

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 135,726 With 227 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Special Envoy for Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi-Qomi Met and Held Talks With Taliban's Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and Taliban's Minister of Water and Energy Mullah Abdul Latif Mansoor

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Cambodia Invites Iran For Oil, Gas Exploration

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Cambodia has invited Iran to conduct oil and gas exploration in the country and set up a refinery, the Phnom Penh Post reports.

Cambodian Minister of Mines and Energy Suy Sem asked Iran during a meeting with Iranian ambassador to Vietnam and Cambodia Ali Akbar Nazari Tuesday to study the country's existing oil blocks and new areas that have the potential to produce oil and gas, the paper said.

The ministry's petroleum department director-general Cheap Sour said Iran has significant experience as an oil and gas producer. He told the Post that the ministry had called on Iran to study the feasibility of investing in Cambodia's existing oil blocks and explore new ones.

Sour said the talks were at a very early stage, but saw them as a boost to further economic cooperation between the two countries.

"This is a start, but it is not yet clear which investors from Iranian companies will be able to invest; it is just a diplomatic discussion. Now we are waiting to see," he was quoted as saying.

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NAM Calls for Urgent End to Unilateral Sanctions on Nations

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iran's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi said that Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) wants those countries that have imposed unilateral sanctions to end sanctions immediately.

Speaking in a speech entitled "Report of Committee of the United Nations Charter" on behalf of the Non-Aligned Movement in the Sixth Committee of the UN General Assembly (UNGA), Zahra Ershadi added that NAM expresses its deep concern at the enforcement of laws and other forms of economic coercion against developing countries, including unilateral sanctions that violate the Charter of the United Nations and undermine international and World Trade Organization (WTO)'s law.

"The Non-Aligned Movement, while emphasizing the role and importance of the work of the UN Charter Committee and strengthening the role of this organization, believes that this Committee should play a key role in the current UN reform process according to UN Resolution 3499 dated December 15, 1975," she added.

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Tehran Will Never Cross Its Red Lines in Vienna Talks



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Iran has informed the Western parties that it will never cross its own red lines in the Vienna negotiations aimed at putting the 2015 nuclear deal back on track.

"Under no circumstances will we cross the red lines of the Islamic Republic in the Vienna talks and we will show our strong commitment to this issue," he said in a joint press conference with his Omani counterpart, Sayyid Badr al-Busaidi, in Tehran on Wednesday.

"We believe that any negotiation requires to be useful and that there should be benefits for the great nation of Iran in that discussion."

Amir-Abdollahian also said that the talks in the Austrian capital have reached a critical stage, adding that there are still few but very important issues to be solved in the course of the negotiations.

Iran, he added, is holding direct talks with the representatives of the P4+1 group of countries while exchanging non-papers with the US through European Union deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora.

"We receive many messages from US officials underlining the need for direct dialog. What matters to us is what will be the benefit of this dialog.... We have heard mostly positive words and messages from the American side, but so far it has not taken any practical steps to prove its goodwill," he said.

"Therefore, we are optimistic about the Vienna talks. We hope that the few sensitive, important remaining issues will be settled in the coming days with the realism of the Western side."

The Iranian foreign minister also spoke about the latest developments in Russian-Ukrainian relations, saying that unfortunately, the provocative behavior of NATO and the United States has made the situation in the northern region and around Iran worrying. He also urged all parties to end this crisis politically and peacefully.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top Iranian diplomat said Tehran-Muscat relations are "on a good path" and hailed political ties as "exemplary and strategic" in the Persian Gulf region.

He further noted that the two countries have agreed to develop trade cooperation, expressing hope that Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi will visit Oman as soon as possible upon an invitation sent by Sultan Haitham bin Tariq.

The Omani foreign minister, for his part, emphasized that political relations between the two countries are based on mutual trust and respect as well as common interests.

He also said that he hopes Raisi will visit Oman in the near future so that the two countries will mark a new chapter in bilateral cooperation.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

West's Useless Investment on MKO

Since the first day of the establishment of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the West and the sworn enemies of the Islamic Revolution have tried to destabilize the revolution through investment on the opposition groups and even creating terrorist groups and grouplets but their efforts to destabilize the Islamic Revolution have been in vain and the nation has thwarted any anti-revolutionary act despite the overwhelming support of the West from these lackey grouplets.

One of these grouplets has been Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MKO) which has committed many crimes and terrorist acts in the country and they were forced to leave the country and to take shelter abroad mainly in the Western countries and they continue their crimes under supports of the West.

The members of this grouplet despite receiving financial supports from the West commit illegal activities in those countries which have angered Western officials and people.

After it was founded more than 50 years ago, the MKO launched a campaign of bombings and assassinations in Iran. Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist attacks over the past four decades, about 12,000 have fallen victim to the group's acts of terror.

The ill-famed terror group is currently based in Albania, where it enjoys freedom of activity after being delisted by the European Union and the United States in 2009 and 2012 respectively.

On Friday senior Iranian Judiciary official Kazem Gharibabadi warned Europe that its support for the anti-Iran terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) will come at a price just as it did with the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

He reacted to a report published that an Albanian historian and journalist has said the country's police have alerted the U.S. embassy that members of the so-called Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), an anti-Iran terrorist cult, are involved in various criminal activities in Europe, including human trafficking, with possible links to the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.

Olsi Jazexhi, citing Albanian media reports, said in a tweet on Thursday that some MKO operatives, headed by the terrorist group's leader, Maryam Rajavi, and based in a camp near the capital, Tirana, have attempted to traffic over 400 of the group's own members to France.

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Iran to Open up Trade Office in Qatar Soon

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran will open a trade office in Qatar in the near future as he underscores Tehran's neighborly diplomacy aimed at increasing mutual trust with neighbors.

Raisi made the remarks upon arriving in Tehran after a visit to Doha, where he attended a summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF).

He said that during his trip, the issue of establishing a trade office in Qatar was raised, which should be done quickly.

Issues related to the removal of customs obstacles and issuance of business licenses were also brought up, he said, adding that Iran's Industry, Mine and Trade minister and Qatar's Commerce and Industry minister were tasked with taking immediate steps to remove economic, trade, and investment barriers between the two countries.

"The trip was in line with [Tehran's] neighborly diplomacy, with the two main goals of increasing mutual trust and cooperation with neighbors and [expanding] Iran's share in the region's economy and trade," Raisi explained.

Pointing to his meeting with businessmen in Doha, the Iranian president said they were very interested in doing investment as well as economic and commercial activities in Iran.

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Iran Exports to Russia Rise 60%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's exports to Russia have increased 60 percent since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021) so far, the chairman of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce announced.

Hadi Tizhoosh Taban made the remarks in an Iran-Russia trade conference held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Tuesday.

Organized by the International Institute of Iran Industries Research (MPSIran), the event was attended by senior officials from both sides including Tizhoosh Taban and the MPSIran Managing Director Sina Sanjari.

Speaking in the meeting, Tizhoosh Taban underlined the significance of holding mutual business conferences between the two countries, saying: "Holding such conferences will result in the discussion of various aspects of trade in other countries, especially in Russia, from different angles."

He added that in order to develop foreign trade, a roadmap should be drawn, saying: "To develop exports, infrastructure such as logistics should be provided, this capacity exists on the border of Astrakhan with Iran, so since [the Iranian calendar year] 1396 (ended in March 2018), an Iranian trade center was founded in the city of Astrakhan."

This center can provide the necessary ground for expanding economic relations between the two countries and strengthen the presence of Iranian exporters in Russia, Tizhoosh Taban said.

Further in the event, Sanjari, as the secretary of the conference, spoke about logistical, industrial, and political advantages of the two countries which have resulted in the growth of economic relations and the upward trend of mutual trade.

Elsewhere in the conference, Ahmad Asl Rokanabadi, an advisor to the Iranian Parliament, also announced the establishment of foreign trade centers in other countries and said that the parliament and the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) have discussed and finalized the plan for establishing 195 trade centers in destination markets.

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President Congratulates Brunei on National Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi in a message to Sultan of Brunei Hassanal Bolkiah congratulated him on the arrival of the National Day of Brunei.

Given your special vision of the valuable relationship between the two countries especially after the coronavirus pandemic, I'm sure that we will be witnessing expansion of cooperation in all areas, especially economic and trade ties between the two Islamic countries, the message reads.

Taboo on Ties With Zionist Regime Should Not Be Broken

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has stressed that taboo on relations with the Zionist regime of Israel should not be violated as the root of regional problems is the measures and interference of the US and the regime.

Qalibaf made the remarks in a meeting held in Tehran on Tuesday evening with the visiting Deputy Speaker of National Assembly of Pakistan Qasim Khan Suri.

In the meeting, Qalibaf referred to the long-lasting relations between Tehran and Islamabad, saying that their ties have been close and deep since the 1979 Islamic Revolution in Iran.

The Majlis speaker underlined that the new Iranian government and parliament are serious in strengthening relations with neighboring countries.

Also, the issue of Afghanistan is important for both, Qalibaf stated.

And, security issues are important due to a long joint border between the two countries in southeastern Iran, the speaker noted.

Touching upon the U.S. anti-Iran sanctions, Qalibaf called for preparing the ground and creating opportunity for interactions between Iranian and Pakistani banks.

For his part, the Pakistani official said his country has made many efforts to fight against the unjust sanctions on Iran.



About his visit to Iran, Suri said he is after strengthening bilateral relations.

On the issue of Palestine, Suri said fortunately, Pakistan and Iran have a common stance on it. Elsewhere, he appreciated Islamic Republic of Iran for its clear stance on the issue of Kashmir. About bilateral relations, Pakistani official said Islamabad-Tehran-Istanbul railroad project has been pursued for furthering land cooperation.

On the issue of Afghanistan, Suri said Pakistan is after seeing a free and independent Afghanistan.

He went on to stress that problems would be solved through unity.

At the end, Suri invited Iranian speaker to visit Pakistan.

Iran Should Always Continue Its Nuclear Program

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official lashes out at the parties that have failed to fulfill their commitments as per the 2015 Iran deal, saying the Islamic Republic should always use its peaceful nuclear capability as a "sword of Damocles" over the heads of those who violate the agreement.

"Peaceful capability of #Iran's nuclear program must always remain like sword of Damocles above the heads of violators as a real guarantee for fulfillment of their obligations," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council Ali Shamkhani said in a post on his Twitter account on Tuesday.

He added that after the U.S. withdrawal from the Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), in 2018, "it was better to use such an inherent guarantee" in a more effective way.

Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA -- Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China -- started talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna last April on the assumption that the US, under the Joe Biden administration, is willing to repeal the so-called maximum pressure policy.

Iran, Russia, China Oppose Using Human Rights as Instruments

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy chief for international affairs of the Iranian Judiciary, and Secretary of Iranian Judiciary's Human Rights Council received ambassadors of Russia and China to Iran, opposing the use of human rights as instruments against countries.

Levan Dzhagaryan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Russian Federation in the Islamic Republic of Iran, and Chang Hua, Ambassador of China to Iran, met separately with Kazem Gharibabadi, the Deputy Chief for international affairs of the Iranian Judiciary, and Secretary of Iranian Judiciary's Human Rights Council.

In these meetings, Gharibabadi, referring to the extensive cooperation and interactions and strategic relations between Iran, Moscow and China, stressed the development of cooperation in the fields of law, justice and human rights and said: "The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to exchange specialized judicial delegations and exchange mutual experiences in this area."

Welcoming the proposal, the Russian ambassador stressed the continuance of opposition to human rights resolutions against Iran and anti-Iranian actions in this area.

The Chinese ambassador also stated that political and international developments will never affect Beijing's political will to develop relations with Tehran, adding that Beijing condemns Western interference in Iran's internal affairs under the pretext of human rights violations.

Officials from Iran, Russia and China, while opposing the use of human rights as instruments against countries, stressed the need to continue and develop joint consultations at the bilateral level and in international human rights organizations.

Azerbaijan Wants Perpetrators of Khojaly Genocide to Be Punished

BY: F. TAHERPOUR

TEHRAN - Azerbaijan wants those who committed the Khojaly Genocide in 1992 to be brought to the justice and be punished.

Azerbaijan Embassy in Tehran on Wednesday held a ceremony to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the Khojaly Genocide.

Speaking at the commemoration ceremony, Azerbaijani Ambassador to Iran Ali Alizadeh said that the war, crimes against peace and humanity, especially the Khojaly Genocide committed by Armenia as part of its policy of aggression against Azerbaijan are serious violations of human rights and international law.

According to the ambassador, the national legislatures of 17 countries, as well as 23 U.S. states have adopted resolutions and decisions condemning the genocide of civilians in Khojaly, calling it a crime against humanity.

"At the same time, the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Cooperation Council of Turkic Speaking States adopted resolutions and statements strongly condemning the Khojaly genocide," Alizadeh added.

During the first Karabakh war, on Feb. 25-26, 1992, the Armenian Armed Forces, supported by the 366th infantry regiment of Soviet troops, stationed in Khankendi city, committed an act of genocide against the population of the Azerbaijani town of Khojaly.



As many as 613 civil residents, including 63 children, 106 women, and 70 old people were killed in the massacre, 1,000 people were injured, and 1,275 were taken, hostage.

When asked what Azerbaijan seeks the international bodies do, Azerbaijan Ambassador Alizadeh said that Azerbaijan wants the world tribunal bodies bring to justice those who have behind Khojaly Genocide because by punishing the criminals, no country or political will dare to commit such horrible genocide.

Alizadeh further said that Azerbaijan has no problem with Armenian people and in case the dispute over the borders of Azerbaijan and Armenia is settled, people of both countries can leave in peace and tranquility.

He reiterated that Azerbaijan has never had any problem with Armenian people and the problems have been only with the Armenian politicians and Baku has always asked for punishment of those who were behind the Khojaly Genocide.

He went on to say that during almost 30 years of occupation of Karabakh, Armenians have almost destroyed all mosques and cultural centers and they have kept only two mosques where they keep their animals to insult Azeris.

H noted that Azerbaijan President during to his visit to the liberate area ordered the reconstruction of the destroyed areas.

Alizadeh also hailed Iran and Iran's Supreme Leader for his support from Azerbaijan regarding Karabakh.

Budget Bill, Regulation of Cyberspace Plan Reviewed in Majlis

TEHRAN (IP) - The open session of Majlis on Wednesday kicked off with reviewing the budget bill and "Regulation of Cyberspace Plan."

The plan to protect users' rights in cyberspace and organize social media was first published as a draft to support social media in the 10th Parliament. In the end, the review of this plan did not reach the life of this Parliament, and its review was left to the 11th Parliament with changes in it. In August 2021, the plan was announced in the 11th Parliament.

The Joint Commission of Parliament and Administration for the "Regulation of Cyberspace Plan" on Tuesday approved the general provisions of the plan.

The members of the commission approved the general points of the plan to protect the rights of users in cyberspace in the meeting of the commission with 18 votes in favor.

From the very beginning, the plan was widely criticized, including restrictions on cyber business and violations of citizenship and privacy, but each time its proponents claimed that the plan had changed. After a while, the Parliamentary Research Center also made major criticisms about the plan to protect the rights of users in cyberspace.

Mehrdad Goodarzvand Chegini, MP against raising the "Regulation of Cyberspace Plan" concurrent with reviewing the annual budget on Wednesday, said: "This plan, which has caused many criticism and insults in cyberspace, should be examined and debunked."

While Mohammad Bagher Ghalibaf insisted that the plan is not on the agenda of the parliament as a priority, the MPs continued to call for further examination of the plan.

Goodarzvand Chegini further called for the plan to be considered in the open session of the parliament so that the people can be informed about what will be approved.

Members of the Iranian parliament referred the bill of eliminating the dollar worth 4,200 tomans to the Joint Commission for further consideration due to the red line of the parliament to prevent the increase of the price of basic goods.

Following the study of the budget details, in the open session of the Islamic Consultative Assembly (parliament), chaired by Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, the revenue section of the budget has been examined.

Among these, the 40% share of the General Development Fund in oil exports, setting the ceiling of revenue sources from oil and gas exports, and the parliament's permission to the government to compensate for the deficit of oil exports from the foreign exchange reserve fund is among the most important approvals of the nation's representatives.

The parliament also authorized municipalities to issue 3,000 billion tomans of Islamic financial bonds, develop public transportation, and renovate dilapidated houses.

Second Announcement

Tender invitation

Invitation to public tender for
N-FORMYLMORPHOLINE (NFM) // 6000 kg

TABRIZ PETROCHEMICAL COMPANY (PLC)

Tabriz petrochemical company intends to procure its required quantity of N-FORMYLMORPHOLINE for OLEFIN 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 March 01.

Deadline for submission of offers for tender is: March 13, 2022

Email: me.rahimi@tpco.ir

Phone No.: +98-41-34282592

Tender	No	Quantity
N-FORMYLMORPHOLINE (NFM)	PVS-9931547	6000 kg

Public Relations of Tabriz Petrochemical Company (Public Stock)

First turn published: February 19, 2022

Second turn published: February 24, 2022

Ian Reminds U.S. of Necessity for Practical Measures in JCPOA Talks

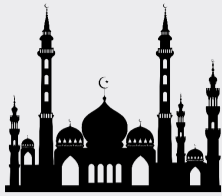
TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The foreign minister of Iran called on the US to end the paradox between its words and deeds, saying the imposition of sanctions on Tehran runs counter to the attempts at reviving the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

In an interview with the Euronews on Tuesday, Hossein Amirabdollahian noted that the mismatch had seen the Americans "sending a message of good will on the one hand, and simultaneously imposing new sanctions against some of our natural and legal entities on the same day."

"Therefore, our yardstick is the Americans' behavior. We are going to judge by the American side's (actual) behavior," he said.

Amirabdollahian also said the US has failed to isolate Iran through sanctions, noting that, "Despite all the efforts that took place under Trump's directorship (of the White House) in the US, and his maximum pressure campaign that was applied against the Islamic Republic, no such thing could be brought about as Iran's isolation."

The foreign minister added that, during the Munich conference, he told Josep Borrell, the foreign policy chief of the European Union, which is coordinating the Vienna talks, about Iran's serious presence in Austrian city with the aim of bringing about a "good agreement."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:15
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:39

17. "And our duty is only to proclaim the clear Message."
 18. The (people) said: "for us, we augur an evil omen from you: if ye desist not, we will certainly stone you. And a grievous punishment indeed will be inflicted on you by us."
 Surah 36, Ya-sin (17 - 18)

Japan's Talks to Buy Iran Oil Underway

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The chairman of the Iran-Japan Joint Trade Committee says details of talks for Japan's purchase of Iran oil have not been revealed yet but since the past, there have been some countries like Japan and South Korea which used to use Iran oil and the whole system of their refineries had been designed based on Iran's oil.

Speaking to ILNA, Bahram Shakouri said that replacing Iran oil has cost Japan and South Korea dear but sanctions have halted it completely and now they are again interested in resuming the purchase of Iran oil.

Speaking on the latest development of Iran-Japan trade, Shakouri said that the Japanese predict the Vienna talks will end successfully and they will be able to broaden their trade ties with Iran. He noted that in the past, oil exports accounted for major part of Iran's trade with Japan which were halted fully due to sanctions. He said that the Japanese want to resume Iran oil imports which can account for major parts of Iran's exports.

He went on to say that the Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) has expressed its interest to have some meetings with the Iran-Japan Joint Trade Committee that fortunately the first meeting convened and during the meeting, its officials expressed interests for B2B meetings between Iranian and Japanese economic activists in order to pave the ground for cooperation after the removal of sanctions and following executive grounds for increasing the bilateral trade.

Shakouri said he predicts a bright future regarding the cooperation between Tehran and Tokyo, adding that Japan is among the developed countries and its interests regarding Iran is very closer. He went on to say that both countries are experiencing



90 years of economic relations, and by the way Japan is interested in helping other countries and it has an organization which helps the developing countries and cooperates in the fields of water and pollution. He noted that in other words, this organization tries to share its experiences with the developing countries and Japan due to its capabilities in the fields of Nano and technologies can be Iran's target country to meet its technological demands through Japan.

He said that Japan has resumed talks for purchasing Iran oil, and the talks are underway through foreign ministries and ambassadors, adding that the Japanese have always been interested in expanding ties with Iran but due to their joint investment with Americans, they had to follow the U.S. sanctions and if sanctions are removed, the Japanese are keen to exchange trade in some fields like importing oil or exporting state-of-the-art equipment.

Shakouri expressed hope the economic revolution between Tehran and Tokyo would broaden, adding that in the past the trade with Japan was not too much and currently it is almost zero but there is the very potential in both countries to expand their relations. He stated that Iran can provide equipment and machineries from Japan for its mining sector, noting that some brands like Janome has been present in Iran since the past and both countries have had cooperation in different industries which can be expanded.

He reiterated that in the past Iran was the market for European countries and the U.S., and if Tehran wants to replace them, Japan is the best which can play the role of them. He reiterated that if Iran expands its economic relations with Japan, their trade volume can reach at least \$10b mark.

Finland Welcomes Offering Technology, Equipment in Chabahar Port



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ambassador of Finland to Tehran Mr. Kari Kahiluoto on Tuesday visited piers, equipment and infrastructures of Shahid Beheshti Port and Shahid Kalantari Port of Chabahar.

According to the public relations of the Ports and Marine Organization Department of Sistan and Baluchestan, Finnish Ambassador Kahiluoto during his visit was accompanied by Director General of the Organization Mr. Behrouz Aqaei. This visit was done in line with studying investment opportunities and grounds for developing cooperation in the transportation and transit sectors.

In the meeting with Mr. Aqaei, Finnish diplomat said that Chabahar Port purchases top technologies and Finland is one of presenter of top technologies welcomes offering services in Chabahar Port.

He reiterated that Chabahar Port in terms of humanitarian aids to Afghanistan and connection with Asian countries is very important for Finland. He noted that in the visit he got acquainted well and will refer its studies and findings to Finnish companies regarding the capacities of Chabahar Port.

Then Mr. Aqaei, for his part, said that this year most of ships docking in the port are over 70,000 tons, adding that Chabahar Port has progressed in the developmental issues and infrastructures very well and this port sees no limit in offering services and any country wishing to invest in the port will be welcomed.

Tehran, Doha to Boost Banking Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade of Iran, in a meeting with the managers of the banking network and members of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce, discussed ways to expand banking cooperation between the two countries.

The President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi, traveled to Doha on Monday at the invitation of the Emir of Qatar to attend the sixth Summit of the of Natural Gas Exporting Countries Forum in addition to pursuing the expansion of bilateral relations.

Also, during the visit of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ebrahim Raisi to Doha, an agreement was signed with Qatar on the establishment of a trade development center and a joint export terminal.

Expanding relations with neighbors and countries in the region and friends has been declared as the main priority of the Iranian government's foreign policy.

The Islamic Republic of Iran, due to its geographical position, has 15 countries in its neighborhood; activating all economic, trade, industrial, cultural and tourism capacities in relations with neighbors and countries in the region leads to the development of bilateral and multi-faceted relations and the realization of this very important issue would be to the benefit of peace and security in the region.

According to Iran Press News Agency on Wednesday, Seyed Reza Fatemi Amin, Minister of Industry, Mines and Trade of Iran, who had traveled to Qatar with the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met with managers of the banking network and members of the Qatar Chamber of Commerce to discuss new trade promotion strategies on Identifying new capacities.

They consulted and discussed mutual cooperation.

Pakistan Welcomes Mechanism of Barter Trade With Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei in meeting with visiting President Lahore Chamber of Commerce and Industry (LCCI) Mian Nuaman Kabir said that the private sector of Pakistan welcomes restoring barter trade with Iran and it seeks to use barter trade or other mechanisms and ways for strengthening relations with Iran.

In the meeting both sides exchanged views and information for strengthening the trade ties between the two countries and for preparing a package which can help the barter trade between the two states.

In the meeting, Shafei referred to the city of Lahore which is one of the biggest industrial cities of Pakistan, adding that unfortunately despite neighborhood and economic capacities of the two countries, the current trade ties of Iran and Pakistan is not satisfactory.

He then pointed to Iran's trade policies and prioritizing neighbor states for increasing its international trade volume and the place of Pakistan in this relation is special.

Shafei added that study on the trade tariff between Iran and Pakistan is very necessary, adding that due to lack of such a mechanism between Iran and Pakistan, both countries are engaged in unofficial trade. He reiterated that by the way it is necessary with the pressure of the private sectors of Iran and Pakistan, the free trade between them is finalized and comes into effect.

He referred to Iran's agro products and its complementary products, saying that agriculture is a good ground for restoring barter system and due to being complementary in the field of the agro products of Iran and Pakistan this system can be defined.

Shafei also called for expansion of direct flights between Iran and Pakistan is the issue which should be



taken into consideration of officials of both states. He reiterated that by the way it is necessary other fields like logistics and railways to be included in the developmental projects of both states.

He then pointed to the barter of goods like corn, wheat and rice which are produced in Pakistan and are imported by Iran. He said that the private sectors

can pave the ground for bartering and therefore it is necessary the exchange of information between the chambers of both countries and ultimately their proposed package is handed over to their governments.

He proposed using the practical pattern in barter of Pakistan's tangerine with Iran's apple and kiwi for expanding it to other products and goods.

He also pointed to the progress of Iran in the knowledge-based industries that both countries can cooperate in this field.

Then Nauman Kabir, for his part, pointed to the 100-year life of LCCI and talked about attention of the chamber to neighbors for broadening international ties. He added that due cooperation between the two countries, the issue of barter has progressed well and its implementation is on the verge of being finalized. He admitted that despite developing barter trade, problems still remain that the private sector is able to resolve them. He added that Pakistani economic activists seek to find other ways for trade with Iran even if the barter trade is not finalized.

He termed transportation an important issue and stipulated that in this regard all existing capacities should be used and the ground for diverse transportation for trade between the two countries should be paved.

Nauman said he believes the private sectors can take more actions than governments in line with strengthening the level of joint cooperation.

Iran Ready to Share Technical Experiences With Mozambique

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - President Ebrahim Raisi expressed the country's readiness to provide Mozambique with the technical know-how and experiences as part of plans to promote cooperation with the African nations.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always had good relations with African countries and today, based on this constructive view of Iran to Africa, we are ready to expand cooperation with the continent," Raisi said in a meeting with his Mozambiquean counterpart Filipe Nyusi, held in Qatar on Tuesday.

"In the view of the Islamic Republic of Iran, African countries are lands full of talents and rich resources, which have unfortunately been plundered by Western countries for the past few centuries," the president added. Iran has always believed that African countries have hard-working people and significant reserves and talents for growth and development, he noted, saying, "The 13th Administration is ready to expand trade and economic cooperation with African countries, especially Mozambique, and the transfer of experience and technical knowledge to these countries."

"Western countries want Africa for themselves, but we want you for yourself," the Iranian president stated.

Deploing the Westerners and Americans for pursuing their own interests and not taking steps for the development of the African nations, Raisi said, "The rise of insecurity and the activities of terrorist groups in recent years in some African countries is also rooted in Western and American interference. The confession of former US officials to the formation of ISIL by this country is proof of this claim."

For his part, Nyusi expressed his country's interest in deepening relations with Iran, saying, "We have a lot of natural resources that we can use for the benefit of the Mozambiquean people and for development with the help of the technical capabilities of Iranian experts."

He also said that one of the serious problems in the development of Mozambique is the spread of insecurity and terrorism, which is mainly directed and controlled from outside the borders of his country.

Congratulatory Message On Achievement of HOSCO

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) in a message congratulated the personnel of the company over the latest achievement of winning the silver statue of the National Organizational Excellence Award.

In his message Ataollah Maroufkhani hailed the personnel of the company who registered another valuable honor for the company and came out of the test victoriously.

He said that moving in direction of organizational excellence is an inevitable necessity and scoring required points in the evaluation process by the Industrial Management Institute for winning the silver statue of the Organizational Excellence Award indicates the strong determination and a united move in all organizational fields towards reaching high levels of progress.

Maroufkhani said that he is sure that HOSCO will continue its progress in direction of improving its position in all fields and it will move towards customers' satisfaction. He then wished success for the personnel and expressed hope all goals of the company would be materialized due to efforts of the staff.

Iran, Qatar Boost Aviation Industry Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization announced the development of Iran-Qatar cooperation in the aviation industry by increasing passenger and cargo flights, especially in the 2022 FIFA World Cup.

According to the public relations of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization, Captain Mohammadi-Bakhsh, Deputy Minister and Head of the Civil Aviation Organization stated: "Following President Raisi's talks with the Emir of Qatar, as well as the Minister of Roads and Urban Development with the Qatari Minister of Transport, we had meetings with Qatar Airways."

"In these meetings, the development of bilateral cooperation and the increase of passenger and cargo flights between the two countries were emphasized. Based on this, it was decided that in the first phase, 36 passenger and cargo flights will be operated bilaterally every week without any restrictions," he added. He also said that Iran and Qatar have reached an on increasing flights and using the facilities of Iran's aviation and tourism industry to help Qatar during the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar.

Twenty Injured in India Riots After Hindu Activist Killed



BANGALORE (Dispatches) - India has rushed hundreds of security personnel to a district in the south after riots saw mobs burn vehicles and pelt stones after a Hindu activist was killed.

At least 20 people were injured in the unrest yesterday, after the killing a day earlier of the member of the Hindu nationalist group Bajrang Dal in Shivamogga, Karnataka state.

Karnataka, which is ruled by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, has been on edge for several weeks after a ban on Muslim girls wearing the hijab in classrooms triggered protests and counter-protests that spread nationwide.

China Warns U.S. Against Including Taiwan in Its Indo-Pacific Plan



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's Foreign Minister Wang Yi today told US Secretary of State Antony Blinken the United States should not include Taiwan, which China claims as its own territory, in America's Indo-Pacific strategy.

Earlier this month, the United States said it would commit more diplomatic and security resources to the Indo-Pacific. Washington also said it would work with partners inside and outside the region to maintain peace and stability in the strait dividing Taiwan from China. The attempt to include Taiwan in the strategy to contain China is sending all the "wrong signals", Wang told Blinken on a phone call, according to a Chinese foreign ministry statement.

Putin Does Not Plan To Restore Empire



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said that he does not plan to restore Russia's empire, a day after he ordered Russian troops to be sent to eastern Ukraine and questioned Ukraine's sovereignty.

"We predicted speculation that Russia plans to restore (its) empire within imperial borders," Putin said at a meeting with Azerbaijan's President Ilham Aliyev in the Kremlin, adding: "This absolutely does not correspond with reality".

On Monday, Putin recognized the independence of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Lugansk separatist republics — despite warnings from the West not to.

He announced the decision after an hour-long speech heavy with historical references, in which he alleged Ukraine was "entirely created by Russia" and questioned its right to exist.

The Russian leader said Tuesday that Moscow "recognized the new geopolitical realities" after the fall of the Soviet Union and works with "all independent countries in the post-Soviet space."

But he said Ukraine was an exception, saying "it is being used by third countries to create threats towards Russia."

"Unfortunately, after the coup d'etat in Ukraine, we do not see such a level and quality of interaction with Ukraine. It disappeared," Putin said, referring to Ukraine's 2014 pro-Western revolution.

Putin annexed Ukraine's Crimea peninsula in 2014.

In 2008, Russia also supported two Georgian separatist regions and has backed a breakaway region of Moldova, Transnistria, since the 1990s.

Putin's recognition of eastern Ukraine's Donetsk and Lugansk rebel republics opens the door for a Russian military presence in the region.

Russia is not planning to send troops to eastern Ukraine "for now" but will do so in case of a "threat", a foreign ministry official said after Moscow's parliament ratified cooperation deals with Ukraine's separatist republics.

Deputy Foreign Minister Andrei Rudenko said the treaties include the provision of "military aid" but added that "speculation" on troop deployments should be avoided.

"For now, no one is planning to send anything anywhere. If there is a threat, then we will provide assistance in accordance with the ratified treaties."

Russian President Vladimir Putin ordered Russia's military to act as peacekeepers in the breakaway Donetsk and Lugansk regions late yesterday, just hours after he recognised them as independent.

The recognition opened the door for direct Russian military involvement.

Moscow provided no details or date for any deployment, with the order only saying that it "comes into force from the day it was signed".

Russia has moved tens of thousands of soldiers to regions near Ukraine's borders, with the West fearing Moscow could use them for an attack at any moment.

Pakistan's PM Wants TV Debate With Indian Counterpart Modi



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistani Prime Minister Imran Khan says he would like to have a televised debate with his Indian counterpart Narendra Modi to resolve differences between the two neighbors.

The nuclear-powered rivals have shared antagonistic relations since gaining independence 75 years ago, fighting three wars, with ties strained recently over the northern Muslim-majority region of Kashmir, which both claim in full. "I would love to debate with Narendra Modi on TV," Khan told Russia Today in an interview on Tuesday, adding that it would be beneficial for the 1.7 billion people in the subcontinent if differences could be resolved through debate.

India's Ministry of External Affairs did not immediately respond to a request for comment, the Reuters news agency said. "India became a hostile country so trade with them became minimal," Khan said, stressing his government's policy was to have trade relations with all countries.

Khan's remarks follow similar comments recently by Pakistan's top commercial official, Razak Dawood, who, according to media, told journalists he supported trade ties with India, which would benefit both sides.

Khan said Pakistan's regional trading options were already limited, with Iran, its southwestern neighbor, under United States sanctions and Afghanistan, to the west, involved in decades of war. Pakistan shares strong economic ties with its northern neighbor, China, which has committed billions of dollars for infrastructure and other projects under its Belt and Road Initiative.

Khan's interview came on the eve of a visit to Moscow, where he will meet President Vladimir Putin — the first visit by a Pakistani leader to Russia in more than 20 years. The two-day visit for talks on economic cooperation was planned before the current crisis over Ukraine.

"This doesn't concern us, we have a bilateral relation with Russia and we really want to strengthen it," Khan said of the Ukraine crisis.

Ukraine Rebel Republics "Unacceptable"

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan slammed Russia's recognition of Ukraine's breakaway regions and urged compliance with international law.

"We consider the decision unacceptable," Erdogan, who is currently in Senegal, said in comments carried by the official Anadolu news agency.

"We invite the parties concerned to act with common sense and comply with the international law."

Erdogan, who has friendly ties with both Russia and Ukraine, has sought to host the two countries' leaders for a three-way summit in Turkey to ease tensions.

He visited Kyiv earlier this month for talks with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky who he said looked "favorably" at a Turkey-hosted summit.

And he was expecting a response from Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"And if Mr Putin also looks on this positively, we can, God willing, come together in Istanbul or Ankara," Erdogan had said last week.

Speaking to reporters on the plane flying to Senegal from DR Congo earlier this week, Erdogan had also said Turkey would take precautionary "measures" in the light of the crisis.

"We cannot leave aside the responsibilities of being a Black Sea country," he said, without elaboration.

Despite political disagreements including in Syria, Turkey has enjoyed burgeoning trade and defense ties with Moscow, purchasing Russia's S-400 anti-aircraft missile system in defiance of criticism from the West.

In the meantime, Turkey, a member of NATO since 1952, has drawn Russia's ire for selling drones to Ukraine in its conflict with pro-Moscow separatists. Erdogan vocally opposed Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea because of the historical presence of ethnically-Turkic Tatars on the peninsula.

Italy Rescues Nearly 600 Migrants off Calabria, Finds One Dead

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's coastguard has rescued nearly 600 people packed into overcrowded fishing boats in bad weather off the coast of Calabria, finding one person dead.

The 573 refugees and migrants were found overnight on board "two overloaded fishing boats and left at the mercy of waves with unfavorable weather conditions that were expected to worsen significantly", the coastguard service said in a statement on Tuesday.

A large ship and three patrol boats aided in the rescue, which took place about 110km (70 miles) off Cape Spartivento at the southern tip of Calabria, it said.

Among those recovered was a body of a person who "had already been dead for a few days", according to witnesses cited by the coastguard.

A patrol boat rushed another person in need of immediate

medical care to the Calabrian port of Roccella Ionica.

The group included 59 minors, most of whom were unaccompanied by family members.

The ship was on its way to the Sicilian port of Augusta where the refugees and migrants will be disembarked, the coastguard said.

Winter weather has not been a deterrent for people crossing the Mediterranean this year despite freezing temperatures and rough seas.

So far this year, about 10,570 refugees and migrants have reached Europe by sea, and more than 1,400 others have attempted crossings by land or air, according to the International Organization for Migration (IOM).

About 229 have died or gone missing in their attempt to reach the continent.



U.N. Voices Concern Over Greece's Treatment of Asylum Seekers



GENEVA (Dispatches) - The United Nations refugee agency voiced deep concern about reports that Greece and other European Union nations have been denying entry to migrants and asylum seekers who reach their borders.

Those seeking protection have been met with violence, ill-treatment and pushback at multiple EU ports of entry, resulting in the loss of lives, Filippo Grandi, the U.N. High Commissioner for Refugees, said in a statement.

Grandi further added that they are "alarmed" by the almost 540 reported incidents of informal returns by Greece authorities starting in 2020, with disturbing incites also reported in central and southeastern Europe at the borders of EU member states.

"People report being left adrift in life rafts or sometimes even forced directly into the water, showing a callous lack of regard for human life," Grandi wrote, stating at last three people are reported to have died in this manner since September in the Aegean Sea.

"Equally horrific practices are frequently reported at land borders, with consistent testimonies of people being stripped and brutally pushed back in harsh weather conditions," he said.

The accusations follow thousands of people interviewed throughout Europe by the UNHCR, which found "a disturbing pattern of threats, intimidation, violence and humiliation," he added.

Grandi called for this "legally and morally unacceptable practice" to stop as the right to seek asylum is not dependent upon one's mode of arrival. He also expressed fear that these "deplorable" acts were now becoming normalized and part of nations' policies.

"States must uphold their commitments and respect fundamental human rights, including the right to life and right to asylum," he said. "How Europe chooses to protect asylum-seekers and refugees matters and is precedent-setting not only in the region but also globally."

Notis Mitarachi, Greece's minister of migration and asylum, said that he was "surprised" by Grandi's letter.

"Greece protects the external borders of the European Union, in total compliance with international law and in full respect of the charter of fundamental rights," he said in his own statement. "Our national

Shanon
(adviser)

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

Zaferanieh Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
600sq.m, pkg
S/p, Sauna, J
green yard
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000)
Mahmoodieh
300sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
maeble fl, F.F

Niavaran Apts
(\$1800) 2bdrs, S/p
(\$2200) 3bdrs, S/p

(\$8000)
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
nice green yard
brand ne, & F.F

Sa`adat abad Apts
(\$1300) 2bdrs, pkg, & F.F
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No Need for Extra OPEC + Supplies

DOHA (Dispatches) - There is no need for OPEC+ to expand its oil production increases, Nigeria's petroleum minister said today, as the group sees a potential deal between Iran and world powers unlocking more supplies. "We don't have to do anything extraordinary this time because we are expecting a lot of production," Timipre Sylva said on the sidelines of a gas exporter conference in Qatar's capital Doha. "We are expecting more production if a nuclear deal with Iran works out (since) there will be production from them," Sylva added. Months of indirect talks between Iran and the United States to revive a 2015 nuclear deal abandoned in



Gas Prices In God's Hands

DOHA (Dispatches) - Major gas exporting nations said today they could not guarantee prices or supplies at a summit overshadowed by the worsening Ukraine crisis which has pushed costs to record highs in Europe.

Qatar's emir, who hosted the talks, said gas producers were working to ensure "credible and reliable" supplies as Europe's fears over supplies from Russia were further hit by Germany's decision to halt the Nord Stream 2 pipeline project.

The Persian Gulf state's energy minister said his country would help Europe as much as possible, but that the unprecedented prices paid by Europe's consumers were "in God's hands".

Leaders and ministers from the 11-member Gas Exporting Countries Forum met after Russian President Vladimir Putin formally recognized two breakaway regions of Ukraine as independent and sent in troops. Germany responded by freezing the huge gas pipeline from Russia.

With Russia a key member of the exporters' forum, the Ukraine crisis was not mentioned in talks, officials said, or the final statement. Russia's Energy Minister Nikolay Shulginov made no reference to the tensions but he told the forum that "Russian companies are fully committed to existing contracts" for gas supplies.

The United States has asked Qatar to help Europe if supplies are cut, but its Energy Minister Saad Sherida al-Kaabi said that his country could not rescue Europe alone. Russia accounts for about 40 per cent of the European market and Qatar five per cent.

It would be "virtually impossible" for one country to replace that amount of gas, Kaabi told a press conference. Qatar's supplies are also tied up in long-term contracts, many with Asian countries including Japan, South Korea and China.

"We are ready to supply more and we are working on that," he said of requests made by the European Union. Kaabi said 10-15 per cent of shipments under Qatar's long-term contracts could potentially be diverted.

But he insisted that the record prices in Europe had their roots in a lack of investment before the Ukraine crisis.

Qatar and other producer nations want long-term contracts of up to 25 years to "underpin" the huge investments made in extracting, processing and transporting gas.

"Everything that is going on today in pricing is fundamentally because of a lack of investments and that will take time to catch up," he said.

Asked whether European consumers would have to pay more because of the Ukraine crisis, he said: "Predicting how prices will be, (whether they) will go up or down, that is in God's hands not mine, I cannot comment on the future."

The summit statement made no comment about increasing supplies and stressed the need for long-term contracts and investment.

But Qatar's emir, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, said forum countries were "working hard to ensure a credible and reliable supply of natural gas to world markets and preserve the stability of those markets".

UAE Invests in Drones, Robots as Unmanned Warfare Takes Off

ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates is ploughing money into drones, robots and other unmanned weaponry as autonomous warfare becomes more and more widespread -- including in attacks on the Persian Gulf country by Yemeni rebels.

Large, black drones with the orange logo of EDGE, the UAE's arms consortium, were on display at this week's Unmanned Systems Exhibition (UMEX), along with remote-controlled machineguns and other "smart" weapons.

The exhibition comes at a time of growing unmanned attacks around the region, including the January 17 drone-and-missile assault by Yemen rebels that killed three oil workers in Abu Dhabi, the first in a series of similar incidents.

"Autonomous systems are becoming ever more prevalent around the world," Miles Chambers, EDGE's director of international business development, told AFP.

"We are really heavily investing in developing our autonomous capability... as well as in electronic warfare and in our smart munitions. These are our three pillars."

EDGE, an Abu Dhabi-based defence consortium that groups 25 Emirati firms, was formed three years ago but reached an estimated \$4.8 billion in arms sales in 2020 -- nearly all of them to the UAE government.

The group was ranked 23rd among the 100 top arms-producing and military services around the globe in 2020, according to the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute. EDGE's most lucrative deals have included maintenance of military jets, worth almost \$4 billion, as well as providing guided munitions at \$880 million.

On Tuesday, it unveiled a vehicle-mounted remote-controlled assault rifle that can swivel 360 degrees and has thermal imaging



Sri Lanka Says Open to Talks With IMF

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka is open to discussions with the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and other multilateral lenders for assistance, a cabinet spokesman said today, as it faces its worst economic crisis in years.

"Sri Lanka has sought IMF assistance multiple times in the past and we are still open to that option," cabinet spokesman and Plantation Minister Ramesh Pathirana said.

Sri Lanka's foreign exchange reserves have plummeted to US\$2.36 billion (RM9.88 billion), hitting imports of essential goods, including fuel, and inflation is quickening.

The island nation of 22 million people also faces debt repayment obligations of about \$4 billion this year, and opposition leaders and economists are pushing the government to seek assistance from the likes of the IMF.

"We are keeping lines of communication open with the IMF and other multilateral lenders such as the Asian Development Bank," Pathirana told reporters.

Some opposition members have also urged the government to table in parliament an upcoming IMF assessment of the economic and financial situation, conducted as part of its regular Article IV consultations.

"It is essential that the government table this document before parliament and clearly state their plan for addressing this crisis in a sustainable manner," said opposition member of parliament Harsha de Silva.

With fuel stocks sufficient for supplies for only a few days, Pathirana said the central bank had been directed to release funds for fuel shipments.

Turkish Business Indicators Worsen

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Confidence in Turkey's retail and services industries fell in February while sentiment in the construction sector added to a decline, indicating persisting frailties for the economy after a slump in the value of the lira.

Retail sector confidence dropped to 119.8, the lowest level since September, from 124.4 in January, the Turkish Statistical Institute reported on Tuesday. Confidence in the services industry fell to 118.7, also the lowest in five months, from 120.2.

Turkey's government is seeking a swift economic recovery from a currency crisis that struck its financial markets late last year when the lira sank to successive record lows against the dollar. The currency lost 44 percent of its value last year.

Confidence in the construction sector, a driver of economic growth over the past decade, decreased for the third-straight month to 82.7. Sentiment was the worst since June and declined from 85.5 in January, the data showed.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan ordered the central bank to cut interest rates for four straight months between September and December in the face of accelerating inflation, sparking a sell-off in the lira by concerned investors and local deposit holders. The central bank then began intervening in the currency markets, spending tens of billions of dollars since December in conjunction with state-run lenders. Erdoğan also introduced a scheme linking Turkish lira deposits to the dollar to help stem the currency's declines.

This week, the Turkish Industry and Business Association (TÜSİAD) challenged the government to return to sustainable economic policies based on sustainable growth rather than short-term stimulus. Lax monetary policy, which has caused declines in the lira, must be adjusted to help stem inflation, Simone Kaslowski, the head of TÜSİAD, told the Dünya newspaper in an interview. Inflation has not only been impacted by supply-side factors, as the authorities claim, but demand as well, he said.

The central bank's benchmark interest rate stands at 14 percent, deeply negative when compared with current inflation.

Industrial confidence in Turkey edged up to 109.8 from 109.5, the central bank said in a separate survey on Tuesday. The figure remained below the 113.9 points registered in August, just prior to the series of rate cuts.

Germany Freezes Nord Stream 2 Gas Project

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany on Tuesday halted the Nord Stream 2 Baltic Sea gas pipeline project, designed to double the flow of Russian gas direct to Germany, after Russia formally recognized two breakaway regions in eastern Ukraine.

Europe's most divisive energy project, worth \$11 billion, was finished in September, but has stood idle pending certification by Germany and the European Union.

The pipeline had been set to ease the pressure on European consumers facing record energy prices amid a wider post-pandemic cost of living crisis, and on governments that have already forked out billions to try to cushion the impact on consumers.

But on Tuesday the European benchmark gas price, currently the Dutch March contract, was up 10% to 79.28 euros per megawatt hour (MWh) at 1416 GMT, much like the price for the fourth quarter, when Nord Stream 2 had been expected to start.

Dmitry Medvedev, Russia's former president and now deputy chairman of its Security Council, tried to rub salt in that wound.

"Welcome to the new world where Europeans will soon have to pay 2,000 euros per thousand cubic metres!" he tweeted - suggesting prices were set to double.

President Vladimir Putin did pledge, however, that Russia would not interrupt any of its existing gas supplies.

Germany gets half its gas from Russia and had argued that Nord Stream 2 was primarily a commercial project to diversify energy supplies for Europe.

But despite the potential benefits, the pipeline had faced opposition within the European Union and from the United States on the grounds that it would increase Europe's energy dependence on Russia as well as denying transit fees to Ukraine, host to another Russian gas pipeline, and making it more vulnerable to Russian invasion.

"This a huge change for German foreign policy with massive implications for energy security and Berlin's broader position towards Moscow," said Marcel Dirsus, non-resident fellow at Kiel University's Institute for Security Policy.

"It suggests that Germany is actually serious about imposing tough costs on Russia."

Washington welcomed Scholz's announcement, saying it had been in close consultation with the German government overnight.

Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba tweeted his approval.

"This is a morally, politically and practically correct step in the current circumstances," he said. "True leadership means tough decisions in difficult times. Germany's move proves just that."

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said he had asked the economy ministry to make sure certification could not take place now.

"The appropriate departments ... will make a new assessment of the security of our supply in light of what has changed in last few days," he said.

Barclays Pegs India's Q3 GDP Growth at 6.6%



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The National Statistical Office (NSO) will declare the GDP estimates for Q3 FY 2021-22 on February 28.

Forecasting a lower-than-previously projected 10 per cent GDP growth for the fiscal year 2022 due to the third wave of the pandemic, foreign brokerage Barclays said the Indian economy is likely to have expanded by 6.6 per cent in the December quarter.

The economy had a relatively stable Q3 with several sectors returning to pre-pandemic level of activity, with services playing a bigger role in activity, the report said, adding that with the mild Omicron wave in January, there is clear downside risks to the earlier growth forecast of 10 per cent in FY22.

In the July-September quarter, the Indian economy had clocked a growth of 8.4 per cent.

The National Statistical Office (NSO) will declare the GDP estimates for Q3 FY 2021-22 on February 28.

As high base effects kick in, and activity consolidates, growth rate is likely to slow down from 8.4 per cent in Q2 to 6.6 per cent in Q3, it said, adding there scope for a steady farm sector growth, even though there are clear signs of weakness in rural consumption.

According to the report, the country's economic growth was driven more by services, rather than manufacturing. Growth has been slower in mining, construction and manufacturing, partly on account of supply-chain disruptions, especially for the auto sector, it said.

While supply shortages and the high-base effect weigh on manufacturing, services output can grow at a faster clip. One clear sign of recovery is the resilient fuel demand, and trade volumes hitting new record highs.

President Felicitates Japanese Emperor, PM on National Day

TEHRAN (MNA) – Felicitating Japan's National Day in messages to the Emperor and Prime Minister of this country, President Ebrahim Raisi called for expansion and strengthening of Iran-Japan relations in all areas of mutual interest. In a separate message to Emperor Naruhito and Prime Minister Kishida Fumio, President Ayatollah Ebrahim Raisi congratulated the Japanese National Day, and stated, "The friendly and historical relations between the

Islamic Republic of Iran and Japan are based on trust and mutual respect." In his message to the Prime Minister of Japan, the President expressed hope that "in the light of the policies of His Excellency's government, we will see continued cooperation and increased consultation of high-ranking officials of the two countries and further expansion and strengthening of relations in all areas of mutual interest."



Only Nine Percent of Plastic Recycled Worldwide

PARIS (Dispatches) - Less than 10 percent of the plastic used across the world is recycled, the OECD said Tuesday, calling for "coordinated and global solutions" ahead of expected talks on an international plastics treaty.

A new report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development report found that 460 million tons of plastics were used in 2019, the number nearly doubling since 2000.

The amount of plastic waste had more than doubled during that time to 353 million tons, the Paris-based OECD said.

"After taking into account losses during recycling, only nine percent of plastic waste was ultimately recycled, while 19 percent was incinerated and almost 50 percent went to sanitary landfills," it said in its Global Plastics Outlook.

"The remaining 22 percent was disposed of in uncontrolled dumpsites, burned in open pits or leaked into the environment."

The Covid-19 pandemic saw the use of plastics drop by 2.2 percent in 2020 compared to the previous year. However single-use plastics rose and overall use is "projected to pick up again" as the economy rebounds.

Plastics contributed 3.4 percent of global greenhouse emissions in 2019, 90 percent of it from "production and conversion from fossil fuels", the report said.

In the face of rampant global warming and pollution, it is "crucial that countries respond to the challenge with coordinated and global solutions", OECD Secretary-General Mathias Cormann said in the report.

The OECD proposed a series of "levers" to address the issue, including developing the market for recycled plastics, which only represent six percent of the total -- largely because they are more expensive.

It added that new technologies related to decreasing the environmental footprint of plastic represented only 1.2 percent of all innovation concerning the product.

While calling for "a more circular plastics lifecycle", the OECD said that policies must also restrain overall consumption.

It also called for "major investments in basic waste management infrastructure", including 25 billion euros (\$28 billion) a year to go towards efforts in low and middle-income countries.

The report comes less than a week before the UN Environment Assembly begins



on February 28 in Nairobi, where formal talks are expected to begin on a future international plastics treaty, the scope of which will be discussed.

Shardul Agrawala, the head of the OECD's environment and economy integration division, said Tuesday's report "further accentuates the need for countries to come together to start looking towards a global agreement to address this very important problem".

Asked about the priorities of the treaty to be discussed in Nairobi, she said that "there is an urgent waste management problem which is responsible for the bulk of the leakage to the environment".

"But we should not limit our focus just to the end of pipe solutions, there is a greater need in the long term to forge international cooperation and agreement towards alignment of standards," she told an online press briefing Monday.

In a survey published Tuesday by polling firm Ipsos for the World Wildlife Fund, 88 percent of respondents stressed the importance of an international treaty to combat plastic pollution.

In the 28 countries surveyed, 23 percent of the respondents said such a treaty was "fairly important", 31 percent said it was "very important" and 34 percent found it "essential".

West's Useless...

FROM PAGE 1

Jazexhi added that a number of the terrorist cult's members have been detained for trafficking people from the Middle East to Europe, who were probably Daesh members.



He went on to say that some senior MKO members have been also arrested while trying to traffic drugs to Italy, with police having prosecuted another member over theft charges.

In another string of tweets later on Thursday, the journalist said in one instance, the MKO cult "forced Gazeta Shqiptarja to take offline its article" about their drug and human trafficking arrests in Albania.

Olisi noted that he has an official document from the office of Tirana Prosecutor, which proves that one of the notorious MKO commanders, called Mohammad Sadat Darbandi, has been arrested for robbing a pharmacy in Tirana.

The journalist then said that Albanian prosecutors have already filed 100 criminal cases against the MKO on charges of major drug smuggling operations and connection to Ndrangheta.

An official source, who requested to remain anonymous, told Exit that the documents claim that information on these crimes has been handed over to the U.S. Embassy in Tirana, and that the Albanian paper has contacted the mission for comments but no formal response has been given.

Gharibabadi, the Judiciary chief's deputy for international affairs and secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights, reacted to this report and censured the European Parliament for supporting the MKO and referring to it as 'political opponents'.

It is shameful for members of the European Parliament to pursue their own political interests and turn a blind eye to the crimes committed by the MKO, which has killed over 12,000 innocent Iranians and still continues its terrorist activities while freely traveling through European countries, he said.

"The Europeans should know that as their support for Daesh has backfired on them in a way that more than 4,000 Daesh members were European citizens and created insecurity for them, their support for the MKO will equally be costly," the senior Iranian human rights official said.

Gharibabadi said the United States and Europe have committed the most heinous crimes against Iran by supporting terrorist groups, sheltering them and excluding them from the list of terrorist groups as well as imposing or implementing unlawful and oppressive sanctions.

"The European Parliament and European countries must stand accountable for their human rights violations against Iranians. They are in no position to preach others in the field of human rights," the top Iranian rights official stated.

Regardless of its disrepute around the world, the MKO has in recent years held numerous big events, attended by senior American, Israeli and Saudi officials, including former U.S. Senator John McCain, former Mayor of New York City Rudy Giuliani, former US National Security Advisor John Bolton, former U.S. Senator Joe Lieberman, and former director of Saudi intelligence agency Turki bin Faisal Al Saud.

These moves once again prove this fact that the MKO is a puppet of the West to destabilize the Islamic Republic but the West should know this fact that such terrorist groups have no room among the nations especially in Iran and MKO will sooner or later will face the fate like what the Daesh face and will be destroyed by brave heroes like martyr Qasem Soleimani because nobody and no terrorist group is able to stop Iran and this point has been proved in more than four decades of the life of the Islamic Revolution and the West and any reactionary country which is financing and supporting such groups is wasting its time and money.

Iran to Open...

FROM PAGE 1

Raisi arrived in Doha on Monday on an official two-day visit to participate in the sixth summit of the GECF and hold talks with senior officials attending the event.

During his visit, he highlighted his administration's neighbors-first policy, which includes boosting ties with neighbors and increasing interactions with Persian Gulf states.

The Iranian chief executive's Doha visit also led to the inking of 14 major bilateral deals between the two countries, including visa waiver economic cooperation agreements, including a deal on canceling visa requirements for passengers traveling between the two countries.

Dubai Airports Chief Says No Full Recovery Until 2024



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Passenger traffic at Dubai international airport, the world's busiest, will not recover to pre-Covid levels before 2024, its CEO told AFP on Tuesday.

Traffic remains "nowhere near pre-pandemic levels" despite rising to 29.1 million passengers last year, Dubai Airports chief Paul Griffiths said in an interview.

The figures announced on Tuesday, up 12.7 percent from 2020, mean that Dubai remains the world's busiest airport for the eighth consecutive year.

However, it is still a long way from the 86 million passengers seen in 2019, before the pandemic ravaged the air industry.

"We are nowhere near the pre-pandemic levels," said Griffiths, adding that Dubai had weathered the storm better than many other airports.

"I think it's quite gratifying that for the eighth year in succession we are still the world's busiest international airport, so that's a very good statistic," he said.

"It means that although our figures aren't what we would like them to be, other airports have clearly fared a lot worse than we have."

Passenger figures collapsed to 25.9 million in 2020, a drop of 70 percent, when Dubai airport was closed from March to July and fleets were grounded around the world.

More than a third of last year's passengers flew in the final quarter, when travel restrictions eased and Dubai opened its Expo 2020 world exhibition and hosted the Dubai airshow, the world's first since the pandemic.

This year, the airport is projecting 57 million passengers but is hoping to exceed the target, Griffiths said.

"Fifty-seven is our projection for 2022, but if current growth rates continue, I hope we'll smash through that target and we expect I think by the end of 2023 to be much closer to the pre-pandemic levels," he said.

He said an easing of restrictions in the Asia-Pacific region, where Australia reopened its borders to vaccinated tourists this week, would fuel the recovery.

"The slow recovery in some of the transport markets because of the restrictions, particularly in Australasia and Asia... as they start to fall away, the transport traffic through Dubai will surge ahead and we will see a recovery which we believe will be very strong," Griffiths said.

"However what I would say is that the current growth rates that we've seen and the recovery in all the major markets is incredibly strong."

India remained the top destination from Dubai with 4.2 million passengers, followed by Pakistan, Saudi Arabia and Britain, while the number of flight movements rose 28.1 percent year-on-year to 233,375.

Mining Firms Targeting Brazil Indigenous Lands

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - Major mining companies are seeking to expand to currently protected indigenous lands in the Amazon rainforest, bolstered by billions of dollars in financing from international banks and investment firms, a report found Tuesday.

Nine mining giants including Brazil's Vale, Britain's Anglo American and Canada's Belo Sun have filed applications seeking authorization to mine on indigenous reservations in Brazil -- even though that is currently illegal, said the report by the environmental group Amazon Watch and the Association of Brazil's Indigenous Peoples (APIB).

The firms appear to be betting Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro, who has pushed to open protected lands to mining and agribusiness, will succeed in passing legislation introduced by his government that would allow them to operate on indigenous territories, it said.

Cambodia Invites Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

According to Sour, there are also plans to study the feasibility of setting up a refinery in Cambodia, and developing technical assistance and human resource training in the petroleum sector and energy trade cooperation, investment mobilization, and development of electricity infrastructure.

Cambodia has long been hoping to become an oil producing country but oil exploration at its Apsara offshore oilfield was suspended when Singapore-listed investment company KrisEnergy, which had been conducting pumping operations there, went bankrupt.

The company had managed to pump about 300,000 barrels of oil when it shut down operations.

Since then, Cambodia has been trying to get other investors as well as research teams to the area and get its oil producing ambition back on track. The country is in a race against time to explore possibilities in the oil sector, the resources of which it shares with neighboring Thailand.

Royal Academy of Cambodia (RAC)'s international economics director Hong Vanak was quoted as saying that if Iran agreed to invest in and develop the country's oil blocks, the local oil sector would benefit from it.

He said Iran's good qualifications and experience in oil and gas was something Cambodia's own industry can benefit greatly from.

On Tuesday, Iran signed initial agreements, including for developing oil and gas fields in Venezuela which has seen its oil industry decimated by US sanctions.

Iran's Minister of Petroleum Javad Owji made the announcement on the sidelines of the summit of the gas exporting countries in the Qatari capital where he said similar agreements would be signed with other countries.

"Other memoranda of understanding reached with Venezuela covered the renovation and modernization of oil and gas refineries, the transfer of technology and the provision of technical and engineering services," the minister was quoted as saying by official IRNA news agency.

NAM Calls for...

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Iranian diplomat to UN stated, "The NAM believes that the United Nations has a vital role to play in addressing issues related to international cooperation, economic development and social progress, peace and security, human rights and rule of law based on dialogue, cooperation and inter-governmental consensus."

NAM calls on all member states to strengthen their commitment to the Charter of the United Nations by respecting its principles, such as refraining from threatening or using force to respect its territorial integrity and peaceful settlement of disputes, Ershadi continued. UN Security Council's Sanctions Committees are expected to provide more objective assessments of the method used to evaluate human consequences of sanctions and short- and long-term social, economic and humanitarian consequences of sanctions against countries, Iran's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations added.

Iran Exports...

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Referring to the development of petrochemical exports, Roknabadi said: "According to available statistics, Russia has raw materials for the production of petrochemical products, but its demand is always higher than production. Therefore, the country imports \$30 billion worth of petrochemical products annually, and to make the most of this opportunity incentives should be provided for investors in this field."

Speaking at the conference, Shahram Farsaee, Representative of the General Directorate of Eurasia in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, stated that Iran-Russia relation is important

for President Ebrahim Raisi's administration, since it focuses on establishing relations with neighbors and East of Asia.

He pointed out that several projects are going on in Russia right now, and several other are planned for the future.

Referring to the trade volume, Farsaee noted that Iran's trade rate with Russia increased from 805 million to one billion dollars despite the pandemic.

Referring to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), he said although reviving the JCPOA can expand the relations between two countries, it does not mean that if it happens, Iran moves to the East.

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Alonso Hoping for Competitive Start to New F1 Era

PARIS (Dispatches) - Double world champion Fernando Alonso is heading into the Formula One season in optimistic mood, with the Spaniard hoping the new 2022 rules can deliver enough of a shake up to put his Alpine team in the fight at the front. The 40-year-old returned to the sport last year, signing for the same Enstone-based outfit with whom he won his two titles in 2005 and 2006 when they ran as Renault. But his sights had always been set on the 2022 rules overhaul, billed as the most sweeping in decades.

Zverev Edges to Victory Over Brooksby

ACAPULCO (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev edged to a victory over Jenson Brooksby in Acapulco in the latest-ever finish to a professional tennis match. The Olympic champion saved two match points before completing a 3-6, 7-6 (12/10), 6-2 win. The first-round tie at the ATP event lasted three hours and 19 minutes, the third match of Monday's schedule to pass the three-hour mark. The previous latest finish was a 2008 Australian Open match between Lleyton Hewitt and Marcos Baghdatis that concluded at 4:34 am.

Villarreal Hold Juventus Chelsea Defeat Lille

LONDON (Dispatches) - Dusan Vlahovic lived up to the hype by scoring 32 seconds into his Champions League debut on Tuesday but Juventus have work to do to make the last 16 after being held to a 1-1 draw by Villarreal in the first leg.

Vlahovic found the corner with just his second touch of the game at La Ceramica but a sensational start for Juve and the Serb's Champions League career was not enough for victory.

Instead, Villarreal's Dani Parejo steered in a deserved equalizer midway through the second half to leave a compelling contest in the balance ahead the return leg in Turin.

At 22 years and 25 days old, Vlahovic is the second youngest player to score on their Champions League debut for Juventus after Alessandro Del Piero made his mark aged 20. "He's young, this is his first Champions League match," said Juve's Alvaro Morata.

"Imagine the career he has ahead of him." Vlahovic was signed for an initial 70 million euros from Fiorentina in January and to huge excitement, with Juve toasting the arrival of one of the world's most coveted young talents.

Juventus coach Max Allegri had tried to reduce expectations on Monday by insisting the striker would have to adapt psychologically and technically to the intensity of the Champions League - but Vlahovic needed less than a minute to find his feet.

It was his second goal in five appearances for Juve after he scored 12 minutes into his debut against Verona earlier this month, following a blistering 25 goals in 31 games for Fiorentina.

"When you play against this type of team, with top players, you can't give them even half an inch. It was a great goal," said Parejo.

Juventus will be favorites to finish the job at home next month but a well-organized and disciplined Villarreal, who won the Europa League last season, showed enough to suggest an upset is far from impossible.

"We feel a bit of frustration. You need to win at home," said Villarreal's Etienne



Capoue. "But I think this team has the strength and mentality to win there. It's difficult but we can do it."

Meanwhile Chelsea showed they can thrive without Romelu Lukaku as Kai Havertz scored after replacing the axed Belgium striker for the 2-0 Champions League last-16, first-leg win against Lille.

Thomas Tuchel's side took control of the tie thanks to Havertz's first-half header and Christian Pulisic's clinical finish after the break at Stamford Bridge.

The holders will expect to complete their progress to the quarter-finals when they travel to France for the second leg on March 16.

But Chelsea's sixth successive win in all competitions was more a referendum on their Lukaku conundrum than an indication of their chances of retaining the trophy.

Lukaku has scored just 10 goals since a club record £97 million (RM548.3 million) move from Inter Milan last year that was expected to launch a period of sustained dominance for Chelsea.

He touched the ball only seven times in Saturday's 1-0 win at Crystal Palace, the lowest total by a Premier League player since 2003-04.

Despite being infuriated in December by Lukaku's public questioning of the way he was being used, Tuchel had appeared to back him on Monday, insisting his problems were no laughing matter.

But, tellingly, Chelsea were more potent in Lukaku's absence and it remains to be seen if Tuchel will trust his beleaguered star in the League Cup final against Liverpool on Sunday.

Neuer Returns To Training After Surgery

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich captain Manuel Neuer has stepped up his recovery after knee surgery this month and the goalkeeper has completed his first running session, the German champions said.

Neuer played in Bayern's 3-2 league victory over RB Leipzig on February 5, keeping out a late effort by Emil Forsberg to secure a record-equalling 310th Bundesliga win and draw level with club great Oliver Kahn.

In the 35-year-old's absence, Bayern were beaten 4-2 in the league by Bochum and snatched a 1-1 draw against Salzburg in the Champions League round of 16 before ending their worst run of results for 10 months with a 4-1 win over Greuther Fuerth.

"The next step on the road back! Manuel Neuer completed a first running session at Saebener Strasse on Monday," Bayern said in a statement.

The club have not said when Neuer will return to action but German media reports said he could be out until mid-March.

Bayern are six points clear at the top of the Bundesliga table as they chase a 10th consecutive title.

Ireland, UAE Qualify For T20 World Cup

MUSCAT (AFP) - Ireland booked their spot at this year's T20 World Cup with a comfortable 56-run victory over hosts Oman in qualifying, as the United Arab Emirates also secured a ticket to Australia.

The Irish will be making their seventh straight appearance in the showpiece, having only missed the inaugural edition in 2007.

Andy Balbirnie's side made a shaky start to the Global Qualifier A event, losing their first game last week to the UAE, but bounced back with successive wins to reach the semi-finals.

With the two finalists to qualify, Tuesday's last-four game was a winner-takes-all affair, and Ireland made a strong start, posting a challenging total of 165-7 after Oman won the toss and opted to field first.

Opens Balbirnie and Paul Stirling, who had previously made three straight fifty partnerships, fell early to leave Ireland 19-2. But Gareth Delany struck 47 from 32 balls, before Andy McBride added late impetus with a 21-ball 36.

Oman, who had qualified for the last two T20 World Cups, never got going with the bat and were bowled out for 105, as Irish spinners Simi Singh (3-20) and McBride (2-24) took five wickets between them.

It was a similarly one-sided game in the other semi-final as the UAE beat previously unbeaten Nepal by 68 runs to qualify for the main tournament for only the second time.

Wicket-keeper Vriitya Aravind, who smashed 97 not out against Ireland and an unbeaten 84 against Bahrain, hit a quickfire 46 and Muhammad Waseem made 70 as the UAE posted 175-7.

Nepal slumped to 14-3 in reply and never recovered, being dismissed for 107 in 18.4 overs.

Ireland and the UAE will join the 12 sides who reached the 2021 T20 World Cup 'Super 12' stage in the main tournament Down Under, which gets underway on October 16.

The final two spots will be decided at the Global Qualifier B event in Zimbabwe in July.

Neymar Keen to Play in MLS



PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain and Brazil forward Neymar would like to play in the United States-based Major League Soccer for at least a season before he calls time on his career.

Neymar, who is under contract at PSG until June 2025, said he was more likely to play in the US than return to his home country.

"I don't know if I'll play in Brazil again," the 30-year-old said on the Fenomenos

podcast. "I have some doubts about that.

"I'd love to play in the US actually. I'd love to play there at least for a season.

"First of all their season is shorter, so I'd get three months' vacation," Neymar joked.

The former Barcelona player said he had not decided when he would hang up his boots but added that he play at least till the end of his PSG contract.

"I joke with my friends that I will retire when I'm 32. But it's just a joke. I don't know," Neymar said.

"Honestly, I will play until I'm mentally tired. If my mental health is ok and my body as well... Physically, I think I'll still last a few years. But my mental health is the most important thing."

Indian 16-Year-Old Stuns Chess World Champion Carlsen

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian teenage chess grandmaster Rameshbabu Pragganandhaa won praise Tuesday for a stunning victory over world number one Magnus Carlsen in an online championship.

Pragganandhaa, 16, who in 2016 became the youngest international master in history at age 10, beat Carlsen late on Monday at the Airthings Masters rapid chess tournament.

"It's about time to go to bed as I don't think I will have dinner at 2.30 in the morning," a visibly calm Pragganandhaa said after the 39-move victory playing black.

Others have beaten Carlsen -- including Indians Viswanathan Anand and Pentala Harikrishna -- but Pragganandhaa is the youngest since the Norwegian became world champion in 2013.

Anand, a five-time world champion and acclaimed as the greatest chess player India has produced, tweeted: "Always proud of our talents! Very good day for @rpragchess."

Indian cricket superstar Sachin Tendulkar also joined in the praise for Chennai-born Pragganandhaa, widely regarded as a future world title challenger.

"What a wonderful feeling it must be for Pragg. All of 16, and to have beaten the experienced & decorated Magnus Carlsen, and that too while playing black, is magical!," Tendulkar wrote on Twitter.

"Best wishes on a long & successful chess career ahead. You've made India proud!"

Carlsen, 31, appeared to blunder in the Meltwater Champions Chess Tour event for a total prize pool of over \$1.5 million.

On Monday, Carlsen had said he was still feeling the after-effects of a recent coronavirus infection.

"It was better today, but the first couple of days, I was feeling like I am okay but I don't have any energy and it was kind of hard to focus," Carlsen said.

Carlsen won his fifth straight world chess title in December, overcoming Ian Nepomniachtchi in a contest that saw the Russian lose his nerve after losing an epic eight-hour game, the longest ever played at a world championships.



Morata Persuaded to Stay at Juventus

TURIN (Dispatches) - Alvaro Morata said he stayed at Juventus in January after coach Max Allegri insisted the arrival of Dusan Vlahovic would help him.

Morata was reportedly close to joining Barcelona during the January transfer window after Juventus signed Vlahovic for 80 million euros from Fiorentina.

"It's not important," said Morata when asked about Barca's interest. "We talked with the coach during the transfer window, about his ideas, and he told me the arrival of Dusan would help me and that has been the case. I'm happy to be here. If it depended on me, I would always stay here."

On Allegri's role in persuading him to stay, Morata said: "I have always felt his confidence, since we started working together. He is the first to ask me things, but he knows what I am and what I am not."

"He told me that I had to stay and that he trusted me. Now I have to give everything to return his trust."

Vlahovic scored on his Juventus debut against Genoa earlier this month to continue a sensational season in which the 22-year-old had already hit 25 goals in 21 games for Fiorentina.

"He has given us all extra energy," said Morata. "You can see in his eyes how much Dusan is looking forward to tomorrow's match. He only brings positive things. He is young and he has a wonderful career ahead of him. He's adapted right away."

Allegri, though, wanted to calm expectations around Vlahovic, who will be making his Champions League debut against Villarreal, the reigning Europa League champions, who sit sixth in La Liga.

"Vlahovic is just starting in the Champions League," said Allegri. "You can't put all the responsibility on him because you need a lot of experience that he doesn't have, you have to support him."

"When he has played 60 or 70 games, he will be a totally different player. It's not just a technical question, but also a psychological one, a question of pressure."

