

During a trip to northern Golestan Province, President Ebrahim Raisi Paid a Visit to the Only Island of the Caspian Sea's Iranian Coast, Where A Project Is Underway to Promote Ecotourism Infrastructure

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Underlined Premature Good News Will Not Replace Good Agreement, Adding That Nobody Can Say the Deal Is Done in Vienna, Until Remaining Issues Are Resolved

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SATURDAY MARCH 5, 2022 - ESFAND 14, 1400

2 DOMESTIC

War Not Solution To Ukraine Crisis



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Tehran to Deepen Trade Ties With Yerevan Via Joint Ventures



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Ukrainians Put Out Fire At Nuclear Complex



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Chelsea Survive FA Cup Scare



> SEE PAGE 8

IAEA Chief Due in Tehran To Resolve Issues

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The director general of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) is scheduled to arrive in Tehran on Saturday, in a visit which reportedly aims to design a roadmap for resolving the outstanding safeguards issues between Iran and the nuclear watchdog.

According to a Thursday report by Nournews, a website close to Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), the safeguards issues between Iran and the IAEA have turned into one of the roadblocks slowing down the progress of the Vienna talks between Tehran and the P4+1 states on reviving the 2015 deal, officially named the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

The visit by Rafael Grossi, the report said, could help remove "an important obstacle" in the way of concluding an agreement in Vienna in case the IAEA chief will be able to facilitate the creation of a roadmap to resolve the outstanding issues.

It added that Grossi would hold talks with Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami, following intensive negotiations between officials of the IAEA and AEOI and general agreements reached in recent weeks.

See Page 7

Iran Ready to Increase Oil Output To Levels Before Sanctions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji said the country would readily enhance its crude oil output to help stabilize the global market.

Following the 26th ministerial meeting of the OPEC+ (Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies), Mr. Owji talked about the decisions of the meeting.

"The decision was a continuation of last month's decision to increase daily production of the group by 400,000 barrels of oil for April 2022 with regard to the report of the joint technical committee and assessments of experts of the global economic outlook and the determining factors in the oil market during the year," he said.

He added: "OPEC+ emphasized on its continuous and regular monitoring of market developments and the continuation of implementation of necessary measures to maintain stability of the oil market, and the countries present expressed readiness to take appropriate measures to maintain the stability of the oil market if necessary and protect the achievements of this agreement."

"According to the latest statistics and reports, thanks to the improvement of economic indicators in the world, especially in the major oil consuming economies, and at the same time the good commitment of OPEC+ members, which reached 129% in January, global oil markets are moving toward balance and stability, despite some concerns about the Omicron variant of the virus and a number of geopolitical unrests," said the Iranian Minister of Petroleum about the oil market.

Regarding security tensions in some parts of the world and the recent rise in world oil prices and how OPEC+ would react to these developments, Owji said: "The occurrence of political and economic crises in the world has various consequences and price fluctuations are one of these consequences, so OPEC+ is fully prepared to take appropriate action in this regard, if necessary, by closely monitoring the market."

He added: "However, the part of the situation that goes back to the fluctuation and increase of prices is rooted in the political actions and decisions of certain countries, which on the one hand impose sanctions on major oil producers and on the other hand cause crisis and wars in different parts of the world; stabilizing the oil market and reducing price fluctuations is only possible through cooperation and changing tense approaches."

The Oil Minister said: "As I emphasized earlier, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to increase its oil supply to world markets as soon as possible, and it is up to the major consuming countries that must take the necessary actions to maintain stability and calm in the oil market."

Owji added: "The Islamic Republic of Iran, as one of the largest oil and gas producers in the world and relying on its huge hydrocarbon resources and production capacity, is ready to take action in this field."

He added: "We are ready to enhance our crude oil output as soon as possible. According to the plans and actions taken at the level of the Ministry of Petroleum and the National Iranian Oil Company, we are able to ramp up our oil production quickly and meet the needs of our customers."

"I have to point out that now OPEC+ is not concerned about the fundamentals of the market, including oil supply and demand in the short run, but the current concern of all producing countries is the weak oil supply in the medium term due to delays in upstream investments," he said. "This issue should be considered as an agenda."

Iran Can Secure Good Share of Russian Market

TEHRAN (IFP) - The deputy chairman of the Non-Oil Export Commission of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce says Russia will facilitate exports from Iran due to the war in Ukraine and Western sanctions.

Seyed Mostafa Mousavi said the current situation in Russia will provide Iran with adequate market capacity.

"With the closure of the European route and Western sanctions against Moscow, the Russian market needs a substitute for imports," he said. Mousavi also said China is one of the countries that can replace Europe in this regard, but Iran has more advantages to increase trade with Russia due to its proximity to the country.

He added that the current situation shows that Iran can secure a good share of the Russian market and export many goods to this country, and this potential exists in Iran to develop trade.

He however noted that Iran's biggest challenge in developing trade with Russia is currency issues and that the restrictions created by the cutting of banking ties and the closure of the SWIFT could cause many problems for this country.

Mousavi said in the long run, Russia's currency restrictions will cause many problems and banking exchanges should be done traditionally, so proper planning is required to develop trade with this country.

Iranian UN Envoy Calls for Immediate Ceasefire in Ukraine

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's representative to the United Nations has called for an immediate ceasefire in Ukraine and assisting the people in need.

Following the UN General Assembly resolution on the Ukraine crisis, Iran's representative to the world body Majid Takhte Ravanchi said the resolution lacked neutrality and realistic mechanisms for resolving the issue through peaceful means.

Takhte Ravanchi also said all UN members did not have the opportunity to participate in drafting this resolution.

He added that The Islamic Republic is deeply concerned over the ongoing conflict between Russia and Ukraine.

Iran's UN envoy underlined the Islamic Republic of Iran's principled position on the need for the peaceful settlement of disputes in accordance with international law and the need for full compliance by all parties and under the Charter of the United Nations.

Takhte Ravanchi said finding a lasting and long-term solution to such crises requires addressing its roots. We note that the current complexity and fragile situation in Eastern Europe has been exacerbated by provocative actions of the United States and NATO.

See Page 7

Iran-Iraq Trade Capacity at \$30b

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Director-General of Arab and African Department of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) is of the opinion that capacities of trade and economic cooperation between Iran and Iraq is at least \$30 billion.

Farzad Piltan said that the two countries of Iran and Iraq enjoy high capability and potential to enhance their bilateral trade at \$30 billion annually.

As the responsible body of country's foreign trade, "We believe that capacities of trade and economic cooperation between Iran and Iraq is at least \$30 billion."

In the fields of imports, exports, technical and engineering services as well as in the fields of joint investment in transit and even swap of some products, the two countries can achieve their economic and trade cooperation at the highest level, he emphasized.

See Page 7

Biden Extends National Emergency Against Iran

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden has extended a national emergency against Iran for another year, in yet another act of bad faith amid the ongoing Vienna talks which diplomats say are progressing toward a possible deal.

In a statement on Thursday, Biden said the national emergency declared by former president Bill Clinton on March 15, 1995, must continue in effect beyond March 15, 2022.

The actions and policies of the Government of Iran continue to pose an unusual and extraordinary threat to the national security, foreign policy, and economy of the United States, the statement read.

"Therefore, in accordance with section 202(d) of the National Emergencies Act (50 U.S.C. 1622(d)), I am continuing for 1 year the national emergency with respect to Iran declared in Executive Order 12957," it added.

Earlier, the European Union's deputy foreign policy chief, Enrique Mora, who coordinates the Vienna talks, tweeted that "we are at the final stages of the #ViennaTalks on #JCPOA."

In recent days, diplomats participating in the eighth round of negotiations in the Austrian capital have said that "a deal is within reach" provided that the remaining, narrowed-down issues are resolved.

The Vienna talks began last April between Iran and the other parties to the Iran deal on the assumption that the U.S., under the Biden administration, is willing to repeal the so-called maximum pressure policy against Tehran.

Saudi Prince Hopes to Clinch Deal With Iran

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia intends to continue "detailed talks" with Iran in order to reach a satisfactory agreement for both, Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman said, while stressing the need for a strong nuclear deal between Tehran and world powers at talks in Vienna.

In remarks to The Atlantic monthly, carried by Saudi state media on Thursday, he said direct talks with Iran would enable reaching "a good situation and mark a bright future" for the region's Sunni and Shia powers, which have been locked in a rivalry playing out in conflicts across the Middle East. "Iran is a neighbor forever, we cannot get rid of them and they cannot get rid of us," the Saudi state news agency cited him as saying.

His comments come as indirect U.S.-Iran talks in Vienna move closer to reviving a 2015 nuclear pact which curbed Tehran's nuclear program in exchange for sanctions relief.

Riyadh and its Persian Gulf allies had seen the pact as flawed for not addressing their concerns over Iran's ballistic missiles program and network of proxies, including in Yemen where Saudi Arabia is embroiled in a costly war.

"We do not want to see a weak nuclear deal because the result will be the same in the end," the crown prince said.

Prince Mohammed also said that Israel can become "a potential ally" of Saudi Arabia if the conflict with the Palestinians is resolved. "We do not look at Israel as an enemy but as a potential ally in various interests that we could seek to achieve together. But it should solve its problems with the Palestinians," he was cited as saying by the state news agency. The Saudi crown prince said he does not care whether U.S. President Joe Biden misunderstood things about him, saying Biden should be focusing on America's interests.

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Iran, Qatar to Expand Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - The Governor of Fars Province, southern Iran, reported a draft Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) signed between the Iranian province and Qatar.

Mohammad Hadi Imaniyeheh pointed to his meeting with the Iranian Ambassador to Doha, saying cooperation opportunities between Iran's Fars Province and Qatar were discussed at the meeting.

Referring to the point that Fars Province was close to Qatar, Imaniyeheh said there were many joint investment opportunities between the two countries in agriculture, industry, and knowledge-based activities among other areas. He added that the 2022 FIFA World Cup in Qatar was a good opportunity to establish relations between the two countries.

War Not Solution To Ukraine Crisis

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a telephone conversation with his Irish counterpart Simon Coveney underscored that the war is certainly not a solution to Ukraine crisis, but it should be resolved through political apparatus.

"The war is not solution to the crisis in Ukraine or any other crisis. Of course no one should ignore the root of the crisis and the measures taken by North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) and its measures for the expansion of militarism in the region," Amirabdollahian said in the phone talk.

Referring to the Irish foreign minister's visit to Tehran last month and his meeting with Coveney on the sidelines of the Munich Security Conference, the Iranian foreign minister expressed hope that Iran-Ireland cooperation will increase effectively and that economic and trade relations will be further enhanced more than ever before by a roadmap.

The top Iranian diplomat pointed to the experience of the 20-year presence of the United States and NATO in Afghanistan.

"Also, in the case of the Yemeni crisis, the war should end and a political solution should be the first priority," he added.

Amirabdollahian asserted that the recent Security Council resolution on Yemen does not take into account the realities of this country and will not help end the war against Yemen.

The Irish foreign minister, for his part, commented on the Security Council resolution on Yemen, and said that Ireland did not support this resolution and is seeking dialogue in Yemen.

"We believe that the United Nations should help the negotiation process to resolve the crisis in countries where we are witnessing a humanitarian catastrophe", Coveney noted.



The top Irish diplomat also spoke of the Vienna talks, saying all parties are willing to take the final step and efforts are being made to achieve maximum confidence and trust to reach a deal.

Coveney called the issue of economic guarantees important for Iran and said, "As a facilitator of Resolution 2231, we have redoubled our efforts and Ireland for its part can play its reassuring role." Elsewhere in the conversation, Amirabdollahian said, "War is not the solution to the crisis in Ukraine and no other crisis." He however noted that the root-cause of the crisis and NATO's efforts to spread militarism in the region should not be overlooked.

The foreign ministers of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Ireland stressed the need for continued consultations between the two countries to pursue the development of bilateral relations and the resolution of regional and international issues.

Official Stresses Enhancement of Human Rights Both Inside Iran and Overseas

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Head of the Iranian Judiciary and Secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights underlined Iran's strong resolve to help the promotion of human rights both inside the country and overseas.

Kazem Gharibabadi made the remarks during a meeting with UN Human Rights Council President Federico Villegas on the sidelines of the 49th session of the UN Human Rights Council in Geneva.

He also stressed the necessity for avoiding having a politically motivated approach to human rights issues.

Taking selective approaches and double standards would weaken human rights, he noted.

Gharibabadi urged the UN Human Rights Council to address the challenges facing human rights - such as terrorism, unilateral punitive measures, and their negative impact on making use of human rights.

During the meeting, both sides called for further enhancement of relations between Iran and the council.

Tehran, Moscow Cooperation in Railway Projects

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Russian and Iranian officials have discussed the latest developments of cooperation in joint railway projects such as the International North-South Transport Corridor as well as electrification of Garmzar-Inchek Borun Railway project.

Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali held talks with Sergey Pavlov, First Deputy Managing Director of International Business Development and International Affairs at Russian Railways (RZD), on Thursday.

Jalali pointed out to the recent visit by President Ebrahim Raisi to Russia and his meeting with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, when they discussed different issues of mutual interests, including collaboration in the North-South Corridor.

The Iranian new administration pursues mutual cooperation very seriously, the ambassador said, noting that undoubtedly, implementation of certain railway projects in Iran will pave the way for joint transport operation.

Pavlov, for his part, expressed satisfaction that bilateral ties between Russia and Iran are developing and that the two sides are reviewing strategies to expand cooperation based on orders by high-ranking officials of both countries.

He also emphasized the need for forming an operation unit to follow up issues of mutual interests.

The International North-South Transport Corridor will link northern Europe to Eastern Asia via Iran, Azerbaijan Republic, and Russia. The initial target of the project indicates that organizers see five million tons of transit of commodities per annum through the route.

The Iranian ambassador further said that Russia and Iran enjoy strong railway connections, adding that the two sides constantly hold talks to pave the way for making the corridor operational as soon as possible.

Efforts are being made to complete the project whose only problem is Rasht-Astara rail road, which should be completed in the near future, he stipulated, expressing hope that coordination among Iran, Russia, and Azerbaijan Republic will help speed up the project.

However, Iran is pursuing an initiative to make the route operational before completion of the rail road by the use of 170 kilometers of road and maritime transportations, he added.

Tehran Ready to Exchange Environment Knowledge With Nairobi

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of Department of Environment of Iran expressed readiness to exchange knowledge and offer training to Kenyan park rangers.

In a meeting with the Kenyan Environment and Forestry Minister Keriako Tobiko on Thursday, Ali Salajegheh said that Iran had organized training courses for Kenyan environment experts and park rangers and Tehran is willing to continue the courses.

He invited the Kenyan counterpart to travel and closely see Iran's environment and expressed hope that a MoU would be signed by the two countries to follow up environmental cooperation.

In turn, Tobiko said that Iran and Kenya have a lot of similarities in their environment and they can cooperation on all areas, including cultural and environmental issues.

He said that Kenya was in need of Iran's technology to combat desertification and water shortage.

The two officials were meeting on the sidelines of the Fifth United Nations Environment Assembly (UNEA) in Nairobi.

Iran Objects Instrumental Use of HR

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran Judiciary's Human Rights Council Kazem Gharibabadi emphasized Iran's objection to instrumental use of human rights in a meeting on the sidelines of the 49th UN Human Rights Conference on Human Rights in Geneva.

Gharibabadi made the remarks in a meeting with Namibian Justice Minister Yvonne Dausab, according to a Thursday report from the website of Iran Judiciary's Human Rights Council.

In the meeting, Gharibabadi named the improvements made in Iran on human rights issues and elaborated on the negative impacts of unilateral coercive measures and terrorism on enjoyment from human rights.

He also condemned the hypocrite approach of Western countries to the issue of human rights in Iran while violating Iranian people's human rights by slapping unilateral sanctions.

Dausab announced the principled position of her country in opposing imposition of sanctions and unilateral coercive measures against developing countries, including Iran.

She also condemned instrumental use of human rights and exercise of double standards, saying that Human Rights Council should be a technical assembly for addressing human rights situation without politicization.

Gharibabadi also met with Sri Lanka's Foreign Minister G.L. Pieris and Justice Minister Ali Sabry, where they discussed exploitation of human rights by Western countries and the US to put pressure on developing countries.

They also exchanged views on legal and political structures and human rights-related improvements in Iran and Sri Lanka.

Gharibabadi also took part via video link in the meeting of representatives of Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and elaborated on Iran's stance on human rights.

He mentioned the common challenges ahead of the non-aligned, including unilateral coercive measure, terrorism, and political, selective approach by the West toward human rights. The Iranian official called on the members of NAM to oppose this approach and be united against that.

Beijing Supports Iran Over Unresolved Issues in Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Chinese foreign minister says his country understands Iran's concerns over the unresolved issues in the Vienna talks, adding Beijing supports Iran in this regard.

Wang Yi made the comment in a phone conversation with Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir Abdollahian.

The two top diplomats discussed bilateral relations, issues pertaining to the Vienna negotiations over the revival of the Iran nuclear agreement and some international developments.

Referring to the progress made in the Vienna talks, Iran's foreign minister stressed the importance of some remaining issues and the need to protect Iran's national interests, including in the economic field.

Amir Abdollahian said that Tehran has so far put forth many initiatives to resolve the remaining issues and now reaching an agreement requires a political decision and a realistic view by the Western parties. The Iranian foreign minister expressed pleasure with the close cooperation between Iran and China and outlined the consultations held by Tehran in this regard.

Amir Abdollahian further described as important, the continuation of the consultations and close cooperation between Iran and China in Vienna, as well as in the capitals of the two countries.

Elsewhere during the telephone conversation, Amir Abdollahian addressed the relations between Tehran and Beijing on various issues. He extended President Ebrahim Raisi's greetings to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping, saying the Iranian president has issued necessary instructions regarding technical negotiations over the implementation of the 25-year strategic partnership agreement between Iran and China.

He added that now it is necessary to act seriously and quickly in order to implement the strategic partnership agreement.

Referring to the strategic partnership agreement, the Chinese foreign minister also stressed the need for dialogue and consultations between the representatives of Iran and China to pursue this important pact.

He also spoke of the close relationship between Iran and China in the Vienna talks and said that with the coordination and joint efforts by the two sides, many achievements have been made so far.

However, the top Chinese diplomat stressed the importance of the remaining unresolved issues in the Vienna talks and said China understands and supports the reasonable demands of the Iranian side. Wang expressed hope that by maintaining the forward trend and the interaction of the negotiating parties, all sides can reach an agreement in Vienna.

The two foreign ministers also discussed the developments in Ukraine and expressed hope that the third Summit of Afghanistan's neighbors in Beijing will be held successfully.

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Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "Intention To Participate" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no.2, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 35,223 EURO or 9,900,000,000 RIAL, in favor of NISOC. Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

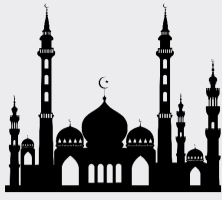
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PRAYER TIME

| | |
|--------------------------|-------|
| ■ Noon (Zohr) | 12:15 |
| ■ Evening (Maghreb) | 18:20 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) | 05:04 |
| ■ Tomorrow's Sunrise | 06:27 |

29. It was no more than a single mighty Blast, and behold!
they were (like ashes) quenched and silent.
30. Ah! Alas for (My) Servants!
There comes not an apostle to them but they mock him!

Surah 36, Ya-sin (29 - 30)

Tehran to Deepen Trade Ties With Yerevan Via Joint Ventures

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Fatemi-Amin says his visit to Armenia is aimed at expanding bilateral trade ties between the two neighboring countries via joint investment projects.

"This visit is focused on deepening ties between Iran and Armenia via joint ventures," said Fatemi-Amin upon his arrival in the Armenian capital of Yerevan on Thursday.

The Iranian minister is heading a high-ranking delegation, including trade officials and CEOs of private companies. This is the first visit to Armenia by high-ranking Iranian officials since President Ebrahim Raisi took office back in August 2021.

Expanding trade diplomacy with regional states tops the agenda of the new Iranian administration. Fatemi-Amin has already made several trips to the Persian Gulf states of the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Oman to boost bilateral trade relations.

The Iranian minister also described Armenia as an important trade partner whose economy complements that of Iran's.

"Armenia as a member state of the Eurasian Economic Union and a neighboring country of Iran is of great significance. The economies of Iran and Armenia are complementary. We can export technology in many industrial sectors to Armenia and import our required industrial know-how from Armenia," said the Iranian minister.

The Republic of Armenia is a landlocked country located in northwestern Iran and the two countries share a 44-kilometer border.

Trade relations between Iran and Armenia have dramatically expanded after Iran signed a Free Trade Agreement with the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in October 2019.

Under the three-year preferential trade deal, EAEU and Tehran are obliged to accept the conditions for achieving a full free trade plan for tariff-free essential commodities.

Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Russia are the member states of EAEU.



"Iranian companies, including those manufacturing home appliances as well as food industries, can invest in Armenia to produce and export their products to other countries. We will also invite some Armenian companies to invest in Iran during the meeting with high-ranking Armenian officials," Fatemi-Amin noted.

Given its relatively low trade tariffs (4%) with North American countries like Canada, Armenia can serve as a platform facilitating the export of Iranian products to such markets.

The value of Iran-Armenia trade volume stood at \$304 million during the last Persian calendar year starting from March 21, 2020 to March 20, 2021, with both sides planning to beef up bilateral trade.

During his two-day visit to Armenia, the Iranian minister is to meet top officials, among them the Armenian minister of economy, the deputy prime minister as well as head of Armenia's central bank.

Implementation of trade agreements, facilitating trade between Iranian and Armenian private sectors, cooperation in free zones, commodity trade, transportation and customs are among the economic issues to be discussed in the meetings between Iranian officials and Armenian counterparts.

Armenia can potentially serve as a transit route for Iranian goods, technology as well as machinery, technical and engineering services to Russia and even to European countries.

According to General Manager of Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization Javad Hedayati, Iran's main transit route to Europe is through Turkey and Azerbaijan, but Armenia is still important as an alternative in case a problem arises with the two corridors.

Gov't Awards \$520m Worth of Flare Gas Contracts to Domestic Firms

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Oil Ministry has awarded over half a billion U.S. dollar worth of flare gas projects to domestic companies as part of efforts to reach a zero flares target by 2025.

A Thursday report said that the contracts will be worth 470 million euros (\$520 million) and will reduce the gas flared from the Iranian oilfields by 600 million cubic feet (nearly 17 million cubic meters) by 2024.

The eight contracts are part of an investment package of \$1.22 billion introduced by the Iranian government in 2018 to recover flare gas from oilfields in southwestern Iran.

The government had already awarded \$288 million of those projects to local contractors, according to officials in the Bid Boland Refinery, a facility especially designed to process the recovered flare gas for use in petrochemicals or industrial plants in the region.

Oil Minister Javad Owji, who supervised the signing of the contracts on Thursday, vowed that Iran will reach a zero flare target at the end of the current administrative government in 2025.

Owji estimated that around 40 million cubic meters (1.4 billion cubic feet) per day of natural gas is currently flared or vented in oilfields in Iran.

"I can assure you that around 500 million cubic feet of flare gas will be recovered and used as feedstock at petrochemical complexes within the next one or two years," the minister was quoted as saying by the state TV.

Iran has introduced various development projects in its massive petroleum sector despite being subject to a harsh regime of American sanctions since 2018.

President Orders Launch of Home-Made Budget Car

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has ordered the launch of at least one home-made budget car model as part of his strategies to reform the domestic car manufacturing sector in Iran.

Raisi issued the order after he visited car yards and assembly lines run by Iran's largest automotive company IKCO near the capital Tehran.

The president issued eight major directives meant to create reforms in the Iranian automotive industry, including the need for more investment and technology transfer from Iranian defense, space and high-tech industries to boost the quality of cars manufactured inside the country.

The directives included a target for increasing domestic car output in Iran by 50% in the year to March 2023.

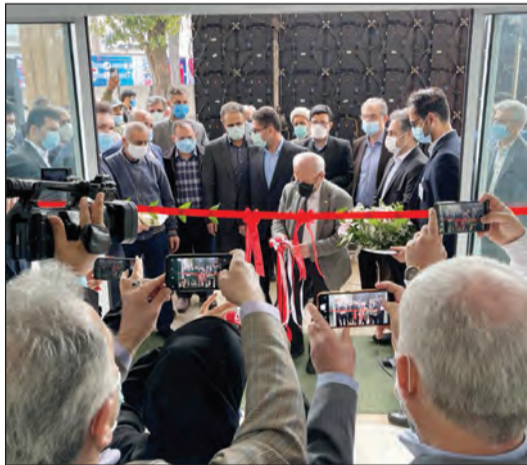
Raisi also ordered the discontinuation of at least three old car models over the same period as he insisted Iranian carmakers should replace them with three new

models to respond to the demand in the market for reliable cars.

The strategies are meant to allay a growing discontent about the quality of cars inside Iran. They come less than two months after the Iranian police said that airbags on all of nearly 60 cars involved in a chain accident in southwestern Iran had failed to function properly.

The incident, which killed five and wounded 41 people, also sparked criticism from the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei who said in a speech on January 30 that domestic car models had poor quality.

Inauguration of Boroumand Subspecialty Medical Center



Boroumand Specialized and Subspecialty Clinic was put into operation as the thirteenth Tooba Clinic in the presence of the caretaker Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences and some officials of Ghaemshahr city. Addressing the inauguration ceremony which was held on Monday, Head of Razi Hospital of Ghaemshahr said that the executive operation of the Boroumand (Tooba Ghaemshahr) Specialized and Subspecialty Clinic began in 1995 and is now operational, adding, "This clinic covers an area of 1,830 square meters and has been built on three floors with a base of 2,500 square meters." Dr. Ziauddin Oladi, announcing that 40 billion Tomans have been spent for the construction, equipment and operation of this clinic so far, said, "12 billion Tomans have been provided for the construction of this clinic from the resources of the Ministry of Health and Internal Resources, and 15 billion Tomans for medical equipment has been spent. This clinic has specialized and subspecialty wards of pediatrics, dentistry, surgery, kidney, sonography, radiology, heart and other required wards." Then caretaker of Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences addressing the ceremony said that in 2014 and in line with the Health Development Plan some clinics had been designed in the province, adding, "In this regard, the thirteenth clinic of Mazandaran Province in Ghaemshahr city has been put into operation. At the provincial level, these clinics have been built based on the donated land and provided space. Tooba clinics have been designed to reduce people's costs. Of course, these clinics are predominantly

active in afternoons and provide specialized and subspecialty services." Professor Boroumand, subspecialist in adult internal medicine (nephrology) who donated land for construction of these clinics was born in 1940 at Hasanabad Quarter of Shahi town (current Ghaemshahr city). He completed his primary education in Ghaemshahr and his secondary education in Rahnama and Adib high schools in Tehran. Dr. Boroumand received his doctorate in medicine from the University of Tehran and his specialty in internal medicine from Georgetown University in the United States. Dr. Boroumand was the head of the dialysis center of the Ministry of Health from 1974 to 1980. He was in charge of the internal ward of Firoozgar Hospital from 1976 to 1979. He has set up a kidney transplant center in 15 Khordad Hospital (formerly Bahavar). Dr. Boroumand was the president of Iran University of Medical Sciences from 1979 to 1981, and after return of some specialized physicians from 1981 to 1985, he reopened the nephrology ward of Dr. Shariati Hospital. He has been the President of the Iranian Scientific Nephrology Association for five terms, an associate



member of the Academy of Medical Sciences from 2003 to 2006, a permanent member of the Academy of Medical Sciences from 2007 until now, a member of the Board of Directors of the Sports Federation of Special Diseases, and a member of board of directors of Medical Council of the Islamic Republic of Iran for two terms a member of the board of directors of the Organ Transplant Association, the representative of Iran in "MESOT" for two years and the vice president of

MESOT for two years. He is the first doctor in Asia who received a Nephrology Board. He was also the first president of Iran University of Medical Sciences. Dr. Boroumand played a key role in providing kidney transplant conditions in Iran in the 1970s and has continued to do so with strength and perseverance. Dr. Boroumand won the International Nephrology Association Award in 2015 and is the first physician achieving this honor. Dr. Boroumand is known as the father of Iranian nephrology and the founder and pioneer of the knowledge of kidney diseases (nephrology) in the Middle East.

Treat pain at the lowest cost

Touching upon donation of land for construction of this clinic, Professor Boroumand, a subspecialist in adult kidney diseases (nephrology) and a university professor, said: "I destroyed my parent's house of 80 years on Hasanabad Square of Ghaemshahr and donated its land for building the specialized clinic. Of course, I was first hesitant to donate it or not to Cultural Heritage, but in line with the medical oath I had sworn in, I decided to



donate the house where I was born and raised to Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences for public health, because of the region's natural environment I became acquainted with and this acquaintance led to my love for medicine. Therefore, during the era of Health Minister Mr. Ghazizadeh Hashemi, I asked him to agree my land to be donated to Mazandaran University of Medical Sciences. Early 1995, I and Dr. Ali Nobakht Haghighi agreed to donate this land with a lot



of pursuits, and after five years, this clinic was put into operation on Monday." He added: "Through this media, I thank Dr. Oladi, the director of Razi Hospital, Dr. Abedi, a nephrologist, and the rest of the friends who attended the ceremony. I hope this clinic will be useful for the people of Ghaemshahr. Of course, there are many specialists in that city and Razi Hospital is one of the best equipped hospitals in Iran. But there was a need for a subspecialist clinic." The professor of nephrology stated: "I, with a history of more than 50 years of teaching and medical profession, received my greatest reward yesterday by observing my students, each of whom has become the highest subspecialist in the city. Therefore, I hope that Dr. Gholami, who is the new director of this clinic, would advance the job very well. Of course, if I had permission to speak at the opening of the ceremony, I would have liked to thank all these people, especially the people of the city, who helped us a lot in building the clinic. However, there is no complaint, the presence and warm looks of the people are enough for me. Hope this clinic would treat pains of the people with the least cost." Dr. Boroumand then highlighted services are offered in this clinic, adding that the clinic with its latest equipment and facilities is to serve patients in all medical fields. He reiterated that his main goal of donating the land has been to serve people of Ghaemshahr because he believes one should serve the public in any job and people should also help each other to alleviate their pains. He stated: "Health and delight of the society is the highest prize for us and we should teach and promote beneficence and honesty among the people."

Japan Set to Extend Coronavirus Limits

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan is set to loosen border controls to allow more people to enter the country, especially students, while extending infection control measures to limit the spread of the coronavirus in several areas, including Tokyo.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida will raise the number of people who can enter Japan to 7,000 a day from 5,000 at present, while students will be exempted from the daily intake and considered in a separate category, media reports said.

The move will extend an easing of the country's strict border measures earlier this week that opened the doors to more students and foreign workers amid criticism from business leaders and educators.



EU Sanctions on Russia Starting to Have an Effect

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union's sanctions against Russia over its invasion of Ukraine are starting to have an initial impact, an EU official said on Thursday.

"We believe that the package of sanctions we've put on the table is quite impressive and is now starting to have the first effects," the official said.

"Take the economic side, we have the Moscow stock exchange being closed since Monday. The depreciation of the rouble is also quite impressive. The fact that the Russian Central Bank had to double his interest rate to 20% also," the official continued.



Ukrainians Put Out Fire at Nuclear Complex

LVIV (Dispatches) - A fire that broke out in a training building near the largest nuclear power plant in Europe during intense fighting between Russian and Ukrainian forces has been extinguished, Ukraine's state emergency service said on Friday.

U.S. Energy Secretary Jennifer Granholm said there was no indication of elevated radiation levels at the Zaporizhzhia plant, which provides more than a fifth of total electricity generated in Ukraine.

Earlier, a video feed from the plant verified by Reuters showed shelling and smoke rising near a five-storey building at the plant compound.

The footage shot at night showed one building aflame, and a volley of incoming shells, before a large candescent ball lit up the sky, exploding beside a car park and sending smoke billowing across the compound. It was not immediately clear who was in control of the plant.

"Europeans, please wake up. Tell your politicians - Russian troops are shooting at a nuclear power plant in Ukraine," Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelenskiy said in a video address.

Zelenskiy said Russian tanks had shot at the nuclear reactor plants, though there was no evidence cited that they had been hit.

The mayor of the nearby town of Enerhodar about 550 km (342 miles) southeast of Kyiv said fierce fighting and "continuous enemy shelling" had caused casualties in the area, without providing details.

Thousands of people are believed to have been killed or wounded and more than 1 million refugees have fled Ukraine since Russian President Vladimir Putin last Thursday launched the biggest attack on a European state since World War Two.

Early reports of the incident at the power plant sent financial markets in Asia spiralling, with stocks tumbling and oil prices surging further.

"Markets are worried about nuclear fallout. The risk is that there is a miscalculation or over-reaction and the war prolongs," said Vasu Menon, executive director of investment strategy at OCBC Bank.

Russia has already captured the defunct Chernobyl plant, about 100 km north of Kyiv, which spewed radioactive waste over much of Europe when it melted down in 1986. The Zaporizhzhia plant is a different and safer type, some analysts said.

U.S. President Joe Biden and UK Prime Minister Boris Johnson both spoke with Zelenskiy to get an update on the situation at the plant.



"President Biden joined President Zelenskiy in urging Russia to cease its military activities in the area and allow firefighters and emergency responders to access the site," the White House said.

Johnson said Russian forces must immediately quit their attack and agreed with Zelenskiy that a ceasefire was crucial.

"The prime minister said the reckless actions of President Putin could now directly threaten the safety of all of Europe," Downing Street said.

Energy Secretary Granholm said on Twitter the reactors at Zaporizhzhia were "protected by robust containment structures" and were being "safely shut down". The head of the International Atomic Energy Agency said he was "deeply concerned" with the situation at the power plant and was in contact with Ukrainian authorities.

On Thursday, Russia and Ukraine negotiators agreed to the need for humanitarian corridors to help civilians escape and to deliver medicines and food to the areas where fighting was the fiercest.

Ukrainian presidential adviser Mykhailo Podolyak said a temporary halt to fighting in select locations was also possible.

The negotiators will meet again next week, the Belarusian state news agency Belta quoted Podolyak as saying.

Only one Ukrainian city, the southern port of Kherson, has fallen to Russian forces since the invasion was launched on Feb. 24, but Russian forces continue to surround and attack other cities.

Mariupol, the main port on the Sea of Azov, was surrounded and under heavy bombardment. Water and power was cut off, and officials say they cannot evacuate the wounded.

Video posted on Twitter from Mariupol, and verified by Reuters, showed parked vehicles burning while non-stop firing reverberated around surrounding apartment blocks. The northeastern city of Kharkiv has been under attack since the start of the operation, but defenders are holding out in the heavily shelled city.

While no major assault has been launched on Kyiv, the capital has been shelled, and Russian forces unleashed devastating firepower to break resistance in the outlying town of Borodyanka.

In Washington, a U.S. defense official said Russian troops were still 25 km (16 miles) from Kyiv city center. Earlier on Thursday, the British Ministry of Defense said a huge Russia convoy rumbling southwards toward Kyiv, was advancing slowly, partly due to resistance, but also due to logistical issues.

The United States and Britain announced sanctions on more Russian oligarchs on Thursday, following on from EU measures, as they ratcheted up the pressure on the Kremlin.

Another step to support low-income provinces

Once again, the fragrance of the resurrection of the Messenger of Mercy in the prophetic practice and faithful help Tehrani benefactors were manifested



The International Charity Foundation of the Waterfall of Emotions, which has been active since 2001, has tried to provide conditions for serving and helping the deprived in the community with an expert and research-oriented view of social and cultural issues from the very beginning. This foundation has 830 agencies in the whole country and 150 agencies in Tehran province and also supports 450 thousand Mehrjoos in the whole country. More than 11 thousand families in Tehran province are supported by the deprivation camp. With the main goal of alleviating poverty and helping the comprehensive development of the country, the deprivation camp of this foundation has put several programs in the perspective of its activities, among which we can promote easy marriage with a simple lifestyle and provide dowry. Orphans mentioned the distribution of baskets, free treatment of incurable patients, academic support for students and support for the marginalized community across the country. Which is donated to the target community in the form of various exercises. The CEO of Abshar Atefeh International Charity Foundation, Mohammad Javad Fooladpour, in a prophetic rehearsal held on the occasion of the resurrection of the Holy Prophet (PBUH) in Tehran's Azadi Square, acknowledged that 13 trailers carrying livelihood packages were loaded and sent to people in need in the country's provinces. He added: The benefactors of Tehran province and all over the country of Atefeh Waterfall Foundation have taken special measures in providing livelihood as well as dowry and housing following the instructions of the Supreme Leader (Dam-e-Zoleh)

and also in the treatment and supply of medicine and items during the Corona Necessary measures have been taken in the form of various exercises. The CEO of the International Waterfall of Emotions Foundation emphasized: More than 10,000 charities are cooperating with this foundation, of which more than 300,000 are supported by this foundation. Therefore, the director of the deprivation camp of Ms. Fatemeh Choupani said in an interview: Now that we are on the eve of the new year and Eid al-Fitr, the deprivation camp of the International Charity Foundation of the Waterfall of Emotions continues its mission. He has put the prophetic exercise on the agenda. He said that the deprivation camp of this foundation, in the form of a prophetic exercise and with the aim of supporting low-income provinces, 13 trailer machines including livelihood packages (rice, oil, paste, pasta, soybeans, beans, etc.) worth each trailer unit Four billion rials is equivalent to four hundred million tomans, of which the total amount of 13 trailers is 52 billion.

Bank information to help donors is as follows:

Account number: 1-7720500-759-1878

Card number: 6273811043191250

Bank Name: Sepah Bank (formerly Ansar)

National Bank Number:

IR770630187875907720500001

Website: www.absharatefeh.org

Instagram: [abshaar_atefeh](https://www.instagram.com/abshaar_atefeh)

Telegram: t.me/bitolreza

Telecommunication network code

*741*3*800#

Quad Leaders Agree Ukraine Experience Should Not Be Allowed in Indo-Pacific

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Leaders of the Quad grouping of countries - the United States, India, Australia and Japan - agreed on Thursday that what is happening to Ukraine should not be allowed to happen in the Indo-Pacific, Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

A virtual meeting of the four-country grouping was held at a time of increased concern about Taiwan, a self-ruled island claimed by China, which has stepped up its alert level, wary of China taking advantage of a distracted West to move against it.

"We've agreed that unilateral changes to the status quo with force like this should not be allowed in the Indo-Pacific region," Kishida said, referring to Russia's invasion of Ukraine. "We've also agreed this development makes it even more important to work toward realizing a free and open Indo-Pacific," Kishida told reporters after the meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden, Australian Prime Minister Scott Morrison and Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Kurt Campbell, the White House coordinator for Indo-Pacific, said on Monday the United States would keep its focus on the Indo-Pacific despite the Ukraine crisis, although this would be difficult and expensive. He said Washington has been deeply engaged in two theaters simultaneously before, including during World War Two and the Cold War.

The United States sees the Quad and its growing relations with India as essential to its efforts to push back against China in the Pacific, but it is in a delicate balancing act with New Delhi, given the latter's long-standing ties with Russia.

Of the four Quad countries, only India has not condemned Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Russia is the main supplier of arms to the Indian military and India faces the possibility of U.S. sanctions for its purchase of the Russian S-400 air defense system.

Analysts say any moves by Russia hawks in the Biden administration to impose sanctions on India for working with Moscow could backfire and set back cooperation in the Quad.

Donald Lu, the U.S. assistant secretary of state for South Asia, told a Senate subcommittee hearing on Wednesday that the United States has been fighting a "pitched battle" with India in diplomatic channels to urge it to take a clear position opposed to Russian actions in Ukraine.

He also said it was looking "very closely" at whether to apply sanctions on India over its Russian arms deals under the Countering America's Adversaries through Sanctions Act (CAATSA), or to waive those.

Turkey Says Drones to Ukraine Are Sales Not Aid

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's drone shipments to Ukraine are not military aid but rather private sales, a deputy Turkish foreign minister was quoted as saying on Thursday, underscoring Ankara's effort to avoid offending Moscow amid Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

NATO member Turkey, which shares a maritime border with Russia and Ukraine and has good ties with both, has criticized the invasion as unacceptable but avoided the harsher rhetoric of other alliance members and opposes their use of sanctions.

Turkey cooperates closely with Russia in energy, trade and defense. It has also sold Bayraktar TB-2 drones to Kyiv and signed a deal to co-produce more during a visit there last month by President Tayyip Erdogan, angering Moscow.

On Wednesday, Ukraine's defense minister said it received a fresh shipment of the armed drones, which have proven effective in recent years against Russian forces and their allies in conflicts in Syria and Libya.

In an interview with pro-government newspaper Sabah, Deputy Foreign Minister Yavuz Selim Kiran said Kyiv had purchased the drones from Baykar, a private Turkish defence company, stressing this did not represent an agreement between the nations.

"Ukraine wanted to buy this product from our firm, and they made a strong deal among themselves," Kiran said, according to Sabah.

"This is not help from Turkey. These are products Ukraine bought from a Turkish company. Of course, we are proud of these products," he added.

The comments come as Western nations ramp up sanctions on Russia and military aid for Ukraine as it fights to fend off a slew of Russian attacks.

Russia had previously raised concerns with Turkey over Ukraine's use of the drones in the country's east, but Ankara says it is not responsible for what buyers do. Cheaper than U.S. and Chinese rivals, Turkish drones have attracted buyers from Europe, Africa and Asia.

Turkey - also heavily reliant on Russian tourists - this week closed its straits linking the Mediterranean and Black Seas to all military traffic under a 1936 pact, allowing it to limit passage of some Russian warships.



Shanon
(adviser)

Elahieh Apt (\$2000)
250sq.m, 4bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

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

Parsian

Apt (\$2700)
Zaferanieh
220sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
Jacuzzi, pkg
L.balcony
F.F

Aghdasieh Apt (\$2200)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, F.F

bldg (\$8000)
Farmanieh
4storey, 15bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
Jacuzzi, pkgs
green yard
Semi Furn

Sa`adat abad
150sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, F.F (\$1500)

Jordan Apt (\$1600)
180sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, F.F

Jordan Office
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IMF Could Visit Lebanon Mid-March

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - An International Monetary Fund delegation could visit Lebanon in the second half of March to continue discussions on an aid program supported by reforms, Lebanon's Deputy Prime Minister Saade Chami said in a statement on Wednesday.

Lebanese officials held talks with the IMF last month with the aim of securing a deal seen as the only way to secure the country's exit from a 2019 financial meltdown that has crashed the currency and left most of the population poor.

An IMF technical team visited Lebanon from Feb. 28 to March 1 "to take stock of the work done already and outline the next steps needed to reach an agreement on the IMF program," the statement said.



Seaborne Russian Gas Supplies to Europe Disrupted by Looming Port Bans

OSLO (Dispatches) - Supplies of Russian liquefied natural gas (LNG) to Europe have been disrupted by uncertainty over whether ships can discharge cargoes at European ports due to sanctions imposed on Moscow, according to ship tracking data and trade sources.

The disruptions come at a time when Europe is contending with record prices for natural gas due to tight supplies that have ramped up energy bills and led governments to pay billions of dollars in subsidies to consumers struggling to stay warm.

Four tankers that loaded LNG at the Russian gas terminal in Yamal and initially said they were sailing to British and French ports have changed their destination status to "For Orders", Refinitiv Eikon ship tracking data showed. That means the vessels are awaiting new orders from their owners.

The change in destinations came after Britain said on Monday it was denying entry to British ports to ships that are Russian owned, operated, controlled, chartered, registered or flagged as it

ratcheted up pressure on Moscow over the invasion of Ukraine.

The British move has added to the widespread disruption to energy markets caused by punitive measures the West has taken against Moscow, with traders steering clear of Russian fuel even though many of the restrictions, including Britain's port ban, exempts Russian oil and gas in itself.

"The UK's decision to turn away Russian-flagged, operated or chartered vessels may materially tighten the market if this move is followed by other countries," said Rystad Energy's senior gas and LNG analyst Kaushal Ramesh.

The diversion of the tanker closest to Britain, the Fedor Litke, helped propel British gas prices higher on Wednesday, Refinitiv analysts said.

The British front-month gas price rose more than 40% on Wednesday to 410 pence per therm but was still short of a record high of 453 hit on Dec. 21. The British day-ahead gas price rose 37% to 405 pence per therm.

Russia has supplied 7.5% of Britain's LNG imports so far this year and accounted for 19% of its imports in 2021, Ramesh said.

European Union states are also considering a ban on Russian ships entering the bloc's ports to tighten sea restrictions after a halt in air traffic, European officials say, a step that would further hamper Russia's commercial shipments.

The European Parliament on Tuesday approved a non-binding resolution calling for broader sanctions on Russia as well as for EU ports to be closed to Russian ships, and ships coming to or from Russia, except for "justified humanitarian reasons".

Trade sources said the new destination status for the four LNG vessels reflected caution over what will happen next with European ports.

The Dutch front-month gas contract, a European benchmark, ended trading 42% higher at 174 euros per megawatt hour (MWh) after setting a new record high of 185 euros/MWh.

Canada said on Tuesday that it too would shut its ports to Russian-owned ships later this week.

The Fedor Litke LNG tanker changed course late on Tuesday from its previous destination of Britain's Isle of Grain gas import terminal.

India's Factory Growth Accelerated in February

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - India's factory activity growth accelerated in February as the threat from a third COVID-19 wave eased, while some softening of price pressures meant demand and business expectations strengthened, a private survey showed.

However, the survey was conducted before Russia invaded Ukraine, which led to an immediate spike in oil prices. India is the world's third-largest importer of oil so the crisis will add to inflationary pressure and hurt consumer sentiment.

The Manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index, compiled by IHS Markit from Feb. 10-22, improved to 54.9 in February from 54.0 in January.

February's reading exceeded expectations for 54.3 in a Reuters poll and was above the 50-mark that separates growth from contraction for an eighth month.

"For now, India's manufacturing sector has weathered the storm of the Omicron variant, undoubtedly supported by the relatively high inoculation rate," noted Shreya Patel, an economist at IHS Markit.

Output and new orders expanded for an eighth month in a row in February, led by the consumer goods sector on favourable demand and increasing sales. Growth in international demand for Indian manufactured goods rose marginally to a three-month high.

Business expectations for the next 12 months improved and the index rose to a four-month high on hopes of a return to normality and expansion plans.

However, firms continued to shed jobs for a third month, although the pace of decline was marginal and the slowest in the sequence.

The input prices index was at a six-month low in February but showed raw material costs had risen for a 19th month, driven by higher prices of metals, cotton, chemicals and rubber. Factories passed some of those higher expenses to customers.

"There were, however, some key concerns that continued to threaten growth. Most prominently, cost pressures remained elevated as a result of shortages while delivery times lengthened once again," added Patel.

India's economy expanded 5.4% last quarter, slower than the previous two quarters and below 6.0% growth expected in a Reuters poll.

A jump in oil prices due to the Russia-Ukraine crisis is likely to have a big impact on inflation and the rupee as well as widening India's current account deficit, slowing growth further.

The Reserve Bank of India was expected to raise rates next quarter to combat inflation, but if the crisis deepens it could change those predictions.



More Price Pain as Eurozone Inflation Hits New Record of 5.8%

LONDON (Dispatches) - Inflation in the eurozone hits a record high for the fourth month in a row in February, raising questions about when the central bank should step in to ease the pain to people's wallets while Russia's invasion of Ukraine rattles the global economy.

The reading intensifies a policy dilemma for the European Central Bank (ECB), which must convey a sense of calm amid war-related market turmoil but also respond to mounting price pressures.

Consumer prices in the 19 countries that use the euro currency increased by an annual 5.8% in February, the highest figure in the bloc's two decades, the European Union statistics agency Eurostat reported Wednesday.

The reading beat expectations for 5.4% and also confounded the ECB's own projection for a drop.

The latest numbers underscore continuing pain for the continent's consumers and pile more pressure on the ECB as it grapples with when and how to raise interest rates to ease inflation.

The latest inflation reading smashed the record of 5.1% set last month to reach the highest level since recordkeeping for the euro started in 1997.

Inflation in Europe, as in other major economies, has been fueled by surging energy prices, and the problem will be complicated by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Russia, a major oil and gas producer, has been hit with sanctions and export restrictions that have raised worries that supplies could be cutoff, though that hasn't yet materialized.

A 32% jump in energy costs drove inflation last month but unprocessed food prices were also up sharply, rising 6.1% and making inflation especially painful for lower-income families.

With energy prices soaring due to Russia's war in Ukraine, inflation is all but certain to accelerate even further in the coming months, analysts say, and could average around 5% or more this year, more than twice the ECB's 2% target.

As price pressures had been building for months, the ECB was all but certain to accelerate its exit from the ultra-easy policy at its meeting next week.

But the war has thrown those plans into turmoil, leaving the policy outlook uncertain.

Still, policy hawks have not fully abandoned their calls for a tighter policy as price pressures are now broad and not merely a function of a spike in oil prices.

"If price stability requires it, the ECB Governing Council must adjust its monetary policy course," Bundesbank President Joachim Nagel said. "We need to keep our sights trained on the normalization of our monetary policy."



Ukraine Conflict Could Hit Food Supplies, Worsening Yemen Hunger Crisis

SANAA (Dispatches) - Potential disruption to global wheat supplies after Russia's invasion of Ukraine is raising concerns that war-torn Yemen's hunger crisis and food price inflation could deepen, with some Yemenis rushing to buy flour.

The World Food Program (WFP) this week said the Ukraine crisis is likely to further increase fuel and food prices, especially grains, in import-dependent Yemen where food costs have more than doubled in many areas in the past year.

Russia and Ukraine account for about 29% of global wheat exports and interruption to that flow is pushing up global prices.

Conflict and inflation in Yemen have pushed millions to the brink of famine.

"People are now rushing to purchase, people are on alert, anticipating a crisis," said wholesaler Mohammed al-Nimri in Yemen's capital Sanaa. "They are taking, ten, twenty sacks."

Flour importer Mahran Al-Qadi said they had stocks, but people were panic buying. "Some merchants have even raised prices after seeing the great demand."

Seven years of conflict have divided Yemen between an internationally recognised government in the southern city of Aden, and the Houthis group in Sanaa.

The Aden government on Tuesday held a meeting on food supplies and said there were four months of wheat and other basic goods stocks.

The Houthis' deputy industry minister Muhammad al-Hashemi told Reuters the administration had several months of wheat stocks and more were coming from outside Ukraine and Russia.

Concerns about supplies come on top of a deteriorating hunger situation in Yemen and amid a shortfall in aid funding.

World Bank Board Backs Using \$1b in Frozen Afghan Funds for Aid

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The executive board of the World Bank approved a plan to use more than \$1 billion from a frozen Afghanistan trust fund to finance urgently needed education, agriculture, health and family programs, the bank announced.

The plan, which will bypass sanctioned Taliban authorities by disbursing the money

through UN agencies and international aid groups, will provide a major boost to efforts to ease the country's worsening humanitarian and economic crises.

The approach "aims to support the delivery of essential basic services, protect vulnerable Afghans, help preserve human capital and key economic and social services, and reduce the need for humanitarian assistance in the future," the bank said in a statement.

Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF) was frozen in August when the Taliban overran Kabul as the last US-led international troops departed after 20 years of war.

Foreign governments ended financial aid constituting more than 70 percent of government expenditures while the United States led in the freezing of some \$9 billion in Afghan central bank funds.

The funding cuts accelerated an economic collapse, fueling a cash crunch and deepening a humanitarian crisis that the United Nations says has pushed more than half of Afghanistan's population of 39 million to the verge of starvation.

The World Bank statement said that as a first step, ARTF donors will decide on four projects worth about \$600 million that will support "urgent needs in education, health and agricultural sectors, as well as community livelihoods."

There will be a "strong focus on ensuring that girls and women participate and benefit from the support," the statement continued.

The Taliban have unraveled gains in rights made by women during the last two decades, including restricting them from working and limiting their travel unless accompanied by a close male relative.

Most girls have been barred from going to school beyond seventh grade since the Taliban takeover. The Islamist extremists say that all girls will be allowed to return to classrooms later this month.

Russia's Top Bank Quits Europe Due to Sanctions



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's largest lender Sberbank is quitting almost all European markets, blaming big cash outflows and threats to its staff and property following Russia's invasion of Ukraine and Western sanctions.

The move seemed inevitable after the European Central Bank (ECB) ordered the closure of the bank's European arm, having warned it faced failure because of a run on deposits sparked by the invasion, which Moscow calls a "special operation." read more

The news came on Wednesday as state-controlled Sberbank reported record annual profits for 2021.

The bank said it was no longer able to supply liquidity to European subsidiaries following an order from Russia's central bank, which is seeking to preserve foreign currency. But it said capital and assets were sufficient to pay all depositors.

The move highlights the pressure some Russian businesses are facing from unprecedented steps by the West to isolate Moscow, including sanctions on its central bank and the exclusion of some of its banks from global payments system SWIFT.

Russian central bank governor Elvira Nabiullina said on Wednesday the country's economy faced an extreme situation, and she was doing everything possible to ensure the financial system could cope with any shock.

"In the current situation, Sberbank has decided to leave the European market," it said in a statement. "The group's subsidiary banks have faced abnormal cash outflows and threats to the safety of its employees and branches."

Sberbank had European assets worth 13 billion euros (\$14.4 billion) as of Dec. 31, 2020, and operations in countries including Austria, Croatia, Germany and Hungary among others.

It said European subsidiaries experienced a liquidity crisis after sanctions were imposed, resulting in the bank losing control of those units in the first quarter of the year.

Sberbank had said in November it planned to finalise the sale of operations in Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Hungary, Serbia and Slovenia in 2021 in a deal worth around 500 million euros.

Iran Launches Strategic Gas Refinery in South

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Persian Gulf Bidboland storage facility and wharf has been launched in the presence of Iran's oil minister in the port city of Mahshahr in southern Iran.

The CEO of Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery said this project has an annual export capacity of 2 million tons of valuable products of propane, butane, pentane plus.

Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery is a homegrown project and has been completed with an investment of 3.4 billion dollars.



Covid Has Taken Severe Mental Health Toll

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The Covid pandemic has taken a dire toll on mental health, the WHO said, indicating that cases of anxiety and depression had swelled by over 25 percent globally.

In a fresh scientific brief, the World Health Organization also found that the Covid-19 crisis had in many cases significantly impeded access to mental health services and raised concerns about increases in suicidal behavior.

The brief, which was based on an umbrella review of a vast number of studies, determined that the world saw a 27.6-percent increase in cases of major depressive disorder in 2020 alone.

During the first year of the pandemic, there was also a 25.6-percent hike in cases of anxiety disorders worldwide, it found.

"In terms of scale, this is a very large increase," said Brandon Gray of WHO's mental health and substance use department, who coordinated the scientific brief.

The brief, he told AFP, "shows that Covid-19 has had a large impact on people's mental health and wellbeing."

The greatest increases were found in places that were heavily affected by Covid-19, in terms of high daily infection rates and decreased mobility due to restrictions, the study found.

Women and girls were more affected than males, and younger people, especially those between the ages of 20 and 24 were more affected than older adults.

Data on suicides was meanwhile mixed, and did not clearly show a change in global rates since the start of the pandemic.

Data from some countries showed rising rates, but others showed that rates had decreased or remained the same.

But Gray pointed out that there is often a delay in collecting and analyzing such statistics.

"I don't think these results should be taken to indicate that suicidal behaviors is not a concern," he said.

The study meanwhile did indicate a higher risk of suicidal behaviors, including suicide attempts and self harm, among young people since the start of the crisis.

Exhaustion among health workers, loneliness and positive Covid-19 diagnoses were meanwhile shown to increase the risk of suicidal thoughts, it found.

The study also showed that people living with mental disorders had an increased



risk of severe illness and death from Covid.

Gray said more research was needed to understand the link.

One reason, he suggested, might be that people living with mental disorders may lead less healthy and active lifestyles, with higher rates of smoking, substance abuse and obesity than among the general public.

Wednesday's study also showed that outpatient mental health services were widely disrupted in 2020 as a result of the pandemic, decreasing access to essential care.

These disruptions were mitigated in many cases by shifting services towards online healthcare.

While this was good news, the study pointed out that the shift obviously exacerbated barriers to proper care for people with little internet access or low levels of technological literacy.

The difficulties in responding to mental health challenges amid the pandemic were largely a result of "chronic underinvestment" in such services before Covid-19 hit, Gray said.

"The decades of underinvestment is showing up now in our lack of preparedness to address the scale of the problem," he said.

UN Takes Historic Step Toward Global Treaty on Plastic Trash



NAIROBI (Dispatches) - The United Nations on Wednesday agreed to start negotiating a world-first global treaty on plastic pollution in what has been hailed as a watershed moment for the planet.

Nearly 200 nations at the UN Environment Assembly in Nairobi unanimously agreed to create an intergovernmental committee to negotiate and finalize a legally binding plastics treaty by 2024.

UNEA chair Espen Barthe Eide declared the resolution passed with a strike of the gavel -- itself made from recycled plastic -- as the assembly hall erupted into cheers and applause.

"We are making history today. You should all be proud," said Eide, who is Norway's climate and environment minister.

Negotiators have been given a broad and robust mandate to target plastic trash in all its forms.

It addresses not just the bottles, straws and shopping bags floating in rivers and oceans, but invisible microplastics found in the deepest oceans and highest mountains, and within the air, soil and food chain.

Supporters described the commitment as the most important environmental decision taken by the UN in years.

"We stand at a crossroad in history when ambitious decisions taken today can prevent plastic pollution from contributing to our planet's ecosystem collapse," said Marco Lambertini from WWF.

The broad treaty framework approved by 193 UN nations -- among them major plastic producers like the United States and China -- does not spell out specific measures but leaves particulars to negotiations.

But the scope covers pollution "from source to sea" -- a key demand of many nations -- and could for the first time introduce caps on the production of new plastic from fossil fuels.

Other regulations could require that industry redesign products to make recycling easier and stem the torrent of trash created by single-use items.

Less than 10 percent of plastic is recycled. Most of the 460 million tons of plastic produced in 2019 wound up in landfill and oceans.

"This is a clear acknowledgement that the entire life cycle of plastic, from fossil fuel extraction to disposal, creates pollution that is harmful to people and the planet," said Graham Forbes from Greenpeace.

The amount of plastic entering the oceans is forecast to triple by 2040, and governments have been under pressure to unite against the trash "epidemic".

Nearly 875,000 Refugees Have Fled Ukraine Conflict

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The number of refugees fleeing the conflict in Ukraine has surged to nearly 875,000, UN figures showed on Wednesday, as fighting intensified on day seven of Russia's invasion.

In all, 874,026 people have fled across the country's borders, according to the website of UNHCR, the UN refugee agency.

That marks a huge jump of around 200,000 from the 677,000 announced almost 24 hours earlier by UNHCR chief Filippo Grandi.

Poland has welcomed around half of all those who have fled, according to combined tallies up to Tuesday. UNHCR figures show that 454,000 had fled to Poland; 116,000 to Hungary; 79,000 to Moldova; 67,000 to Slovakia; 45,000 to Romania, 43,000 to Russia, and 350 to Belarus.

Meanwhile 70,000 have gone to other European countries. Czech Prime Minister Petr Fiala said Wednesday that his country had welcomed around 20,000 Ukrainian refugees since the conflict started.

"The military offensive in Ukraine has caused destruction of civilian infrastructure and civilian casualties and has driven many thousands of people from their homes," UNHCR said.

"There is a clear indication that many more people are on



the move. They are in need of protection and support."

UNHCR projects that more than four million Ukrainian refugees may eventually need help in neighboring countries.

The UN on Tuesday launched an emergency appeal for \$1.7 billion to provide urgent humanitarian aid to people caught up in the Russian invasion and

for the refugees fleeing the violence.

"We are looking at what could become Europe's largest refugee crisis this century," Grandi said.

The first wave of people fleeing across Ukraine's borders were likely to be people with cars, resources and some connections in other European countries, he said.

But as Russia's offensive continues, people who are "more vulnerable" could start to flee, he told reporters. Russian forces said they had captured the Ukrainian port of Kherson on Wednesday, as Russian and Ukrainian troops battled in the streets of Kharkiv, Ukraine's second-largest city, and President Volodymyr Zelensky said Moscow wanted to "erase" his country.

The UNHCR noted that an additional 96,000 people had crossed into Russia from the separatist eastern Donetsk and Luhansk regions between February 18 and 23, before the February 24 invasion.

On Land and Sea, Climate Change Causing Irreversible Losses

PARIS (Dispatches) - Climate change has already caused "irreversible losses" for Nature, UN experts have said, warning that if emissions are not cut quickly, warming could trigger chain reactions with potentially catastrophic effects for all species, including humans.

All forms of life on Earth are linked together by a vast web of causes and consequences, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) said in a new report on the impacts of global warming published this week.

Those effects are severe and wide ranging across the world's natural habitats.

"Climate change has caused substantial damages, and increasingly irreversible losses, in terrestrial, freshwater and coastal and open marine ecosystems," the IPCC says in its key Summary for Policymakers.

And "unsustainable development" is only increasing the vulnerability to danger.

Many natural systems have already reached or are close to the limit of their ability to cope with the effects of a warming planet. The oceans have absorbed huge quantities of carbon dioxide from the atmosphere as emissions have grown, but this has come at the cost of changing the water chemistry -- ocean acidification -- that harms sea life.

Warming is also linked to an increasing number of powerful marine heatwaves that drive harmful algal blooms, kill fish and cause coral bleaching.

Coral reefs are home to at least a quarter of all marine animals and plants.

But battered by repeated marine heatwaves, the world's shallow water corals are "unlikely to last the century", the IPCC said, if global warming continues without a dramatic reduction in emissions.

Forests, tropical or boreal, are also particularly threatened by rising temperatures, drought and fire.

Mortality increases of 20 percent have been recorded for trees in some areas.

At four degrees Celsius of warming, the IPCC report said, half of the Amazon could reach a "tipping point", becoming a savannah and starting to release its vast store of CO2, further accelerating warming.

At just 2C, the world's permafrost could begin to thaw, releasing immense quantities of methane, a greenhouse gas much more powerful over the short term than CO2.

While the Paris agreement goal is to limit warming at 1.5C above pre-industrial levels, current international plans and pledges would see temperatures rise up to 2.7C.

The Earth is already believed to be entering its sixth mass extinction, driven by humanity's overconsumption and comprehensive destruction of species and habitats.

IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

Grossi is likely to meet other Iranian officials during the trip, the report said, adding that interactions between Iran and the IAEA are tangibly improving.

The news website did not give more details about the IAEA chief's visit to Tehran, but said the two sides have had "very difficult and challenging" negotiations over the past 10 days.

"Maintaining professional relations and continuous cooperation between the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran and the IAEA in recent days along with both parties' constructive initiatives have significantly contributed to the continuation of dialog between Iran and the IAEA," the report said.

The AEOI head said late last year that the organization is making efforts to deprive all ill-wishers of pretexts for the continuation of sanctions, after Iran took a voluntary measure to further collaborate with the IAEA.

Iranian UN Envoy...

FROM PAGE 1

In this regard, the Iranian diplomat added, the security concerns of the Russian Federation must be taken into account.

He said, "My government will continue to call for a peaceful, comprehensive and lasting solution to this crisis, including the establishment of an immediate ceasefire and the start of dialogue, as well as the provision of humanitarian assistance to the people in need."

Iran-Iraq...

FROM PAGE 1

Building trade and commercial infrastructure is one of the most important issues that should be taken into serious consideration, he said, adding, "This means that the country must be able to strengthen customs, transportation and banking infrastructures, most of which is related to the Iraqi provinces in the vicinity of southern province of Khuzestan."

It is hoped that Khuzestan Chamber of Commerce will cooperate TPOI in this respect, Piltan underscored.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he placed special emphasis on the unified management of Chazzebah and Shalamcheh Border Terminals and said that the government is also working to facilitate the railway connection between Iran and Iraq.

Rich History Approximates Iran, Lebanon

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili said that Lebanon has unique cultural and artistic capacities and that Iran and Lebanon's rich cultures approximates the two nations.

Esmaili had travelled to Lebanon to inaugurate Iran cultural week in the country. He met with his Lebanese counterpart while leaving for Tehran.

The Iranian culture minister had meetings with the president, prime minister, parliament speaker, and culture minister of Lebanon as well as Hezbollah Secretary General Hassan Nasrallah and families of martyrs during his visit.

He also paid tribute to the tombs of martyrs Imad and Jahad Mughniyeh, Imad al-Din Nasrallah, and other martyrs of the Resistance.

Elsewhere in his Lebanon visit, Esmaili paid a visit to al-Manar TV and met with several cultural figures of Lebanon.

In his meetings with senior Lebanese officials, Iran's culture minister urged strengthening ties between Tehran and Beirut, saying that constructive interaction between countries in the region would provide their security and prevent foreign intervention.

Iran Export of Products to Tajikistan at Upward Trajectory

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Energy said that Iran's export of products to Republic of Tajikistan is on the growth track.

Ali Akbar Mehrabian made the remarks on the sidelines of his meeting with visiting Tajikistan Minister of Energy and Water Resources at the venue of Ministry of Energy and said, "With the aim of developing the cooperation between Iran and neighboring countries, President Raisi made his first foreign visit to the Republic of Tajikistan. The trip made for participating in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and a bilateral meeting was held between Iranian and Tajik delegations."

Good contracts were also signed in this meeting, he said, adding that presidents of the two countries of Iran and Tajikistan emphasized the development of cooperation in all areas, especially in economic fields.

Stating that Iran's volume of exports to Tajikistan is on the upward trajectory, Mehrabian said that the two countries of Iran and Tajikistan enjoy high potentials to promote their trade and economic activities especially in the field of exporting technical and engineering services.

Russian, Belarusian Athletes Banned From Winter Paralympics

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Russian and Belarusian athletes were today banned from the Beijing Winter Paralympics over the war in Ukraine, with organizers bowing to international pressure and threats of a boycott. The International Paralympic Committee (IPC) had just a day earlier said athletes from the two countries would be allowed to compete as "neutrals" in the Games, which start tomorrow. It said that was the "harsh punishment" the IPC could dish out under its rules.

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Woods Wins Inaugural Player Impact Program

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods has not competed in any official tournament for over a year but he still beat PGA Tour big hitters Phil Mickelson, Rory McIlroy, Dustin Johnson and Jon Rahm to win the inaugural Player Impact Program and its US\$8 million first prize, the U.S.-based circuit said. The concept, which awarded a combined US\$40 million to the top 10 finishers, was implemented in 2021 as a way to reward players who positively "move the needle" and generate the most positive interest in the PGA Tour.

Chelsea Survive FA Cup Scare

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea survived a major FA Cup scare to reach the quarter-finals with a 3-2 win at Luton just hours after Roman Abramovich put the club up for sale.

Thomas Tuchel's side took to the Kenilworth Road pitch for the fifth round tie with their heads still spinning from Abramovich's bombshell announcement.

The Russian billionaire has decided to sell Chelsea amid fears he could be sanctioned by the British government amid his country's invasion of Ukraine.

Abramovich, who is alleged to have close ties to Russian President Vladimir Putin, will give the net proceeds from the sale to victims of the Ukraine war, with his asking price starting at a reported £3 billion.

After his massive investment helped Chelsea win 19 major trophies in his 19-year reign, Abramovich admitted it had been "incredibly difficult" to give up the keys to Chelsea.

Fittingly, it was Belgian striker Romelu Lukaku who completed Chelsea's escape act on the day the Abramovich era entered its final chapter.

Chelsea twice trailed against second-tier Luton before Lukaku bagged the winner in the closing stages to spare their blushes.

Abramovich sanctioned the club record £97 million deal that brought Lukaku from Inter Milan last year in the final blockbuster transfer of his reign.

Asked about the sale, Tuchel admitted it was impossible to imagine Chelsea without Abramovich. "I can only think about Chelsea with Roman Abramovich. So it's very hard for me.

It hasn't sunk in yet that this is going to stop. It's a massive change of course," Tuchel said.

"I don't know as much as maybe you think. I'm not a CEO or member of the board. So, I'm very sure the club will speak to us and the players.

It was a much-needed victory for Chelsea after their agonizing penalty shoot-out



defeat in the League Cup final against Liverpool at Wembley on Sunday.

But it was Abramovich's seismic decision to sell up that hogged the attention at tiny Kenilworth Road.

Chelsea conceded a shock goal in the second minute as Reece Burke rose above Malang Sarr to glance his header past Kepa Arrizabalaga.

Tuchel's side hit back in the 27th minute when Saul Niguez scored for the first time since his August loan move from Atletico Madrid.

Saul drilled a composed finish from the edge of the area after Timo Werner started an incisive counter-attack.

Sarr was at fault again in the 40th minute when he tried in vain to play offside and Harry Cornick sprinted onto Carlos Mendes Gomes' pass to net Luton's second goal.

Chelsea snatched an equalizer in the 68th minute when Werner controlled Ruben Loftus-Cheek's superb high pass and slotted home for his first goal in eight games.

Lukaku has yet to repay much of that mammoth fee but he bagged his 11th goal of the season as he stretched to tap in Werner's cross in the 78th minute.

Liverpool kept up their bid for an unprecedented quadruple as Takumi Minamino's double sealed a 2-1 win against Norwich at Anfield.

Japan forward Minamino put Liverpool ahead in the 27th minute with a clinical finish from Divock Origi's pass.

He netted again in the 38th minute, this time lashing home off the inside of the post, before Lukas Rupp got one back for Norwich in the 76th minute.

Having lifted the League Cup last weekend, Liverpool are firmly in contention for the Premier League and Champions League, with no English side ever winning all four prizes in one season.

Elsewhere, Southampton eased through with a 3-1 win against West Ham at St Mary's.



Nadal to Play in Barcelona Ahead Of French Open

MADRID (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal will play at the Barcelona Open in April, the tournament confirmed, as the Spanish tennis legend builds up to the French Open in Paris.

Nadal will be looking to win his 13th title on the clay courts in Barcelona after first lifting the trophy in 2005.

Tournament director David Ferrer said: "Having Rafa in Barcelona is very exciting for the tournament and the expectation will be high to know how far he can go."

Nadal has enjoyed a sensational start to the year after winning the Australian Open in January coming from two sets down to beat Daniil Medvedev.

That was the 35-year-old's 21st grand slam title and moved him ahead of Roger Federer and Novak Djokovic in the all-time list of male major champions.

Nadal also won the Mexican Open final last weekend having beaten newly-anointed world number one Medvedev in the semi-finals.

The Barcelona Open begins on April 16, just over a month before the start of the French Open in May. Nadal will be looking to win a record-extending 14th title at Roland Garros after losing to Djokovic in last year's semi-finals.

Bucks Rally to Cool Off Heat

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Milwaukee's Jrue Holiday drove for a layup with 1.9 seconds left as the NBA champion Bucks rallied from a 14-point deficit to beat Eastern Conference leaders Miami 120-119.

Milwaukee out-scored Miami 21-6 down the stretch to halt the Heat's winning streak at four games.

Khris Middleton drilled a three-pointer with 13.5 seconds to play to pull Milwaukee within one, then superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo forced a jump ball and won it -- Holiday ending up with the chance for the game-winner.

Miami had no timeouts left, and Tyler Herro's desperation three-pointer at the buzzer was off-target.

Two-time NBA Most Valuable Player Antetokounmpo finished with 28 points 17 rebounds and five assists despite being in early foul trouble. Middleton added 26 points and Holiday scored 25 for Milwaukee.

Herro led the Heat with 30 points, Gabe Vincent scored 21 and Bam Adebayo added 18 points with 12 rebounds for Miami, who made 21 of their 44 three-point attempts.

The Heat remained 1 1/2 games ahead of the Chicago Bulls atop the Eastern Conference. The Bucks are in fourth place, a game behind the third-placed Philadelphia 76ers.

James Harden thrilled Philadelphia fans in his 76ers home debut, scoring 26 points with nine assists and nine rebounds in a 123-108 come-from-behind victory over the New York Knicks.

Joel Embiid scored 27 points and pulled down 12 rebounds and Tyrese Maxey scored 25 points for the 76ers, who improved to 3-0 with Harden, who arrived in a trade-deadline deal that sent Ben Simmons to the Brooklyn Nets.

For much of the night it looked like the Knicks might spoil Harden's home Philly debut. The visitors, fueled by 16 points from eight Sixers turnovers, built a 16-point lead in the second quarter.

Philadelphia took the lead for the first time on Harden's free-throws in the third quarter, and his three-point play pushed the lead to 13 points in the final minute of the period.

Bangladesh End T20 Losing Streak



Nasum returned with career-best figures of 4 for 10 as Bangladesh bowled out Afghanistan for 94 runs in 17.4 overs after Liton's 60 off 44 balls guided the side to 155-8 at the Sher-e-Bangla National Stadium.

The win ended Bangladesh's long streak of defeats in T20Is starting from the Twenty20 World Cup in Oman and the UAE last year and gave the side a 1-0 lead in a two-match series.

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Left-arm spinner Nasum Ahmed and batsman Liton Das helped Bangladesh halt an eight-match losing streak in Twenty20 internationals with a resounding 61-run win over Afghanistan in Dhaka on Thursday.

Nasum picked up four wickets in his only spell, opening the bowling for Bangladesh to give the hosts a firm grip on the game as they reduced Afghanistan to 20 for 4 inside five overs.

Najibullah Zadran and skipper Mohammad Nabi briefly stopped the rot with a 37-run fifth-wicket stand before Shakib Al Hasan dismissed both.

Zadran, dropped on four by wicketkeeper Liton, made 27 off 26 balls. Azmatullah Omarzai staged a late fightback to score 20 off 18 balls but it was not enough.

"Pleasing to see how the boys fought in the middle with the bat, ball. The energy was good too. We thought the total was defendable. Nasum bowled really well, it was a match-changing spell," said Bangladesh skipper Mahmudullah Riyad.

Afghanistan's Nabi lamented the loss of early wickets.

UEFA Chief Blasts Clubs Still Committed To Super League Project

LONDON (Dispatches) - UEFA chief Aleksander Ceferin said Thursday he was sick of talking about a breakaway European Super League, accusing club chiefs still committed to the idea of living in a "parallel world".

Twelve of Europe's biggest clubs signed up to the proposed new competition last April but it collapsed within days following a fierce backlash from their own players and fans, as well as governments and football's governing bodies.

Nine clubs distanced themselves from the project but Real Madrid, Barcelona and Juventus remain on board with the concept and former England full-back Gary Neville warned this week that it could make a comeback.

Ceferin, addressing the Financial Times Business of Football Summit in London via videoconference, said he was "sick and tired" of speaking about the Super League.

"Look, first they launched this nonsense of an idea in the middle of a pandemic," he said, speaking from the European governing body's headquarters in Switzerland.

"Now we are reading articles every day they are planning to launch another idea in the middle of war (in Ukraine). They obviously live in a parallel world. "While we are saving players, together with other stakeholders, and work to help in a terrible situation, they work on a project like that."

He added: "This is complete nonsense and everyone except them knows it."

Ceferin took aim at Juventus supremo Andrea Agnelli -- formerly chairman of the European Club Association -- who was one of the driving forces behind the original Super League proposal, aided by Real Madrid's Florentino Perez. "It is interesting they are criticising UEFA, criticising the ECA. One of them was the chairman of the ECA and I have a quote where he was praising the system a week before they launched the first Super League," he said.



No Grand Prix In Future as F1 Terminates Contract

PARIS (Dispatches) - Formula One has removed Russia as a Grand Prix host for good due to the invasion of Ukraine, by terminating its contract with the organizers, the championship promoters announced on Thursday.

"Formula 1 can confirm it has terminated its contract with the Russian Grand Prix promoter meaning Russia will not have a race in the future," they said in a statement.

The Black Sea resort of Sochi has hosted the race since the first running in 2014 but Saint Petersburg was due to replace it as the venue in 2023.

Formula One had already cancelled this year's race following public unease among leading drivers.

Reigning champion Max Verstappen and four-time champion Sebastian Vettel had both said they would not race there.

"For myself, my own opinion is I should not go, I will not go. I think it's wrong to race in the country," said the German.

But former F1 supremo Bernie Ecclestone -- who played a pivotal role in bringing the race to Russia -- told AFP on Wednesday the cancellation made no sense.

"It does not make sense whichever way you look at," Ecclestone told AFP. "There is no war in Russia to my knowledge so if it took place it would make no difference to anybody."

"This idea of trying to punish Russia this way in a sporting sense is not going to punish (Russian President Vladimir) Putin at all."

"The race would not matter to him."

Among other events stripped from Russia, European football's governing body UEFA have taken away this year's Champions League final from Saint Petersburg.

