

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 138,433 With 173 More Iranians Killed By the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi in a Message Described Blocking His Instagram Page as an Evident Violation of Freedom of Expression

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THURSDAY MARCH 10, 2022 - ESFAND 19, 1400

2 DOMESTIC

Iran, Uzbekistan To Set Up Joint Security Committee

> SEE PAGE 2



3 DOMESTIC

Tehran, Rome Call for Exchange of Artists

> SEE PAGE 3



4 INTERNATIONAL

Biden Bans Russia Oil Imports to U.S.

> SEE PAGE 4



8 SPORTS

Liverpool, Bayern Sail Into Champions League Quarters

> SEE PAGE 8



Iran Foreign Trade Value Hits About \$10b in 11th Month

TEHRAN (MNA) – The spokesman for Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) said that 15,799,000 tons of goods and commodities, valued at \$9.858 billion, were exchanged between Iran and other countries in the Iranian month of Bahman.

Seyed Rouhollah Latifi said on Wednesday that 15,799,000 tons of goods were exchanged between Iran and other countries in the Iranian month of Bahman (from Jan. 21 to Feb. 22, 2022), showing a 45 and 52 percent hike in terms of weight and value respectively as compared to the same period of last year.

These statistics showed that Iran's foreign trade has registered a 41 and 21 percent hike in terms of weight and value respectively as compared to a month earlier, he added.

He went on to say that 12,233,000 tons of Iranian goods, valued at \$4.754 billion, were exported from Iran to other countries in the same period, showing a 45 and 64 percent growth in terms of weight and value respectively as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

See Page 7

Tehran Blasts Western States for Granting Immunity to MKO

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top human rights official blasts the Western countries for "granting immunity" to the terrorist anti-Iran Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), despite the group's long-drawn-out history of bloodshed and atrocity against the Iranian people.

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of the country's High Council for Human Rights, made the remarks in a letter addressed to the United Nations secretary-general, the UN high commissioner for human rights, and the UN Human Rights Council as well as the heads of the European Council, Commission, and Parliament.

The group, he wrote, is responsible for carrying out most of the assassinations that have targeted the Iranian people since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution.

"In order to introduce the MKO, it suffices to say that their top priority and the main basis of performance [relies on] assassination and murdering the individuals, who do not adhere to the same ideas as they [themselves]," the letter read.

See Page 7

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U.S., Other Parties to JCPOA Need To Make Necessary Decisions



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's acting ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) says a successful conclusion of the Vienna talks is possible if the United States and the other signatories to the 2015 Iran deal take the necessary political decisions.

Addressing the IAEA Board of Governors on Tuesday, Mohammad Reza Ghaebi said "good faith" and the immediate removal of anti-Iran sanctions were required of the other parties to revive the deal, which is officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"A successful conclusion of the negotiations is not out of reach if the US and other members of the JCPOA show good faith in the negotiations and make the necessary and the right political decisions to immediately lift the cruel and inhumane sanctions," Ghaebi said.

The Vienna talks, which were launched eleven months ago, are reportedly in their "final stages," as the participating countries intensify their efforts to narrow the remaining gaps. Iran's lead negotiator Ali Bagheri-Kani was due back in Vienna on Wednesday after briefly returning to Tehran for consultations.

Ghaebi said the U.S. withdrawal and the three European parties' inaction had left Iran no choice but to resort to the only available solution, namely invoking the Articles 26 and 36.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly announced that it will reverse its remedial measures if the other parties return to the full and verifiable implementation of their obligations within the framework of the JCPOA," he said.

Even so, the Iranian envoy continued, the IAEA has had its routine access to Iran's nuclear facilities under the safeguards agreement. "The [IAEA] director general's reports are a clear indication of the unprecedented level of transparency in Iran's nuclear program and activities," he said.

The remarks come days after the IAEA and Iran agreed to accelerate and strengthen cooperation and dialog aimed at the resolution of the remaining issues between the two sides to help secure the revival of the nuclear deal.

In a statement to the IAEA Board of Governors on Tuesday, the European Union (EU) said it was committed to and supported the full and effective implementation of the JCPOA, calling on all countries to support the agreement's implementation in line with UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorses the deal.

The statement, signed by several non-EU members as well, expressed support for the "intensive diplomatic efforts" in Vienna to revive the JCPOA by facilitating a US return to the deal.

See Page 7

IRGC to Avenge Martyrdom of Its Advisors by Zionists

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) vows to avenge the martyrdom of two of its advisors at the hands of the Israeli regime during a recent attack on the countryside of the Syrian capital Damascus.

"Undoubtedly, the Zionist regime will pay the price of this atrocity," the IRGC's Public Relations Office said in a statement on Tuesday.

It named the two victims as Colonel Ehsan Karbalayi-Poor and Colonel Morteza Saeed-Nezhad, who were martyred following a missile attack by the Israeli regime on the outskirts of the Syrian capital a day earlier.

Iran maintains an advisory mission in the Arab country, helping it in the face of foreign-backed terrorism. Back in 2017, the advisory assistance helped Syria defeat the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh.

The Monday attack does not mark the first time, when the Israeli regime targets the Iranian advisors. Last time, the occupying regime martyred a number of Iranian advisors during an attack on the T-4 airbase near the city of Homs in Western Syria in 2018. Israel has been a key supporter of terrorist groups that have opposed the government of President Bashar al-Assad since foreign-backed militancy erupted in Syria in March 2011.

See Page 7

Iran Oil Exports Rising Regardless of Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (Shana) - The former director of international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), referring to the desire of Asian companies to buy Iranian crude oil despite the sanctions, said: "Regardless of the outcome of the JCPOA talks, and given the high demand for oil in the market, Iran will continue to boost its sales."

Mohammad Ali Khatibi said that the Iranian nuclear negotiating team should make the most of experiences of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) and receive the necessary guarantees from the other side in its negotiations, adding: "The lifting of sanctions related to oil exports, including shipping, insurance, tolls and banking, should be lifted globally, because the non-lifting of one of the pieces of the crude oil export chain will cause a crisis in the Islamic Republic of Iran in practice."

See Page 7

Iran Lauded for Achievements in Women Advancement, Empowerment

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi said that despite the US illegal and inhumane sanctions, Iran has remarkable achievements in the field of women advancement and empowerment.

"Despite the US illegal and inhumane sanctions, which have negatively affected the financing and executing the programs planned by government, civil society and private sectors aiming at women advancement and empowerment, Iran has remarkable achievements in this area," Ershadi said addressing the UNSC on "Women, Peace and Security: Women's economic inclusion and participation as a key to building peace."

Stating that the rights of Afghan women must be respected, Iran's Ambassador to the United Nations said that the Taliban must heed the international community's call for human rights especially women's rights in the country.

Speaking in a meeting of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) on "Women, Peace and Security" on Tuesday, Ershadi, Iran's Deputy Permanent Representative to United Nations stated, "Since its establishment, Islamic Republic of Iran has always considered the promotion of the cultural, social, economic and political status of women and girls as a key and fundamental pillar in its national policymaking, legislation and planning."

See Page 7

Metamask, OpenSea Bars Iranian and Venezuelan Users

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cryptocurrency wallet Metamask and Non-fungible-token (NFT) marketplace OpenSea are banning all accounts based in the sanctioned countries by the US government. This development comes as the U.S. and its allies imposed sanctions on Russia following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

It should be noted as of now both Metamask and OpenSea NFT marketplace are currently functioning in Russia. However, Iranian and Venezuelan users have been dropped off from the platforms. Both the countries are currently sanctioned by the US government.

"OpenSea blocks users and territories on the US sanctions list from using our services, including buying, selling, or transferring NFTs," OpenSea NFT marketplace said in a statement. Touted as the largest NFT marketplace, you can find digital art, there are collectibles including game items, domain names, even digital representations of physical assets at OpenSea. Essentially, the platform is like an eBay for NFTs with millions of digital assets organized into hundreds of categories.

Iranian users on OpenSea alleged that their accounts have been deleted, with some NFT artists even claiming that the platform has also deleted their NFT collections without any prior intimation or notice. "Woke up to my @opensea trading account being deactivated/deleted without notice or any explanation, hearing lots of similar reports from other Iranian artists & collectors," a twitter user said.

Venezuelan users have also reported they were no longer able to access MetaMask—one of the most popular crypto wallet that holds cryptocurrency and NFTs. In a statement to CoinDesk, MetaMask's parent company, ConsenSys said that it observes U.S. sanctions on "Iran, North Korea, Cuba, Syria, and the Crimea, Donetsk, and Luhansk regions of Ukraine."

Changpeng Zhao, CEO of cryptocurrency exchange Binance told Bloomberg that it is freezing the accounts of Russians targeted by international sanctions. However, the exchange will not keep all Russians from accessing its platform. "Binance follows sanctions rules very strictly. Whoever is on the sanctions list, they won't be able to use our platform, for whoever is not, they can," Zhao said in an interview. Expanding restrictions beyond the list of sanctioned individuals would be "unethical for us to do," he added.

Tehran Condemns Zionists' Rocket Attack on Damascus

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry here on Wednesday condemned the Zionist regime of Israel's rocket attack on the vicinity of Damascus, Syria, which led to killing of two Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) defenders of holy shrines.

Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed sympathy over martyrdom of the two IRGC defenders of holy shrines. Such a criminal measure is rooted in the regime's nature of aggression, occupation, and terror, the spokesman noted. Khatibzadeh went on to stress that the regime's reckless move will not remain unanswered.

Iran, Uzbekistan to Set Up Joint Security Committee

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Uzbekistan have reached an agreement to set up a joint security committee, calling for closer relations in all other areas besides security and intelligence cooperation.

The document was signed on Wednesday during a meeting between Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani and his Uzbek counterpart, Viktor Vladimirovich Makhmudov, in Tashkent.

The agreement paves the way for Tehran-Tashkent cooperation in fighting terrorism, extremism, drug trafficking, and other transnational organized crimes, according to an SNSC statement.

As part of their security-intelligence cooperation, the two states will convene annual committee meetings to assess the outcome of their joint efforts.

In a post on social media, Shamkhani described the inking of the agreement as an "important step" toward strengthening bilateral ties.

"Activating regional capacities to create lasting stability is a prerequisite for bolstering the policy of regional cooperation in [Iran's] 13th administration," the top security official added.

During the meeting, Shamkhani said, "Iran's and Uzbekistan's joint borders with Afghanistan necessitate joint cooperation in resolving the problems and establishing peace and security in the country."



The Iranian security chief expressed hope for an acceleration of economic and trade relations between the two states.

In turn, Makhmudov urged a swift implementation of the deals reached between senior officials of Iran and Uzbekistan so that the two countries can maximize their cooperation in the fields of economy, transit and security.

He said Shamkhani's visit to Tashkent would play a decisive role in promoting bilateral ties and fruitful security cooperation to safeguard regional stability and peace.

Apart from meeting his Uzbek counterpart, the Iranian official is also scheduled to meet a number of other high-ranking officials from Uzbekistan during his visit to the Central Asian country.

Implementation of Refining, Petro-Refining Projects to Be Facilitated

TEHRAN (MNA) - Oil Minister Javad Oji said that the implementation of refining and petro-refining projects will be facilitated in the near future.

Making the remarks in a Tuesday meeting on report about the mentioned projects, the minister said, "In this regard, with the consultations we had with the cabinet, it was possible to provide facilities from the National Development Fund (NDF)".

During the meeting, Oji reviewed the progress of refining and petro-refining optimization projects and the reasons for the delay of some of these projects, and offered solutions to solve problems.

He further pointed to the Islamic Revolution Leader's emphasis on the country's refining capacity, as well as the insistence and pursuit of the government, parliament and the National Development Fund to facilitate investment in this area and stressed that Oil Ministry spares no effort to advance refining and petro-refining projects.

Based on the national budget bill for the next Iranian calendar year (begins on March 21), Oil Ministry has been authorized to use various resources including private sector and foreign investments to construct petro-refineries with a total capacity of 300,000 barrels per day.

The decision in this regard was announced during a Parliament's (Majlis) open session on Sunday in which MPs reviewed the government expenditures in the next year's national budget bill, Shana reported.

Iran Cultural Diplomacy in Italy Aims to Boost Friendship

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's cultural attache in Italy Mohammad-Taghi Amini said on Tuesday that Iranian cultural diplomacy in Italy promotes mutual understanding and boosts peace and friendship between the two nations.

Amini told Radio Capital that this year, Iran and Italy are celebrating the 160th anniversary of their diplomatic relations, and he said adding that the cultural cooperation between the two states is underway.

The comprehensive ties between Iran and Italy, based on the two countries' historical, cultural, and rich civilizations, are culturally oriented, he noted.

Amini highlighted that Iranian cultural diplomacy in

Italy promotes mutual understanding and boosts peace and friendship between the two nations.

Regarding cultural events in Italy, he said that a specialized library of Iranian studies had been established in Rome, and more than 160 books have been translated and published to introduce Iranian culture and civilization to Italians.

He underscored that holding Persian language courses, supporting Iranian studies chairs in Italian universities, exhibitions, film screenings, and music concerts are other activities of the Iranian Cultural Counselor in Italy to strengthen peace and friendship between the two states.

"Government's Transformation Document" Published

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The first edition of the Popular Government's Transformation Document, compiled by the collective efforts of several months of elites, was published with the aim of exercising popular oversight and gaining the views of thinkers and experts in subsequent editions.

The Government's Transformation Document, which was previously announced to the members of the Cabinet, provides operational solutions for major solutions in 37 major fields, and one of its important features is the timely implementation of each of these strategies.

Another feature of the Popular Government's Transformation Document is its supervision feature so that the people and the elite can monitor and follow the implementation and finalization of projects based on the document.

The 37 topics of the document are classified into two general levels. One is the cross-sectoral issues, which are characterized by the central role of this sector in the development of infrastructure and support for specialized areas, and the other is the drivers of change that play a propelling role for other sectors and provide high-capacity development opportunities for other parts of the country.

More than 50% of the areas covered by the transformation plan are economic and production affairs.

This document has been prepared with the collective efforts of several elites for several months and is the first edition of the document on the transformation of the country's governing system. The final version of the document will be presented after the approval of the seventh plan.

U.S. Must Destroy Its Chemical Weapons Arsenal ASAP

TEHRAN (MNA) – Permanent Representative of Iran to the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons says the US, as the sole holder of chemical weapons, must destroy its chemical weapons arsenal as soon as possible.

Addressing the 99th Session of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons on Tuesday, Alireza Kazemi Abadi stressed that the U.S. as a sole holder of chemical weapons must use all its capabilities to destroy its arsenal of chemical weapons in the shortest possible time in accordance with its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention.

Expressing satisfaction with Syria's constructive cooperation with the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, he emphasized the need for the organization to pay attention to the rights of the Syrian government,

Kazemi Abadi also called for resolving the remaining issues between the two sides.

The 99th Session of the Executive Council of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons kicked off on Tuesday, March 8 at the headquarters of the Organization in the Hague, the Netherlands, and will continue until Thursday, March 10.

Chinese, Iranian Officials Hold Virtual Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the International Liaison Department of the Chinese Communist Party Song Tao and Secretary of Iran's Expediency Council Mohammad Bagher Zolghadr have held a video conference.

According to Xinhua News Agency, Song Tao and Zolghadr exchanged views through a video link.

During the discussion, the two sides exchanged views on issues such as deepening exchange of experiences as well as enhancement of coordination on regional and international affairs.

Song also explained current "two-sessions" in China as well as the sixth public meeting of the 19th Chinese Communist Party (CCP) Central Committee.

China and Iran signed a 25-year cooperation agreement to strengthen mutual relations in political, strategic and economic arenas.

COVID Taskforce to Facilitate Nowruz Trips

TEHRAN (IP) - The Iranian Interior Minister says that the approach of the National Task Force for Combatting Coronavirus is to facilitate Nowruz trips.

Spring is about to kick in, and people are getting ready to celebrate Nowruz, the Persian New Year, and use the holiday to travel.

Nowruz, which has been celebrated every year by Iranians since three millennia ago, means new day in Persian and it marks the first day of spring in the northern hemisphere. Iran has made it obligatory for travelers to have received at least two doses of the COVID vaccine.

Attending a press conference after a meeting of the National Task Force for Combatting Coronavirus on Tuesday, Ahmad Vahidi announced that the task force would not pass a resolution banning Nowruz travel, but Iranians would also have to follow health protocols.

He said there would be penalties for violators and those who did not get the two doses of the COVID vaccine.

The interior minister noted that receiving two doses of the vaccine is mandatory in the system of the National Task Force for Combatting Coronavirus, but in some foreign trips, it is possible that the third dose would also be mandatory and be applied in the system.

IRENEX Launches Its First Futures Contracts

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a ceremony on Wednesday, attended by Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) Head Majid Eshqi, Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX) launched futures contracts for the first time.

The contracts were launched for the naphtha and methanol trades at the IRENEX.

Iran first launched futures contract, a new financial instrument in Iran's capital market, in December 2018.

Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE) officially launched the mentioned contract in a ceremony at the place of Central Securities Depository of Iran (CSDI), which is the sole registrar, central custodian and clearing house for the Iranian financial market of four exchanges including TSE, Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), and IRENEX.

Addressing the mentioned ceremony, SEO head at the time, Shapour Mohammadi, said that futures are some very important instruments for the market balance, while they are also some strong hedging tools.

They provide investment opportunities for those who are seeking the amount of profit more than they can earn in the normal market deals, the official noted.

Tehran Urges Reopening of Land Border With Baku



TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Voicing Iran's readiness to enhance the economic and energy cooperation with the Republic of Azerbaijan, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian called for plans to increase the number of flights between the two neighbors and reopen the land border.

In a telephone conversation on Tuesday, Amirabdollahian and his Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov discussed the bilateral cooperation between Tehran and Baku and the regional developments.

Commemorating the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Tehran and Baku, Amirabdollahian said the ties between the two countries have now reached the stage of progress.

Referring to the developments in the South Caucasus region, Amirabdollahian said the common goal of Iran and Azerbaijan is stability and peace in that region.

The Iranian foreign minister also expressed hope that the remaining issues between Azerbaijan and Armenia will be resolved with foresight and without foreign intervention.

He pointed to an increase in travels between the two neighbors, stressed the need to increase the number of direct flights, and called for reopening of the land border between the two countries.

Amirabdollahian also underlined Iran's readiness to expand economic and energy relations with Azerbaijan, the Foreign Ministry's website reported.

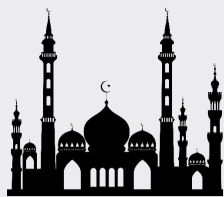
Referring to an upcoming meeting of Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Commission, the top Iranian diplomat reaffirmed the seriousness of the Iranian side to achieve positive results from the commission.

The Azeri foreign minister, for his part, expressed pleasure with the development of cooperation between Tehran and Baku in recent months and welcomed the holding of the Joint Economic Commission.

Referring to the 30th anniversary of Tehran-Baku relations, Bayramov described the level of bilateral ties as growing.

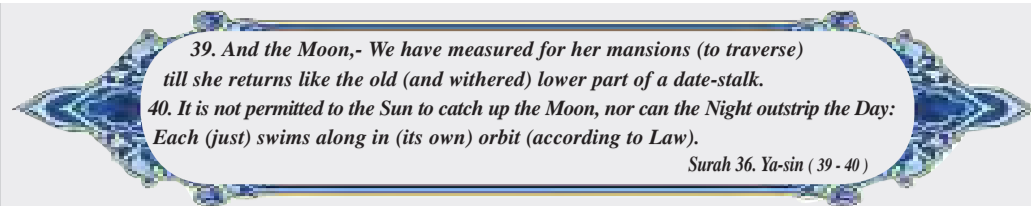
He described a recent visit by the Iranian minister of roads to Baku as a sign of good relations between the two neighbors.

Bayramov also stressed Azerbaijan's full readiness to implement economic agreements with Iran.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:25
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:57
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:20



Tehran, Rome Call for Exchange of Artists

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mehdi Esmaeili during his meeting with Italian Ambassador to Tehran Giuseppe Perrone on Tuesday called for exchange of artists between the two countries.

According to reports, in the meeting Mr. Esmaeili emphasized that Iran and Italy with the oldest civilization background have broad joint cultural cooperation more than in any other field. He pointed to the good relations between Iran and Italy and called for broadening cultural ties.

He went on to say that Iran is ready to have joint cooperation with Italy in all cultural and art fields like film, music, theater and book.

Esmaeili also announced readiness of the ministry in line with signing MoU on joint cultural and art cooperation with Italy, adding that the cultural exchanges of artists of the two countries lead to better presentation of old civilization of Iran and Italy for their nations and holding cultural day or week between the two countries is another way for presentation of cultures.

Then the minister pointed to the approach of Embassy of Italy in Tehran for broadening cultural relations between the two countries and hailed it. Esmaeili concluded his remarks by saying that Iran will welcome election of Italy as the host of 2030 Expo.



Then Italian Ambassador Mr. Perrone emphasized old cultural and civilization ties of Iran and Italy, saying that Iran and Italy are two countries with historic cultural and civilization background along with art and cultural heritage and they have had effective talks.

He then said that Italy emphasizes broadening cultural relations with other countries like Iran, and it holds different programs in this regard.

Perrone then hailed the cooperation and supports of cultural Iranian bodies with Embassy of Italy especially Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's cooperation. He later called for continuation of Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance's support for election of Italy as the host of 2030 Expo.

He concluded his remarks by emphasizing joint cultural cooperation between the two countries like in film and music.

The Italian diplomat during his stay in Tehran has been busy with holding cultural events and interaction with Iranian artists beside other activities like boosting trade cooperation between Iran and Italy.

Iran Tax Office Says It Met Receipt Target in 11 Months to February

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) says its receipts in the 11 months to late February had exceeded a target set for the calendar year to March 20.

INTA chief Davoud Manzour said that the government body had collected a total of 2,780 trillion rials (\$10.69 billion) of tax in the 11 months to February 19, an increase of 61% in rial terms compared to the similar period over 2020-2021.

"The INTA has completely fulfilled its budget obligation for the current calendar year and a new record has been set in tax revenue receipts," said Manzour.

The official said INTA's direct tax receipt had also increased 56% year on year in March-February to a total of 1,680 trillion rials (\$6.46 billion).

He said Iran will see a significant increase in tax receipts in the year to March 2023 with the implementation of technology-based systems that will help prevent tax evasion.

The Iranian government has sought to rely more on tax revenues over the past three years to compensate for financial losses suffered because of American sanctions on its crude oil exports.

Experts say a growth in business and manufacturing activity that has been caused by US sanctions on Iran has led to higher tax receipts for the INTA in the current calendar year.

Tax receipts are expected to increase over the next calendar year as the government plans to enforce a parliament legislation on taxing vacant homes and luxury goods.

Syria Calls on Iranian Companies to Participate His County's Reconstruction

TEHRAN (IP) - The Syrian ambassador to Iran called for the active participation of Iranian companies in the country's reconstruction conference in Damascus.

The third Syrian Reconstruction Conference, entitled "Horizons and Investment Opportunities," will be held in Damascus in June.

Following the war in Syria and the destruction of the country's infrastructure by terrorist groups backed by Western countries, the legitimate government of Damascus has called for the participation of friendly countries in its reconstruction.

Syrian ambassador to Tehran Shafiq Dayoub stressed the importance of Iranian companies attending the third Syrian Reconstruction Conference in Damascus, saying: "The conference is a great opportunity for Iranian companies to share their experiences and gain a significant share of Syrian reconstruction."

The Syrian government has also said that in addition to Iran and Russia, some other friendly countries, including China, India, Malaysia, Brazil, and Africa, have an excellent opportunity to participate in the reconstruction.

\$18b Allocated to New Refining Projects

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company announced the allocation of \$18 billion to the development of new refining projects under the Raisi administration.

Farhad Ahmadi said on Tuesday: "In the coming years, several new refining projects in the oil industry are on the agenda. A total of about 16.5 billion euros (equivalent to \$18 billion) will be allocated to these new projects."

He said construction of the new 300,000-barrel oil refinery of Shahid Ghasem Soleimani with \$11.5 billion of investment, construction of the Khuzestan refinery with an initial estimated investment of \$4.5 billion, and the second step of the development and stabilization of Abadan refinery with 1.7 billion euros of investment are among the most important of the projects.

"In financing the Shahid Soleimani refinery project, we will use various methods, including financing, bank resources and public funds."

The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company emphasized: "In this project, we will use the maximum capacity of domestic manufacturers. Also, this project will play an important role in the development of domestic industries and job creation in the country's refining and oil industry."

Rising Oil Prices, Chance for Iran to Retake Market Share

TEHRAN (Shana) - The chairman of the board of the Iranian Oil, Gas and Petrochemical Union believes that the increase in energy prices could provide a great opportunity for Iran to return to world oil markets.

Hamid Hosseini said: "As one of the largest holders of oil and gas reserves in the world, we will undoubtedly benefit from increasing prices."

"Apart from rising energy prices, food prices are also rising," he said. "As Russia and Ukraine are key

producers of grain and staple commodities, the ongoing tensions between them can be detrimental to us."

Asked where the optimal point of production and oil price is in the market, Hosseini said: "The global oil market is in short supply after the relative decline of the coronavirus, and despite the fact that OPEC+ has been increasing its output by 400,000 barrels per month for the past few months, the market is still in short supply, with prices rising before the Ukraine crisis."

Gov't Orders Meat Imports to Control Domestic Prices

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian agriculture ministry (MAJ) has ordered imports of red meat into the country in an attempt to control rising prices in the domestic market.

An MAJ letter addressed to the head of the State Livestock Affairs Logistics Company on Tuesday ordered imports of up to 10,000 metric tons (mt) of fresh meat into Iran in the upcoming weeks.

The letter cited in a report by the semi-official Mehr news agency said the imports was necessary to prevent meat price hikes in the domestic market in the run up to Iranian the New Year in late March and the holy fasting month of Ramadan in early February.

The imports will focus on lamb and mutton shipments as prices of the two meat varieties have increased by at least 20% in the local market in recent weeks.

Figures by the Iranian statistics agency and government estimates show that Iran had a surplus of fresh meat in the nine months to December last year.

However, prices increased consistently over January and February, causing MAJ authorities to cancel exports permits issued earlier in the winter to reduce the surplus.



Iran normally imports large shipments of frozen meat from Brazil to respond to a demand that is estimated to be more than half a million mt per year.

However, the country also takes delivery of fresh meat shipments mostly from countries in Central Asia to boost stocks and to control the prices.

MAJ figures show that meat imports into Iran declined by over 80% in the calendar year to March 2021 to only 30,000 mt.

Webinar on Trade Opportunities of Iran, Vietnam

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce in collaboration with Qom Chamber of Commerce is to hold a webinar on trade opportunities of Iran and Vietnam which is to be held today (Thursday) afternoon.

According to reports, the webinar will host those business activists who are keen for trade with Iran and Vietnam.

Officials of Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce and Qom Chamber of Commerce as well as their Vietnamese counterparts are to attend this webinar.



Iran Elected Rotating Head of ECO Chamber of Commerce

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has been elected as the rotating head of the Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) Chamber of Commerce.

The decision was made during the organization's 19th General Assembly on Tuesday online.

Turkey handed its three-year chairmanship of the ECO Chamber of Commerce to Iran during the virtual meeting.

The Economic Cooperation Organization or ECO is an Asian political and economic intergovernmental organization that was founded in 1985 in Tehran by the leaders of Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey.

It provides a platform to discuss ways to improve development and promote trade and investment opportunities.

ECO was founded in 1985 and its permanent headquarters are located in Tehran.

HOSCO Receives Medal of Merit for Management



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) Dr. Ataollah Maroufkhani was awarded with medal of merit for management during the 9th ceremony of honoring the national top managers titled "Fajr Festival of Management of Iran" which was held by the Training, research and Technology Department of Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade in collaboration with University of Industries and Mines and Persian Gulf Studies Center.

According to reports, Dr. Maroufkhani was selected as one of the top managers in the country in the festival and was awarded with medal of merit due to his outstanding management.

One of the main goals of Fajr Festival of Management of Iran is to unveil and introduce the first national award for management in the country as a valuable driving force for the national economic activists that they can do their best for offering solutions and best operational and strategic proposals to the officials and economic and industrial activists for design of the roadmap for the national sustainable development.

Japanese Offer to Implement Project in Sefid-Rud

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The managers of the Ministry of Energy of Iran, in a meeting with the experts of the JICA organization of Japan, discussed the continuation of cooperation based on the memorandum of understanding signed between the two sides.

Referring to the excellent cooperation of the Ministry of Energy of Iran with Japan, including JCCME and JICA, the two sides stressed the need to continue collaboration to meet the expectations.

JICA experts, referring to projects implemented in Sudan, Indonesia, Cuba, and Vietnam, considered it appropriate to use the experiences gained from these projects in Sefid-Rud in northern Iran.

During the meeting, Japanese experts welcomed the work with the Ministry of Energy and the use of Iran's experience in the Zayandeh River in Isfahan province.

More Than Two Million Flee War in Ukraine

GENEVA (Dispatches) - More than two million people have now fled Ukraine since Russia launched its full-scale invasion on February 24, according to the latest data from the United Nations on Tuesday.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, recorded 2,011,312 refugees on its dedicated website, 276,244 more than the previous count on Monday.

UNICEF, the UN children's agency, believes hundreds of thousands of them are youngsters.

Authorities and the UN expect the flow to intensify as the Russian army advances deeper into Ukraine, particularly as it approaches the capital, Kyiv.



Over 6m People Have Died From Covid

PARIS (Dispatches) - Over six million people have died worldwide from Covid-19 since the pandemic began, according to a tally from official sources compiled by AFP on Tuesday.

A total of 6,003,081 people have succumbed to the virus, AFP counted at 1100 GMT.

The milestone comes as the number of infections and deaths continues to plummet in most regions of the world, except in Asia, where Hong Kong is suffering its worst-ever outbreak, and Oceania, where New Zealand has recorded a jump in cases.



Biden Bans Russia Oil Imports to U.S.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden announced a ban on Russian oil and other energy imports on Tuesday in retaliation for the invasion of Ukraine, underscoring strong bipartisan support for a move that he acknowledged would drive up U.S. energy prices.

"We're banning all imports of Russian oil and gas energy," Biden told reporters at the White House. "That means Russian oil will no longer be acceptable in U.S. ports and the American people will deal another powerful blow to (Russian President Vladimir) Putin's war machine."

Oil prices jumped on the news, with Benchmark Brent crude LCOc1 for May climbing by 5.4% to \$129.91 a barrel.

Biden has been working with allies in Europe, who are far more dependent on Russian oil, to isolate Russia's energy-heavy economy and Putin. Britain announced shortly before Biden's remarks that it would phase out the import of Russian oil and oil products by the end of 2022.

Biden said sanctions imposed by the United States and its allies had already caused the Russian economy to "crater". He said the latest moves had been made in close consultation with allies and partners around the world. Russia exports between 4 and 5 million bbls of crude a day and about 8,500 billion cubic feet of natural gas annually.

The United States imported more than 20.4 million barrels of crude and refined products a month on average from Russia in 2021, about 8% of U.S. liquid fuel imports, according to the Energy Information Administration, and the ban is expected to send already high gasoline prices and inflation soaring. The United States also imports a negligible amount of coal from Russia. Biden predicted prices would rise further as a result of "Putin's war," but pledged to do all he could to minimize the impact on the American people. He also warned U.S. gas companies against exploiting the situation to engage in profiteering or price gouging.

U.S. Senator Chris Coons said the administration was coordinating with European allies "and making sure that we've done the groundwork to understand how to effectively implement a ban on Russian energy."

"We are going to see increased gas prices here in the United States. In Europe, they will see dramatic increases in prices. That's the cost of standing up for freedom and standing alongside the Ukrainian people, but it's going to cost us," Coons told CNN.

The White House had been coordinating with U.S. congressional leaders working on fast-tracking bipartisan legislation to ban Russian imports, but the ban of Russian imports would make any such bill moot. Republican lawmakers took to social media to welcome the decision, while criticizing Biden's green energy policies, and calling for the administration to support more oil and gas production at home.

U.S. Representative Susan Wild said Americans need to realize the larger sacrifice needed. "Obviously nobody wants to pay more for gas," Wild, a Democrat on the House of Representatives Foreign Affairs Committee, said on MSNBC.

In announcing that it is phasing out imports of Russian oil and oil products by the end of 2022, Britain said it is giving the market and businesses more than enough time to find alternatives to the imports, which make up 8% of demand.

"The government will also work with companies through a new Taskforce on Oil to support them to make use of this period in finding alternative supplies," British Business and Energy Secretary Kwasi Kwarteng said.

Poland Refutes Claims on Mistreatment of Ukrainian Seeking Refuge

TEHRAN (Embassy of Poland) - Some Iranian media have recently published reports regarding alleged cases of maltreatment and discrimination against certain categories of persons who flee the war in Ukraine and seek refuge in Poland. Such allegations do not reflect the situation on the ground.

It is to be expected that in the current situation not only Ukrainians seek refuge in Poland, but also citizens of almost all countries of the world who resided legally in Ukraine, including students from Africa, Middle East, Asia, as well as Byelorussians and Russians. However, among 1.1 million refugees who have already arrived in Poland as consequence of the armed conflict in Ukraine, citizens of third countries – other than Ukraine or EU countries – are relatively few.

Poland is ready and well prepared to offer assistance to anyone who flees from the war waged by Russia against Ukraine. To quote an example, Poland helped in the evacuation of several hundred Iranian citizens from Ukraine and facilitated their safe return to Iran.

African and Middle East communities, who live in Poland, help organize assistance for their compatriots among the refugees. Those who have no relatives in Poland receive governmental and non-governmental support. Inhabitants of border towns offer refugees hot drinks, food, clothing etc. Government of Poland has set up support centers for refugees. Local authorities collect information about available accommodation for refugees. A special train connection was established between the city of Przemyśl in south-eastern Poland and the western Ukrainian city of Lviv.

Polish authorities and services operate to assist refugees of all nationalities, taking into account specific needs of women and children, the elderly and persons with medical conditions. The Polish Red Cross, Polish Center For International Aid, Polish Medical Mission and several other foundations and non-governmental organizations collect donations for refugees, offer medical assistance, tents, camp beds, sleeping bags, blankets, food and hygiene products. In dozens of places all over Poland people are donating blood for the victims of the war. Polish governmental institutions, local administrations, private foundations and social organizations are working together to provide comprehensive assistance to refugees, leaving no-one behind.

Diplomatic missions accredited in Poland, in coordination with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, actively assist their citizens to arrange for their return to respective countries of origin. Persons, who do not meet legal requirements to enter Poland, are being temporarily allowed to cross the border from Ukraine to Poland for humanitarian reasons for a period of 15 days.

The huge and constantly growing number of refugees presents a serious challenge to all involved – authorities, NGOs, foreign missions. Given the circumstances, not always is it possible to provide all necessary assistance without delay or hindrance.

However, the narrative of refugees being segregated because of their race or religion is false. Reported cases of alleged discriminatory treatment by Polish authorities of citizens of some countries have been investigated by diplomatic missions of those countries who concluded they were **fake news**.

One of weapons used in the war against Ukraine is misinformation. Allegations of mistreatment of refugees are part of such disinformation campaign, their aim is to discredit both Ukraine and Poland. Responsible public media and social media users should refrain from giving credit and visibility to such unverified and unreliable reports.



Women Rally in Pakistan Despite Attempts to Shut Down Protest

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Around 2,000 women rallied Tuesday in the Pakistan city of Lahore despite efforts by authorities to bar the protest and withdraw security for an event frequently the target of violence.

Rallies on International Women's Day have received fierce backlash since they were embraced four years ago in deeply conservative and patriarchal Pakistan.

In a society where women have been shot, stabbed, stoned, set alight and strangled for damaging family "honor", critics accuse rights activists of promoting liberal Western values and disrespecting religious and cultural mores.

On Tuesday dozens of events marking International Women's Day -- known as the Aurat March in Pakistan -- were held across the country.

Non-violent counter-protests, dubbed "hijab marches", were also staged by women from conservative religious groups in Karachi, Lahore and Islamabad where participants called for the preservation of Islamic values.

In the eastern city of Lahore, city authorities urged organizers to cancel the rally over safety concerns, and threatened to not provide security.

Following a legal challenge, the Lahore High Court ruled the event could go ahead and authorities agreed to provide protection.

The women marched through the streets in a jovial atmosphere, chanting slogans such as "Give respect to women" and "End the patriarchy".

They were guarded by riot police -- and greeted by a small band of men chanting "end this obscenity".

Student Sairah Khan, 23, cited recent high-profile cases of brutal violence against women "without consequences" for her attendance.

In Karachi -- Pakistan's largest city -- around 1,000 women gathered in a festival atmosphere with organisers conducting security checks as police stood by idly.

"We have only one slogan: equal wages, protection and peace," one woman chanted from a stage.

In the capital Islamabad around 200 women rallied outside the city's press club. Aurat March protesters hold placards as they gather to mark the International Women's Day in Islamabad

"We have come to raise our voices and highlight our issues," said student Fatima Shahzad.

They were outmatched by more than 400 counter-protesters from extremist religious parties.

But organizer Farzana Bari pledged "we will continue to assert ourselves".

"These are the women who refused to bow down," she told AFP.

In 2020, groups of hardline Islamist men turned up in vans and hurled stones at women as they marched through Islamabad.

Doctored videos and photos of last year's events were spread online and even appeared on popular television shows falsely accusing women of chanting or carrying blasphemous slogans -- an act which carries the death penalty in Pakistan.



EU Commission Proposes EU-Wide Laws To Combat Violence Against Women

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Commission proposed on Tuesday European Union-wide rules to fight violence against women, to protect and support victims and to prevent such violence in the first place.

Unveiling its plan on International Women's Day, the EU's executive proposed that, across the bloc's 27 countries, rape would be criminalized, based purely on the lack of consent and irrespective of whether force and threats were used.

It also proposed criminalizing female genital mutilation, cyber-stalking, non-consensual sharing of intimate images, cyber-harassment and cyber-incitement to hatred or violence.

According to European Commission data, one in three women in the EU has experienced some form of violence, and while the offences are already crimes in the vast majority of member states, there are gaps in national laws of some countries and legal frameworks differ.

"Too many women and girls suffer from rape, harassment or abuse. There is no place for this in modern Europe," European Commission Vice-President for Values and Transparency Vera Jourova said.

Half of women in the EU have experienced sexual harassment and one in 20 report having been raped,

the EU's executive said, while online violence is also rising, aimed in particular at women in public life such as journalists and politicians.

Half of young women experience gender-based cyber violence and about a third of women have faced sexual harassment at work.

"Unfortunately, the situation is not getting better fast enough and violence is soaring online. We are proposing for the first time an EU-wide law to combat violence against women. This will offer real tools for victims," Jourova said.

Under the proposed laws, victims would have the right to claim full compensation from offenders for damages, including the costs of healthcare, support services, lost income, physical and psychological harm.

They should also be able to obtain compensation in the course of criminal proceedings. EU countries would have to provide dedicated services, including rape crisis centers.

Victims at an increased risk of violence, including women fleeing armed conflict, would have to receive support from EU governments. There would have to be national help lines to support victims of violence against women and domestic violence operating seven days a week and free of charge.





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J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

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

Parsian

Velenjak bldg (\$10000) 5storey, 20bdrs, S/p, pkgs
Farmanieh bldg (\$12000) 6storey, 24bdrs, S/p, pkgs
Darrous bldg (\$8000) 4storey, 15bdrs, S/p, pkgs

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U.S. May Act Alone to Ban Russian Oil Imports

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration is willing to move ahead with a ban on Russian oil imports into the United States without the participation of allies in Europe, two people familiar with the matter told Reuters, after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

President Joe Biden is expected to hold a video conference call with the leaders of France, Germany and the United Kingdom on Monday as his administration continues to seek their support for a ban on the imports.

The White House is also negotiating with congressional leaders who are working on fast-tracking legislation banning Russian imports, a move that is forcing the administration to work on an expedited timeline, a source told Reuters



Arms Industry Eyes Boost as Europe Looks to Bolster Defenses

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has catapulted defense spending up the political agenda in Europe and could herald a new era of purchases led by Germany, according to weapons makers gathering at an arms fair in Saudi Arabia this week.

The World Defense Show, where Europe's Airbus, MBDA and Leonardo are exhibiting alongside nearly 600 other weapons makers, is taking place amid the largest assault on a European state in 70 years.

The conflict has reignited interest in security issues after years of European defense spending cuts and fatigue following NATO failures in Afghanistan.

Germany, which has long played down the role of its military in foreign policy, Denmark and Poland have all said they will ramp up defense spending with war at their doorstep. "There was peace for decades and people thought there would be peace forever. Unfortunately, that assumption has been proven wrong," Hristo Ibouchev, the executive director of Bulgarian firearms and munitions maker Arsenal, told Reuters.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz has said Berlin could buy F-35 stealth warplanes from the United States, but also that future advanced weaponry would be purchased from European consortia.

The German budget this year will allocate 100 billion euros (\$109 billion) for a one-time increase in defense spending, Scholz said on Feb. 27, which is more than double the entire 2021 defense bill of 47 billion euros.

"The German announcement alone is a new era of defense spending for the EU if it's followed through on," manager of Jane's Defense Budgets Andrew MacDonald told Reuters, predicting such a major cultural shift would likely see others follow suit.

Some executives were skeptical of any dramatic increase, bemoaning what they see as years of sluggish investment and predicting states would not follow through on new commitments.

Others argued EU states, after years of Russian aggression like the 2014 annexation of Crimea, were already paying more attention to security and this war would just ramp plans up.

Russia calls its actions in Ukraine a special operation.

"The defense role is changing dramatically," a European executive said, predicting higher spending not only because of the war but also because former U.S. President Donald Trump's "American First" policy underscored the need for self-reliance.

At the fair, Russia's weapons makers displayed precision guided missiles and artillery like those used by its forces besieging Ukrainian cities.

Russian executives declined to comment on whether their firms could still be paid for exports amid Western sanctions on banks and other businesses aimed at crippling Russia's economy. Western executives said the sanctions would make it difficult for Russian firms to be paid, but not impossible.

Elsewhere, armored vehicles and other weaponry at a near-empty Ukrainian booth will be sent back as soon as the trade show finishes to be used in the conflict. "Ukraine is in martial law and everything that can be used for the Ukrainian army will be used for the Ukrainian army," said the sole representative of a Ukrainian state defense firm.

Soaring Food Prices Threaten Emerging-Market Currencies

ROME (Dispatches) - While energy prices are an ongoing risk to inflation in countries around the world, several emerging-market countries face a different problem: The pace of food price inflation is rendering their currencies vulnerable.

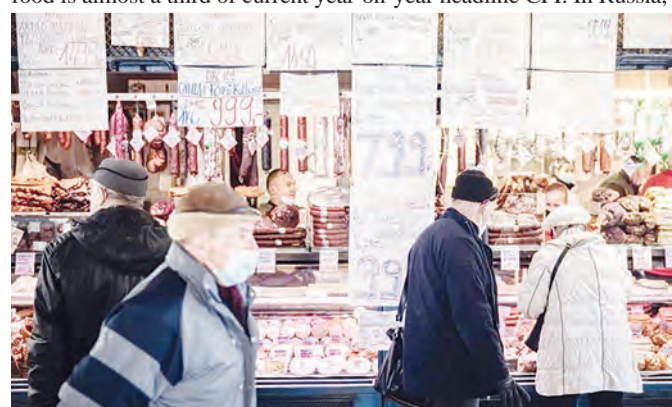
The UN's February World Food Price Index, released on Friday, was essentially unchanged at 20.7% y/y vs 19.2% in January, perhaps surprisingly given the rampant rally in soft commodity prices such as corn and wheat. But inflation measures in general are severely lagging indicators, and the index should soon start to reflect recent rallies in soft commodity prices.

Monday's acceleration in energy prices poses an additional risk to food prices, given oil is a key component in fertilizers. Furthermore, food prices typically lead global headline inflation. The chart below shows that as things stand, global CPI should ease over the next three to nine months, but there are upside risks to this if energy prices remain elevated.

However, global CPI masks some big underlying divergences, with emerging-market inflation – already rising much faster than developed-market inflation – acutely exposed to rising food prices.

This is because food represents a far larger percentage of headline CPI baskets in EM compared to DM countries. Food makes up almost half of India's CPI basket, and over 30% of it in the Philippines, China and Russia, while in European countries it is around 10-15%, and in the U.S. it is only around 8%.

As was seen in the Arab Spring in the early 2010s, rising food prices can be hugely destabilizing. The impact they are having on broader inflation is growing and therefore the risk they pose to EM governments is mounting. For the median EM country, food is almost a third of current year-on-year headline CPI. In Russia, almost half of the current 8.7level of CPI is coming from food, whereas in the US, UK and much of Europe food is only 10% or less of headline CPI currently.



Food inflation presents a risk to currencies. We can plot the six-month change in food CPI's contribution to the headline vs the six-month change in the currency for each country. We can see from the chart below the Taiwanese dollar, Mexican peso, the Colombian peso, the ringgit, the rupiah and the yuan all look vulnerable among EM currencies given the rise in food prices. Turkey is literally off the chart with food adding an extra 8.5% points to CPI over the last six months, while Russia's currency has already collapsed due to sanctions.

And as currencies weaken, the risk of an inflation spiral in EMs rises as the cost of imported goods climbs even more.

Scramble for Transport as Yemen Fuel Shortage Worsens

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemenis are riding on the roof or hanging out the sides of taxi vans as severe fuel shortages in the capital Sanaa and other Houthi-held areas raise demand for public transportation, with people queuing for days to fill the tanks of their cars.

University students Amjad al-Amari and Ahmed al-Mutahar complain the fuel crunch is further disrupting their education in the war-torn Arabian peninsula country.

"When we arrive for lectures, we arrive late. We miss half and the professor considers us absent," said al-Amari. "We can't even find (taxis) and (the ones we get) are overcrowded."

People also struggle to reach markets and health centers. Twenty liters of petrol at fuel stations costs 9,500 rials (\$16) and more than four times that on the parallel market.

Few people can afford this. Around 80% of Yemen's population needs assistance because of economic collapse in the seven-year war and a sea and air blockade by a Saudi-led coalition on areas held by the Houthis. "The (fuel) crisis affects the whole population, from the ordinary to those on top. Neither officials nor dignitaries are excluded," civil servant Fawaz al-Sayaghi told Reuters.

Air and sea access to Yemen is controlled by the coalition that intervened in Yemen in early 2015 after the Houthis ousted the government from Sanaa.

The alliance says the restrictions are needed to prevent arms smuggling, and accuses the Houthis of using ports for military purposes, charges the group denies.

Ukraine Crisis Jeopardizes Middle East's Black Sea Wheat Supply

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Wheat importers face a threat to delivering politically sensitive bread supplies across the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) after Russia's invasion of Ukraine closed off access to the lower priced Black Sea grain they depend on.

The ensuing conflict has halted shipping from Ukraine's ports, while financial sanctions have put payments for purchases of Russian wheat in doubt, traders and bankers say, adding another to the risk for governments in the MENA region already struggling with

import costs, economic crises or conflict.

"Everyone is looking for other markets as it's becoming increasingly impossible to buy stocks from Ukraine or Russia," a Middle Eastern commodities banker said, citing disruption to shipping, escalating sanctions and rising insurance premiums.

"The market is not expecting Ukrainian and Russian exports to resume until the fighting ends," one trader said.

Soaring global prices and possible export restrictions make switching to alternative origins costly, while options for expanding local production in the MENA region are limited by water scarcity and rising input costs.

While Persian Gulf countries are protected by fiscal surpluses, other MENA countries, including Egypt and Lebanon, "remain some of the most vulnerable globally, given the dependence on wheat imports and high household spending on food", Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, said.

Egypt, often the world's largest importer, bought 80% of its wheat from Russia and Ukraine last year, traders said.

But since Russia's invasion of Ukraine its state grains buyer has cancelled two tenders due to a lack of offers and high prices, while two cargoes are stuck at Ukrainian ports.

Egyptian officials say wheat reserves and the upcoming local harvest are enough to provide subsidized bread for around nine months. But they are already expecting to pay up to an additional \$950 million in the current budget due to higher prices and could see an erosion of strategic reserves.

Egypt's commercial bread market could be at greater risk due to lower stocks, traders said. Prices of local wheat and flour have risen 23% and 44% respectively since the Russian invasion began, Ezzat Aziz of the Cairo Chamber of Commerce said.

Algeria, another major buyer, says it has enough grain reserves to last until the end of the year but is readmitting French wheat imports, suspended after a row over France's colonial role in the North African country.

OPEC+ Policies Not to Blame for Surge in Crude Prices

LONDON (Dispatches) - The policies of OPEC+ have nothing to do with the surge in crude prices, two sources in the group said on Monday, downplaying the likelihood of any boost to global supply from the alliance that includes Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Oil spiked to its highest price since 2008 on Monday amid fears about supply shortages as the United States and European allies considered banning Russian oil, while the prospects of a swift return of Iranian crude to markets receded.

At its last meeting on March 2, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Russia and allied producers stuck to a plan for a modest output rise in April and ignored the Ukraine crisis in their talks.

"The problem is the current market conditions have nothing to do with OPEC policy/policies. It has nothing to do with supply (production) shortfall," one of the sources said.

"We all know the reasons for the current price. OPEC or OPEC+ has nothing to do with all the reasons that are driving prices to current levels," the source said.

Sanctions against Moscow over Ukraine have disrupted trade in Russian oil over the past week, with many buyers shunning barrels from the world's second-largest crude exporter, even when energy exports have been exempt from Western measures.

Russia is the world's top exporter of crude and oil products combined with exports of about 7 million barrels per day (bpd), or 7% of global supply.

OPEC+ has been gradually unwinding record output cuts in 2020 in response to the collapse in demand due to the pandemic, boosting supply by 400,000 bpd each month but it has repeatedly rebuffed calls from consumers for a larger increase.

The sources said the overall supply and demand in the global oil market remained balanced.

"Fundamentals remain on track," said another OPEC+ source. "I presume the outcome of the last meeting was clear to all market participants, that the group purely considers balancing the market in its decision."

Most OPEC+ members have little spare oil production capacity at the moment, with the bulk of the extra capacity available in the Persian Gulf states of Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates, according to the International Energy Agency.

Policy Steps in Place, Turkey's High Inflation to Linger in 2022



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Inflation is expected to remain high this year in Turkey due to the effects of the global energy prices, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said, adding that tax investigations have been initiated in many sectors in light of the allegations of speculative price formations and stockpiling.

Turkey's annual consumer prices index (CPI) rose more than expected to 54.44% in February, while the producer price index (PPI) soared 7.22% month-over-month in February for an annual rise of 105%.

Nebati, who commented on several subjects relating to the Turkish economy in an interview with economics daily Dünya, reiterated that fighting inflation is a top priority.

"We are implementing our short-term, medium and long-term policy steps in this area. First of all, we achieved significant gains by implementing a series of instruments to prevent exchange rate fluctuations that adversely affect price stability," he said.

The country's inflation reading that marked a two-decade high was fueled by a slide in the Turkish lira late last year and higher commodity prices.

The lira weakened after the central bank in September embarked on an easing cycle, which saw its policy rate being slashed by 500 basis points to 14%.

The policy easing came as the government endorses a new economic program that prioritizes growth, investment and exports while keeping rates low. The government also revealed a currency-protected scheme.

The lira has been broadly stable since the start of the year following a 44% decline in 2021 and was hovering just below 14 against the greenback.

But it topped the level in the last weeks as volatility returned over Russia's war against Ukraine.

Turkey's energy bill surged last year as global prices and demand rose, leading Ankara to hike energy prices at the start of the year, including a 50% increase in electricity prices for lower-demand households.

Turkish Airlines Increases Iran Flights

TABRIZ (IRNA) - The chief of East Azarbaijan Province airports said that Turkish Airlines has resumed Tabriz-Istanbul weekly flights, increasing scheduled flights for Nowruz holidays.

Ramin Azari, the director general of Iran’s East Azarbaijan Province airports, told IRNA on Wednesday that Turkish Airlines has scheduled 96 two-way flights until mid-Farvardin (April 4, 2022) in four routes: Istanbul, Ankara, Izmir, and Adana. According to the announced schedule, Azari said, 74 two-way flights are for Istanbul, 8 for Ankara, 8 for Izmir, and 6 for Adana.



Russia Could Work Around SWIFT Ban But With High Costs

LONDON (Dispatches) - Western sanctions banning several Russian banks from the SWIFT international payments network with the potential threat of more to come if there is no end to the Ukraine conflict is likely to push Moscow to seek alternatives.

Russia could in theory try to replace SWIFT’s communications system that keeps international trade flowing smoothly. But any alternatives would add significant costs and risks for Russian businesses, money transfer experts said. The impact on Russia would be a reduction in imports and export volumes, at least in the short term, they added.

The Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication (SWIFT) is a secure messaging system for banks, which facilitates rapid cross-border payments. Senders of SWIFT’s secure messages can be confident they will be acted upon, as recipients are contractually liable if they fail to respond.

Russia has become one of the top users of the system, having had a board seat since 2015 and with more than 300 Russian banks using it as their primary method of communicating with domestic and international banks.

Here is a rundown of the potential alternatives and why it is not easy to replace SWIFT:

Russian banks could move to a messaging system developed by Russia’s central bank - System for Transfer of Financial Messages. Last year, the central bank was reported as saying domestic interbank traffic could easily be transferred to this platform.

A spokesperson for the Russian Central Bank was not immediately available for comment.

But the “SWIFT analogue”, as the central bank calls it, has limitations. It only operates during weekday working hours, while SWIFT operates 24 hours a day, every day. Also, SPFS messages have size limitations potentially making it less able to handle more complex transactions.

The SPFS system also lacks international connectivity.

“Currently, international services are limited to countries such as Armenia, Turkey, Uzbekistan, and Kazakhstan,” analysts at Morgan Stanley said this week.

Russian banks could in theory use SPFS messaging to send international payments to a connected bank in one of the countries that belong to the network. This bank could then use SWIFT to pipe the instruction into the international banking system, said Alistair Milne, Professor of Financial Economics at Loughborough University.

But a sudden surge in transactions via such a route would be likely to attract the attention of international regulators, thereby deterring the non-Russian partner bank from continuing this activity.

Professor Markos Zachariadis of University of Manchester, author of a book on SWIFT, said even if regulators did not take action, the banks could soon find themselves ostracised by Western banks, which have grown wary of engaging in activity seen as undermining sanctions.

Another possible response to a SWIFT ban would be for Russian banks to connect



to China’s CIPS payment platform. However, China’s platform can only be used for settling payments in yuan.

Analysts at Morgan Stanley said only 1.9% of international payments are made in the Chinese currency, against around 40% for U.S. dollars, which limited the effectiveness of CIPS as a method for funding cross-border trade.

Also, since CIPS itself relies on the SWIFT network for its operations, piggybacking on CIPS could also be seen as a breach of a SWIFT ban, analysts said.

Indirect CIPs participants still need to go through SWIFT to complete settlements.

A more suitable SWIFT alternative for Russian banks would be to set up bespoke, bilateral systems using phones, faxes or messaging Apps with an overseas partner who would take payment from importers of Russian goods and make payments to exporters to Russia.

Such a system was created by one foreign lender when Iran was cut off from the SWIFT network by sanctions tied to its nuclear program, a former SWIFT executive familiar with the matter said.

This required a small team of people processing payments on the basis of sending two faxes and making two phone calls for each transaction.

But however effective, such systems are also prone to error and face security challenges. While SWIFT is plugged straight into a bank’s systems, faxes or WhatsApp messages may involve manual transfer of data.

Errors and the necessity for extra checks to avoid them would raise costs and could make smaller ticket transactions uneconomic, industry experts said.

“It’s not an easy workaround” Zachariadis said.

Thailand Bids to Avert Population Crisis as Birth Rate Crashes



BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand is scrambling to encourage its people to have more babies to arrest a slumping birth rate, offering parents childcare and fertility centers, while also tapping social media influencers to showcase the joys of family life.

The campaign comes as the number of births has dropped by nearly a third since 2013, when they started declining. Last year saw 544,000 births, the lowest in at least six decades and below the 563,000 deaths, which were also swelled by coronavirus-related fatalities.

While Thailand’s demographic path is similar to other Asian economies like Japan or Singapore, as an emerging market relying on cheap labor and a growing middle class the implications for South-east Asia’s second-biggest economy are far more profound.

“The data reflects a population crisis ... where the mindset towards having children has changed,” said Teera Sindecharak, an expert on demography at Thammasat University.

Senior health official Suwannachai Wattanayingcharoenchai told Reuters the government recognized a need to intervene.

“We are trying to slow down the decline in births and reverse the trend by getting families that are ready to have children faster,” he said, describing plans to introduce policies so that newborns get the full support of the state.

The plans include opening fertility centers, currently limited to Bangkok and other major cities, in 76 provinces and also using social media influencers to back up the message, officials said.

Such policies may come too late for people like Chinthathip Nantavong, 44, who decided with her partner of 14 years not to have children.

“Raising one child costs a lot. A semester for kindergarten is already 50,000 to 60,000 baht and then it reaches millions later,” she said, adding that other countries have better care facilities and welfare policies.

Thailand is not alone in the region struggling with low fertility rates, but is less wealthy than some more developed countries that have been forced to rely on migrant workers to support their economies.

Experts said it is hard to reverse a situation where social conditions have changed and attitudes towards having children are now colored by concerns over rising debt and elderly care.

Iran Oil Exports...

FROM PAGE 1

Referring to signing of the JCPOA under the 11th administration and the lifting of sanctions on Iran, he said: “Unfortunately, despite the lifting of sanctions under the previous administration, not a single reputable international bank was willing to cooperate with Iran in crude oil exports and we had to deal with very small and risky banks.”

The former director of international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company stated: “Iran will be able to increase oil exports by about 1.5 million barrels by lifting sanctions, but still this figure cannot reduce the market turmoil.”

Khatibi pointed to the desire of Asian companies to buy Iranian crude oil despite the sanctions, and said: “Regardless of the outcome of the JCPOA talks, given the high demand for oil in the market, it seems that the trend of selling Iranian oil continues to increase. Currently, all producers are producing at their maximum capacity and only Iran has excess capacity.”

“The global demand for oil is expected to increase by 3 to 3.5 million barrels per day this year,” he said. “The market is counting on Iran’s production capacity. I believe that in the past six months, the President, the Minister of Petroleum, the Director of International Affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company, and the Deputy Minister of Petroleum for International Affairs and Trade have performed positively in the field of oil sales.”

“Russia is currently exporting a total of 8 million barrels of crude oil and petroleum products per day, unfortunately, there is no replacement for this high export figure,” said the former Iranian representative to the OPEC Board of Governors. “It also supplies 40 percent of Europe’s daily gas consumption.”

“Western countries are fully aware of the importance of Russia’s oil and gas exports, so they have so far excluded the energy sector from sanctions against Moscow,” Khatibi said. “Our experience of the sanctions and sale of oil shows that even though western countries might have apparently exempted Russian oil and gas from the embargoes, behind the scenes, mischief begins, such as psychological pressure on shipping companies, insurance companies and banks regarding cooperation with Russia, so the behavior of Western countries has always been deceptive.”

He said: “Western countries, if in practice block Russia’s oil and gas exports, will inevitably have to face a strong reaction from Russia, in which case the oil and gas markets will be seriously affected, so given the behavior of Western countries and Russia’s reaction, we must see more developments in this area in the future.”

The former director of international affairs of the National Iranian Oil Company proposed two scenarios regarding the impact of the developments and the conflicts between Russia and Ukraine on the world oil and gas market, and said: “The global markets will continue with the current trend with some fluctuations in the first scenario in which western countries honor their words regarding exemption of Russia’s oil and gas in the sanctions, but in the second scenario, if the Western countries do not adhere to their promises, the global oil markets will face serious problems.”

Khatibi added: “According to today’s world standards, the oil and gas reserves of Europe and the United States are only enough for 90 days, and in the event of a crisis, these countries will not be able to withstand market fluctuations in the long run.”

Iran Lauded for...

FROM PAGE 1

Despite illegal and inhumane U.S. sanctions, which clearly have serious and dire implications for financing and implementing planning devised by the government, civil society and private sectors, aimed at advancing and empowering women, Iran has made significant achievements and progresses in this respect.

Women have an undeniable role to play in promoting dialogue and confidence in process of peace and security process, she said, adding, “It is a well-known fact that encouraging women to

participate in peace process increases the possibility of peace. As a result, women’s participation in the peace process increases the effectiveness of humanitarian aid, enhances civilian protection, contributes to the political settlement of disputes and accelerates economic reconstruction.”

Several UN resolutions have emphasized the importance of empowering women in the prevention and settlement of post-war situations and also their more efforts to maintain international peace and security, Ershadi underscored.

U.S., Other Parties...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian foreign minister says cooperation between Iran and other countries, including Russia, should not be affected by sanctions.

The EU also acknowledged the issues connected to the U.S. withdrawal from the JCPOA and said the removal of U.S. sanctions was an essential part of the agreement.

“Alongside the verified full implementation by Iran of its nuclear-related commitments, the lifting of nuclear-related sanctions is an essential part of the agreement,” the statement said, claiming that the EU “has fully upheld its commitments, including sanctions lifting under the JCPOA.”

The so-called E3 — France, Britain, and Germany — also issued a separate statement to the IAEA Board of Governors, warning about Iran’s nuclear measures without citing the US withdrawal from the JCPOA as the cause.

“Iran’s R&D on, and extensive use of, advanced centrifuges have permanently improved its enrichment capabilities. This means that Iran’s continued escalations are irreversibly reducing the non-proliferation value of the JCPOA,” they said.

The three European parties to the JCPOA also said that the negotiating teams in the Austrian capital were “very close to finalizing a deal,” but said, “The window of opportunity is closing. We call on all sides to make the decisions necessary to close this deal now.”

Russia’s ambassador to the IAEA said the discussion of verification in Iran at the meeting of the IAEA Board of Governors had been routine.

In a tweet after the meeting, Mikhail Ulyanov wrote that “many, as always, focused on deviations of Iran from JCPOA” without referring to the US maximum pressure policy as the reason behind those deviations.

Iran Foreign...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, Latifi pointed to the volume of products imported into the country in this period and added that 3,566,000 tons of goods, valued at \$5.104 billion, were imported into the country, registering a 46 and 42 percent hike in terms of weight and value respectively.

More than 1,070,000 tons of foreign goods were transited via Iranian land and territory, recording a 36 percent hike as compared to the same period of last year, IRICA spokesman added.

Tehran Blasts...

FROM PAGE 1

The MKO has a dark history of assassinations and bombings against the Iranian government and nation. It notoriously sided with Saddam Hussein in the former Iraqi dictator’s 1980-88 war against the Islamic Republic.

Out of the nearly 17,000 Iranians killed in terrorist assaults since the Revolution’s victory, about 12,000 have fallen victim to the MKO’s acts of terror.

Western countries, topped by the United States, have, however, taken the group out of their terror blacklists.

Gharibabadi reprimanded some European countries for providing “safe havens” for the group, allowing it to set up its offices there, and even letting its members to address their government and parliament sessions.

The support, he regretted, had emboldened “the murderous and dangerous organization’s ringleaders to [even] introduce themselves as human rights supporters.”

“This dual perspective of the issue of human rights” and support for a group, which has the blood of thousands of Iranians on its hands “is not acceptable under any circumstances,” the letter said.

It finally urged the United Nations and the European Union to prevent the free movement of the MKO’s members across the European countries and elsewhere and hold them accountable for their atrocities.

IRGC to...

FROM PAGE 1

The Israeli regime keeps a significant military presence in Syria’s Golan Heights, which it uses as one of its launchpads for attacks against the Syrian soil.

The Tel Aviv regime mostly keeps quiet about its attacks on Syrian territory, which many view as a knee-jerk reaction to the Syrian government’s increasing success in confronting terrorism.

Also on Tuesday, Hebrew-language sources reported taking place of a “massive blast” in the Gush Dan area, which is located along the Mediterranean coastline in the occupied territories.

The explosion was heard as far as several kilometers away, with some residents of the Israeli-occupied West Bank reporting hearing as many as seven blasts.

The Israeli police have said they were investigating the incident.

Jumbo in Paris-Nice Stranglehold

PARIS (Dispatches) - Danish rider Mads Pedersen, the 2019 world champion, won a sprint finish to take the third stage of the Paris-Nice on Tuesday and consolidate fourth place overall in the highly competitive eight day race.

But for a third day Dutch team Jumbo set the kind of relentlessly high pace that has given them top three in the overall standings and exposed fitness levels of anyone not on full form.

Jumbo new recruit Christophe Laporte is in the yellow jersey with a one second lead over Wout van Aert with Jumbo leader Primož Roglič in third at 09sec.

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Merlier Sprints to Victory in Second Stage

MILAN (Dispatches) - Tim Merlier won the second stage of the Tirreno-Adriatico after coming out on top of a rapid bunch sprint in the Tuscan countryside to claim his first victory of the season.

Alpecin-Fenix rider Merlier saw off a host of contenders, including Peter Sagan in the final metres of the longest stage of the seven-day race, a 219-kilometre run between Camaiore and Sovicille.

The Belgian, a stage winner at the Tour de France and Giro d'Italia last season, came off three-time world champion Sagan's wheel to take the win at the last, with Olav Kooij also pipping the Slovak veteran to the line.

Liverpool, Bayern Into Champions League Quarters

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool stuttered into the quarter-finals of the Champions League with a 2-1 aggregate win over Inter Milan after suffering a 1-0 loss to the Italian side, who were reduced to 10 men, at Anfield today.

After a cagey first half, a superb drive into the top corner from Lautaro Martinez in the 62nd minute put Inter ahead on the night.

But just when they looked capable of springing a surprise, the visitors found themselves down a man after Alexis Sanchez was dismissed for a second yellow card after catching Liverpool midfielder Fabinho.

It was a harsh decision against Sanchez, who had won the ball but caught the Brazilian with his follow through and Inter's bench furiously protested.

The dismissal killed Inter's momentum with Liverpool never looking in danger of conceding again.

"Lautaro's goal had hit Liverpool, but Sanchez's expulsion influenced the last half hour of play," said Inter coach Simone Inzaghi ruefully.

"A victory at Anfield it's nice, but it's useless for the qualification," he added.

After their 2-0 loss at the San Siro, Inzaghi's Inter came to Anfield knowing that they needed to find the perfect balance of defensive security and clinical finishing and they began in confident fashion.

Inter's shape was compact and their movement clever while Liverpool struggled to get into their normal rhythm, perhaps wary of over-committing.

Meanwhile Bayern Munich's Robert Lewandowski grabbed the earliest hat-trick in Champions League history with three goals by the 23rd minute as the Germans steamrollered Salzburg 7-1 to book a place in the quarter-finals with an 8-2 aggregate score.



The 33-year-old Poland striker scored three times in an 11-minute spell as he opened his account with two almost identical penalties in the 12th and 21st before netting on the break two minutes later for his fifth hat-trick ever in the competition.

The last-16 tie was all but over by the half-hour mark when Serge Gnabry beat beleaguered Salzburg goalkeeper Philipp Koehn with a low shot to make it 4-0 before a Thomas Mueller double and Leroy Sane strike in the second half wrapped up the win.

"This was a statement, an exclamation mark," said Bayern keeper Manuel Neuer.

Bayern, who have been unpredictable in the Bundesliga this year, have now scored seven or more goals in a Champions League game for a record seventh time.

"We started well and presented ourselves differently from recent weeks. That gives you hope that this will go on. You could see from the start that we had a good attitude," said Neuer.

The keeper also set a record with his 104th appearance in the competition, overtaking current club CEO Oliver Kahn as the Bayern keeper with the most games in the Champions League.

Salzburg had two golden chances early in the game and came agonisingly close to an equalizer in the 15th minute when Neuer, back from a knee injury, pulled off the save of the game to tip Nicolas Seiwald's missile over the bar.

Zverev Handed Suspended Eight-Week Ban

LONDON (Dispatches) - Men's Tennis governing body has handed world number three Alexander Zverev a suspended eight-week ban for smashing his racket against the umpire's chair at last month's ATP 500 event in Acapulco, for which he was expelled from the tournament.

Zverev was fined \$20,000 for verbal abuse, \$20,000 for unsportsmanlike conduct and forfeited more than \$31,000 in prize money and all rankings points earned from singles and doubles action at the Abierto Mexicano tournament. Following a review, the ATP found that the 24-year-old German had committed "aggravated behavior" under the Player Major Offense section of its rules and issued an additional fine of \$25,000 and eight-week suspension from any ATP-sanctioned event.

But the ATP said the fine and suspension was withheld on the condition that, over a probation period ending on Feb. 22, 2023, a year after the incident, Zverev has not incurred any more fines for unsportsmanlike conduct, verbal or physical abuse.

Asia Rugby President In Tehran

IRAN NEWS SPORTS DESK

TEHRAN - President of Asia Rugby Mr. Qais Abdullah Al Dhalai arrived in Tehran on Wednesday for talks with Iranian sports officials.



According to reports of Iran Rugby Association, Al Dhalai during his visit to Tehran is to meet and talk with Iran's Minister of Youth and Sports Hamid Sajjadi, Head of Iran National Olympic Committee Reza Salehi Amiri, President of Iran Federation of Sport Associations Mr. Mohammad Alipoor and Head of Iran Rugby Association Mr. Mir Mehdi Hosseini.

The Emirati official is in Tehran to exchange ways of cooperation for cooperation and boosting rugby in Asia.

Imola Confirmed on F1 Calendar Until 2025

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's Imola circuit will continue to host Formula One until 2025, the sport announced.

The track returned to the calendar in 2020, for the first time since 2006, as Formula One sought to fill gaps left by other races cancelling due to the Covid-19 pandemic.

It retained its place in the 2021 and 2022 world championships.

Italy has two races, with Monza hosting the Italian Grand Prix and Imola's round now named after the surrounding Emilia-Romagna region.

"I am delighted that we will be continuing our excellent partnership with Imola for the Emilia-Romagna Grand Prix until 2025," Formula One chief executive Stefano Domenicali, who was born and grew up in Imola, said in a statement.

"The circuit is iconic and has been part of the history of our sport and they have done an incredible job of hosting two races during the pandemic.

Murray Pledges Prize Money to Ukraine



LONDON (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray said Tuesday he would donate his prize money from tennis tournaments for the rest of the year to UNICEF's Ukraine appeal.

The British player said he was working with the United Nations children's agency to help victims of the conflict following Russia's invasion of its neighbor late last month.

UNHCR, the UN Refugee Agency, recorded more than two million refugees on its dedicated website on Tuesday and UNICEF believes hundreds of thousands of them are youngsters.

"Over 7.5m children are at risk with the escalating conflict in Ukraine, so I'm working with @UNICEF_uk to help provide urgent medical supplies and early childhood development kits," Murray tweeted.

"It's vital education continues, so UNICEF is working to enable access to learning for displaced children, as well as supporting the rehabilitation of damaged schools, together with replacement equipment and furniture.

"I'm going to be donating my earnings from my prize money for the rest of the year, but anyone in the UK can support UNICEF's humanitarian response by donating to our appeal."

Murray recently appointed eight-times Grand Slam singles champion Ivan Lendl as his coach for a third time, reuniting with the man who guided him to all three of his major titles before he suffered serious hip problems.

The 34-year-old Scot, currently ranked 88th in the world, has been able to train and play consistently but his recent results have been disappointing apart from a run to the final of the ATP Tour event in Sydney in January.

FIFA Opens Special Transfer Window for Foreign Players in Russia



PARIS (Dispatches) - FIFA is opening a special transfer window for foreign players stranded in Russia because of the invasion of Ukraine, soccer's world governing body said.

"In order to facilitate the departure of foreign players and coaches from Russia, in the event that clubs affiliated to the Football Union of Russia (FUR) do not reach a mutual agreement with their respective foreign players and coaches before or on 10 March 2022 ... the foreign players and coaches will have the right to unilaterally suspend their employment contracts with the FUR-affiliated clubs in question until the end of the season in Russia (30 June 2022)," FIFA said in a statement. "The suspension of a contract... will mean that players and coaches will be considered 'out of contract' until 30 June 2022 and will therefore be at liberty to sign a contract with another club without facing consequences of any kind."

FIFA's move is only a temporary measure that will not provide much help, the players' union (FIFPRO) said, demanding that players should be allowed to terminate their contracts.

"The decision ... to allow foreign players to only suspend their contracts and thus only temporarily leave Russian clubs is too timid," FIFPRO said in a statement.

"It will be hard for players to find employment for the remainder of the season with uncertainty looming over them and, within a few weeks, they will be in a very difficult situation once again. "It is unsatisfactory even for players who are tied to short-term contracts in Russia - where contracts typically end in December - and who may not want or be able to return after 30 June 2022... FIFPRO communicated to FIFA last week that these players should be allowed to terminate their contracts."

Lewandowski Drops Sponsor Huawei Amid Ukraine Crisis



WARSAW (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich's Polish international striker Robert Lewandowski has cut ties with sponsor Huawei amid claims the Chinese tech giant has been helping Russia secure their network against cyber-attacks following the invasion of Ukraine.

"We have taken the decision today to end the marketing cooperation between Robert Lewandowski and the Huawei brand," the footballer's agent Tomasz Zawislak said in a statement to AFP, without specifying the reason for the break.

"Therefore the implementation of all promotional services has been suspended on our part," Zawislak added.

According to Polish media, the decision is linked to an article in the British daily Daily Mail accusing Huawei of having helped Russia secure its internet against attacks by pro-Ukrainian hackers.

The Chinese group confirmed the end of their partnership with Lewandowski in a very brief statement.

"Huawei CBG Poland regrets the end of its partnership with Robert Lewandowski. We appreciate our years of cooperation and wish him every success in the future," Huawei said in an email to AFP.

The Polish branch of the Chinese group dismissed the newspaper reports as "fake news".

Lewandowski has voiced his support for the people of neighboring Ukraine following the Russian invasion, wearing an armband in the Ukrainian colors during a match.