

President Ebrahim Raisi Reassures That Gov't Has Been Fully Adhering To the Framework and Red Lines Set By the Supreme Leader While Pursuing the Negotiations in Vienna On a Possible Revival of the JCPOA

IRAN NEWS

President Ebrahim Raisi Arrived in Mazandaran Province on Friday As Part of His Administration's Regular Visits to Provinces to Observe the Implementation of Big Projects, and Tackle Problems

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Israel to Get Due Response Over Targeting IRGC Advisors

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has said the Israeli regime will be dealt with decisively for the killing of two advisors in an attack on the countryside of the Syrian capital Damascus.

"The Zionist enemy knows that it will not benefit from such crimes and will receive decisive responses," Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif said.

Sharif said the blood of the innocent martyrs will "bolster the morale" of the Muslim ummah.

A day earlier, the IRGC named the two martyrs as Colonel Ehsan Karbalayi-Poor and Colonel Morteza Saeed-Nezhad, saying they were killed in a missile attack by the Israeli regime on the outskirts of the Syrian capital on Monday.

"Undoubtedly, the Zionist regime will pay the price of this atrocity," the IRGC's statement read.

In a statement on Wednesday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said the occupying regime's crime "will not go unpunished."

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Iran Economic Growth At 5.1% in 9 months To December: Report

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's economy grew by over 5% in the nine months to December 21 despite continued pressure on the country because of American sanctions, says a report in the local media.

The Wednesday report by the semi-official Fars news agency said that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) had reached 54,970 trillion rials over March-December last year, an increase of 5.1% against the similar period in 2020.

The report cited figures from the Iranian government's statistics agency (SCI) and said that the GDP growth calculations were based on fixed prices reported in 2011 when the US dollar was worth around 120,000 against the Iranian rial.

Currency prices have more than doubled since then and the GDP figure reported for Iran for the March-December 2021 period is currently equal to \$215.5 billion.

However, the report by Fars said that Iran's GDP without oil had increased 3.8% year on year in March-December to reach 45,460 trillion rials.

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Leader: Iran Will Not Forgo Regional Presence, Nuclear Program



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei says Iran will not give up on its regional presence and peaceful nuclear program as two factors that contribute to the country's national power.

Addressing a meeting on Thursday with Iran's Assembly of Experts, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "It is vital for any country to have national power."

He said any nation seeking independence and resistance against the will of others needs to "stand strong, otherwise it will be fearful, weak, humiliated and constantly worried about the foreigners' greedy eyes."

Ayatollah Khamenei described national power as a "compound issue" and an "intertwined network" comprised of multiple factors.

The Leader said among the "pillars of national power" are "security and defense power," "economy, public welfare and easy livelihood," "the power of politicking and bargaining to fulfill national interests in at the regional and global front," and "culture and lifestyle," among other things.

"None of these arms of national power should be cut off in favor of one pillar and the other," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

"Regional presence gives us more strategic depth and national strength. Why should we give it up? Scientific nuclear advance has to do with the country's needs in the near future and, if we do away with [the nuclear program], who will we have to ask for [nuclear knowhow to meet our demands]?" the Leader asked.

It is a big mistake to retreat in the face of America or any other power for securing protection against sanctions, which will deal a blow to the nation's political power, Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Using the media as a tool, the devils have constantly been spreading lies to undermine the public trust and faith and frustrate the nation, the Leader added.

Speaking at the meeting, he described the intertwined combination of factors involved in national strength and stated that attending to the people's problems in livelihood is important. Referring to the enemy's severe, relentless soft war to entice and influence the people and particular individuals, he emphasized, "The solution for this complex war is the struggle for clarification using new software methods and based on the deep, sublime teachings and concepts of Islam."

Expressing his congratulations on the occasion of the Eids in this month of Sha'ban, in particular the 15th of Sha'ban, Imam Khamenei described the Eid of the 15th of Sha'ban as being the day of the historic dreams of humanity coming true. In referring to the great spiritual significance of the month of Sha'ban and the sublime meanings found in the Sha'baniyah Supplication, he said, "Imam Khomeini was deeply fond of the Kumayl Supplication and the Sha'baniyah Supplication. I hope that God will bestow on everyone the spiritual capacity to be able to make a better use of the blessings offered in this month."

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Tehran Criticizes Politicizing OPCW for Politically-Driven Goals

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has strongly criticized politicizing the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) by certain countries to achieve politically-motivated goals.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks in an address to a Thursday meeting of the UN Security Council on the situation in the Middle East with special focus on the implementation of the CWC in Syria.

While criticizing the world body for its unnecessary focus on Syria, Iran's envoy said, "Dedicating one monthly meeting of the Council to the repetition of positions and unfounded allegations against the Syrian government is not conducive to the Security Council's efficiency."

"Politicizing the implementation of the CWC and exploiting the OPCW for politically driven national goals bring about major negative consequences for the Convention's authority and credibility as well as those of the Organization," he added.

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Non-Iranian Sources Not Confirm Pause In Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Informed sources involved in the Vienna talks have not confirmed possible interval in the negotiations for revival of the 2015 nuclear deal and removal of anti-Iran sanctions.

Two sources from two non-Iranian delegations in the Vienna talks said on Friday that they cannot confirm such a rumor. IRNA correspondent in Vienna has heard that contradictory approach and change of stances by the American team in last days have turned the way to reach a potential agreement into a difficult one.

Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian wrote on his Twitter account a few hours ago: "Had a productive conversation w @JosepBorrellF today. Efforts to reach a good & durable agreement continue; it is within reach if US acts realistically & consistently. No single party can determine end result; a joint endeavor is needed. Reason should prevail." According to the top diplomat, a collective consensus is needed to reach a final agreement; so, unilateral approach cannot determine the end of the Vienna talks.

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Iran's February Loading LPG Exports Seen at 382,000 mt

LONDON (Dispatches) - Iran's LPG exports loading in February are estimated at 382,000 mt, compared with 451,500 mt in January, shipping sources said, keeping 2022 outflows on track for the projected 6 million mt.

Shipments loading in December totaled 531,000 mt, while loadings in November were at 539,500 mt and October at 363,500 mt, sources said.

Exports in 2021 peaked in September around 556,000 mt, S&P Global Commodity Insights reported earlier.

January-loading shipments included seven cargoes comprising 33,000 mt of propane and 11,000 mt butane, two 44,000 mt evenly split cargoes, a cargo comprising 15,000 mt of propane and 8,000 mt butane, a cargo comprising 10,000 mt of propane and 12,000 mt butane, a 4,000 mt evenly split parcel — all loading from Assaluyeh — and a 20,000 cargo of either propane or butane loading from Siraf.

February-loading shipments included six cargoes of 33,000 mt propane and 11,000 mt butane, two 44,000 mt evenly split parcels, a 22,000 mt lot of either propane or butane, a parcel of 3,000 mt propane and 1,000 mt butane, a 4,000 mt evenly split parcel — all loading from Assaluyeh — and a 44,000 mt cargo of either propane or butane loading at Siraf.

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Fire Breaks out at Saudi Oil Facility After Drone Attack

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's Energy Ministry says an unmanned aerial aircraft has struck and subsequently ignited a fire at an oil facility in the capital of Riyadh, while claiming that the supply of petroleum and its derivatives have not been affected.

The official Saudi Press Agency, citing a statement by an energy ministry official, reported early on Friday that the attack happened at approximately 4:40 a.m. local time (0140 GMT) on Thursday and caused no deaths or injuries.

"The refinery's operations and supplies of petroleum and its derivatives were not affected," the statement said. It did not specify where the attack originated from.

The drone attack comes as Saudi officials tend to depict such operations as insignificant when the scope of the damage is usually revealed later on. The world's top oil exporter has faced frequent retaliatory missile and drone attacks by the Yemeni armed forces, who have been defending their country against a Riyadh-led devastating military aggression and brutal siege for seven years.

Back on March 19 last year, Yemen's army said it had successfully carried out a drone strike against a facility belonging to oil giant Aramco in Riyadh in retaliation for the kingdom's ongoing military aggression and siege.

Yahya Saree, the spokesman for the Yemeni army, announced in a series of tweets at the time that six drones had been used in the retaliatory attack that hit the oil facility "with high precision" at dawn, without specifying the type of the UAVs and the exact location of the target.

In retaliation for the stepped-up Saudi-led military campaign and blockade, "Yemeni Armed Forces carried out at dawn the sixth operation of Shaaban with six drones targeting Aramco in the capital of the Saudi enemy, Riyadh," the military official said.

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President Congratulates New Armenian President

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi issued a message congratulating the new Armenian President Vahagn Khachaturyan on appointment to the post.

In his congratulatory message, the Iranian president referred to three decades of cordial relations between Iran and Armenia which he said would pave the way for further expansion of bilateral ties to help meet the interests of both countries and strengthen peace, security and stability in the region.

Raisi expressed hope that the two countries would leverage the past experiences so that they will witness a new chapter in bilateral relations.

FM Dismisses Unilateralism in Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says achievement of a "good and strong" agreement is still possible through the ongoing talks in the Austrian capital, dismissing the "excessive demands" raised by the United States in the course of the negotiations.



Iran's top diplomat made the remarks in a Thursday phone call with the European Union's foreign policy chief, Josep Borrell, during which the two sides discussed the latest situation of the Vienna talks as well as some other international issues of mutual interest.

Lauding the efforts made by Borrell's deputy, Enrique Mora, in the Vienna talks and the progress made in the negotiations, Amir-Abdollahian said, "If realism governs all sides' behaviors, it is still very possible to achieve a good and strong agreement."

"Raising certain new demands by the United States has no logical justification and is also at odds with this country's positions on rapid achievement of an agreement," Iran's foreign minister said.

"The axial issues [in the Vienna talks], and the effective removal of sanctions [imposed on Iran] must not be affected by the United States' excessive demands," Amir-Abdollahian emphasized.

He said the US is not authorized to use public opinion pressure in the country as a pretext and convey a "new and different" message to Iran everyday via the EU coordinator in the Vienna talks.

"If the American side has a problem with [convincing its] public opinion, I must say that we also have the public opinion problem in Iran. They [Iranian people] monitor developments [surrounding the Vienna talks] with high sensitivity and precision, and expect accountability and effective removal of sanctions as well as maintenance of a powerful peaceful nuclear capability from the government," the top Iranian diplomat pointed out.

The Vienna talks began last April between Iran and the remaining parties to the JCPOA- Britain, France, Germany, Russia and China- on the assumption that the US, under the Biden administration, is willing to repeal the so-called maximum pressure policy pursued by former president, Donald Trump, against Tehran.

Tehran Rejects AL Foreign Minister's Baseless Accusations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry has dismissed the latest report by foreign ministers of the Arab League and the so-called Quartet Committee, noting that leveling accusations against Tehran will impede improvement of regional Arab states with the Islamic Republic.

In his Thursday remarks, Saeed Khatibzadeh was reacting to a statement issued on Wednesday by the so-called Ministerial Committee of the Arab Quartet, which accused Iran, among other things, of interfering in regional countries' affairs.

Khatibzadeh said that such repeated statements will only impede the strengthening of Iran's relations with its neighbors.

The spokesman once again reaffirmed Iran's unwavering position on the necessity of recourse to diplomatic channels in order to promote dialogue among neighboring countries and overcome the existing misunderstandings.

Khatibzadeh rejected repetition of "baseless" allegations about Iran's interference in the internal affairs of other countries, emphasizing that such claims are being made by those states, whose track records show their long history of creating tensions and waging wars, especially in Yemen and other regions across West Asia and North Africa.

Khatibzadeh also dismissed the Arab League's claims about the three Iranian islands in the Persian Gulf and said all the Islamic Republic's measures are taken within its right to impose its sovereignty and defend its territorial integrity. He strongly condemned any attempt by other countries to interfere in Iran's right in this regard.

He further emphasized that preservation of Iran's nuclear achievements and defense capabilities is among the country's strategic policies, saying such statements would fail to have any impact on development of Iran's peaceful nuclear industry.

In its statement issued in Cairo on Wednesday, the Quartet Committee, consisting of Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Bahrain and Egypt, claimed that Iran continued to interfere in the internal affairs of Arab countries and to play a role in sowing sectarian discord among them by supporting and arming terrorist groups.

It also claimed that the Islamic Republic poses a threat to security of Arab states and impedes regional and international efforts to resolve issues and crises in the region through peaceful means.

The ministerial committee then criticized what it called the visits to and statements of Iranian officials about the islands of Greater Tunb, lesser Tunb and Abu Musa.

This is while the three islands have always been part of Iran historically, proof of which can be found in and corroborated by countless historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and other parts of the world. However, the United Arab Emirates has repeatedly laid baseless claims to the islands.

Iran Envoy Censures UNSC Allegations Against Syria

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Majid Takht Ravanchi has criticized the United Nations Security Council for holding monthly sessions on Syria and reiterating unfounded allegations against government of the war-stricken country.

The Iranian ambassador and permanent envoy to the UN made the remarks on Thursday, slamming the UNSC for holding regular meetings on "The situation in the Middle East: (Syria - Chemical)."

Following is Takht Ravanchi's statement in full:

Politicizing the implementation of the CWC and exploiting the OPCW for politically driven national goals bring about major negative consequences for the Convention's authority and credibility as well as those of the Organization.

We renew our call for complete, effective, and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention, as well as the preservation of the OPCW's authority.

Syria has complied with its obligations under the Convention and continues to cooperate with the OPCW, submitting its 98th report on operations linked to the destruction of chemical weapons and associated production sites on its territory on January 17, 2022.

In addition, Syria regularly provides information to the Technical Secretariat of the OPCW and the General Secretariat of the UN about the possession and use of chemical materials by some terrorist organizations, as well as the fabrication of chemical incidents in order to blame the Syrian Army for such heinous acts. Recently in Idlib governorate, members of the terrorist group "Al-Nusra Front engaged in the fabrication of a chemical incident.

Mindful of the disastrous and horrific repercussions of the systematic use of chemical weapons by Saddam, Iraq's ex-dictator during his aggression against our country, Iran reiterates its opposition to the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances.

Only the complete destruction and elimination of all chemical weapons on a global scale, as well as the implementation of all essential measures to prevent their production, can ensure that chemical weapons are never used again.

We reiterate once again our call on the Security Council to utilize its meetings on Syria. Dedicating one monthly meeting of the Council to the repetition of positions and unfounded allegations against the Syrian government is not conducive to the Security Council's efficiency.

Official Stresses Implementation of Tehran-Tashkent Security Cooperation Pact

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani stressed the need for proper implementation of Tehran-Tashkent document on security cooperation which was signed earlier on Wednesday.

Shamkhani, who is on a visit to Uzbekistan, met with Uzbek President Shavkat Mirmonovich Mirziyoyev on Wednesday.

Congratulating Uzbekistan on its 30th anniversary of independence, Shamkhani expressed Iran's readiness to develop and deepen all-out ties with Uzbekistan.

Pointing to the volume of trade exchanges between the two states, he called it essential to take necessary measures to activate potential economic capacities and create crucial facilities in this regard.

Shamkhani stressed that the important document of security cooperation which was

signed between the two countries earlier in the day will pave the way for greater success in overcoming common threats.

President Mirziyoyev, for his part, said that it is very important to accelerate the activation of the axis of the joint cooperation that they agreed on in a meeting with President Raisi.

Expressing satisfaction over the signing of the security cooperation document between Uzbekistan and Iran, he highlighted that it is necessary to follow up and implement the provisions of this document accurately by increasing the scheduled relationship between the security agencies of the two states.

Shamkhani's two-day visit is taking place upon an invitation by his Uzbek counterpart Victor Makhmudov.

Upgrading bilateral relations and discussions on the latest regional and international issues are the main agendas of Shamkhani's visit to Tashkent.

Shamkhani and Makhmudov signed document on establishing joint security commission.

The document will pave the way for Tehran and Tashkent on fighting terrorism, extremism, drug smuggling, and other organized crimes.

Based on the document, the two countries will start a wide range of intelligence and security cooperation.

Iran Reacts to Saudi Envoy's Anti-Iranian Accusations

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran's Interest Section in Cairo Naser Kanaani in reaction to the Saudi envoy's anti-Iranian accusations said on Thursday that using distractions and repeating baseless claims against the Islamic Republic of Iran will not solve a problem from Saudi Arabia and the region.

Kanaani made the remarks on Thursday in reaction to the Saudi Arabia envoy's baseless claims and accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran in an interview with Egypt's Al-Akhbar newspaper.

He emphasized that the Saudi ambassador's accusations in Cairo to Iran about meddling in the affairs of regional states are completely rejected, adding that the practical policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations and respect for the independence and sovereignty of countries while supporting the oppressed.

In both its stances and in practice, Iran has proved that it stands with national governments and nations in the region and opposes the use of force and terrorist methods to create instability in the region. Pointing to the Yemeni issues, he highlighted that the main reason for the Yemeni crisis is because of illegal Saudi military aggression against the Muslim people of Yemen for 7 years.

Iran Has Upper Hand on Battlefield Against Enemy

TEHRAN (MNA) - Commander-in-Chief of Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) said that Iran has the upper hand against enemies, adding today's grandeur of Islamic Iran is the result of obedience to leadership, unity and amity of people.

Major General Hossein Salami, the IRGC Chief Commander made the remarks in a ceremony held on the occasion of auspicious birth anniversary of Third Imam of Shia Imam Hussein (PBUH), which marks the National Day of Guards, on Thursday during which he said that Islamic Republic of Iran has become so powerful and strong on international stage which is ready to give a crushing response to the enemy on the battlefield.

"Resistance" is the only way to dignity and prosperity of Islamic Iran, he said, adding, "Today, we have a superior hand over enemies. Our glorious achievements are the result of following the sublime recommendations of leadership and unity, amity and empathy of noble nation of Islamic Iran."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Major General Salami pointed to the eight years of Scared Defense (Iraqi imposed war against Iran in 1980-1988) and said that epic-making of combatants during these years will go down in all-time history of the Islamic Revolution.

Today, Islamic Republic of Iran is at the centerpiece of all dangers and threats of enemies, he said, adding, "Armed Forces of the country are strictly monitoring events taking place across the globe in a way that enemies of the country have left no stone unturned to undermine the image of country and have resorted to imposition of tough economic sanctions, military intimidation, psychological operation and intelligence warfare, etc."

Relying upon the assistance of the God Almighty, all malicious plots and conspiracies of enemies have been foiled under the wise leadership of Islamic Revolution and unity and amity of people, IRGC commander added.

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PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:27
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:54
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:17

41. And a Sign for them is that We bore their race (through the Flood) in the loaded Ark;

42. And We have created for them similar (vessels) on which they ride.

Surah 36, Ya-sin (41 - 42)

Tehran, Baku Stress Broadening Transit Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Azerbaijan poised to enhance cooperation in the field of transit.

In his visit to Azeri capital Baku on Thursday, Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi said that transit of Azerbaijan's fleet from Iranian land and territory to Nakhichevan is the main aim of his visit to Azerbaijan.

It is hoped that the two countries of Iran and Azerbaijan would witness signing and sealing agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) in 15th Iran-Azerbaijan Joint Economic Commission, Ghasemi emphasized.

He announced the agreement to hand over several projects to Iran by the Republic of Azerbaijan during the visit and stated, "It is planned that Azerbaijani trucks will cross Iranian land and territory for transiting towards Nakhchivan."

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ghasemi said that officials of the two countries will discuss enhancing bilateral ties in the fields of energy, industry, agriculture and exchange of goods between Tehran and Baku.

Minister of Roads and Urban Development is also scheduled to hold talks with



Azeri side on re-launching Nakhichevan-Mashhad train. Improving cooperation between Iran and Azerbaijan in the field of road transportation with more than 70,000 trucks and re-launch of the Nakhichevan-Mashhad-Nakhichevan passenger train will also be the main topic of discussion between officials of the two countries.

During his visit to Azerbaijan, Rostam Ghasemi will emphasize the need to resume activities of regular bilateral passenger services by fully observing of health protocols and guidelines due to the spread of COVID-19.

Pursuing the Astatachay bridge construction project, completion of Astara railway dock project and Rasht-Astara railway project as part of the north-south corridor are other topics of discussion between Iranian Roads Minister and Azeri officials.

In addition, officials of the two countries will also discuss the development of mutual cooperation in the field of Ro-Ro shipping, shipbuilding and launch of joint container shipping lines, etc.

Head of Vigilant Department of Oil Industry Visits National Goreh-Jask Project

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Vigilant Department of Oil Industry with his presence at Hormozgan Province visited the oil transfer pipeline of Goreh-Jask and Jask Oil Terminal.



According to the public relations of Pars Oil and Gas Company (POGC), Mr. Azim Shiravand and his entourage on Monday in a one-day travel to Makran region visited the national and strategic project of Goreh-Jask oil transfer pipeline and Jask Oil Terminal.

During the visit Mr. Shiravand was accompanied by the CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company and some other officials. He visited different parts of the projects like reservoirs, 24-inch crude oil transfer pipeline and pumping stations.

He then had a meeting at Jask Oil Terminal with officials of the project and was informed about the latest progress of the Goreh-Jask project as well as the performance of Jask Oil Terminal.

International oil terminal and offshore installations of crude oil export of Jask is the last chain of the national and strategic project of Goreh-Jask crude oil transfer pipeline.

Trans-Tech Blockchain Will Develop Future Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Blockchain Home during honoring technical and vocational jihad managers of the country said trans-technology of blockchain will develop future economy.

Ali Pakbakhtegan Zanjani, the exemplary entrepreneur of the country who was appointed in a special ceremony as the manager of cryptocurrency and blockchain training of the Center of Entrepreneurship Association of Private Vocational and Technical Institutes, said trans-technology blockchain will develop the future economy.

He said that the most important principle in the policies of the Second Step of the Revolution and Supreme Leader is deployment and strengthening of resistance economy and trans-technology blockchain is the modern solution to meet this end, and in order to materialize the resistance economy, all opportunities and potential capacities of the Islamic Republic should be identified and top capacities should be improved for materializing and organizing the goals of resistance economy.



Pakbakhtegan Zanjani went on to say that all kinds of opportunities and potential capacities like digital economy, trans-tech blockchain and cryptocurrencies should be revived, organized and expanded. He stated that in this regard one of the characteristics of the strong and independent economy is the futures studies for economic development and it means that in line with materializing the second step of the Revolution, education, research and futures studies regarding the modern technologies of world economy and blockchain science and cryptocurrencies should be strengthened and expanded because it makes the lever of sanctions ineffective.

Head of Iran Blockchain Home further said that blockchain is a trans-tech which has started some 27 years ago and it is hack- and penetration-proof and it is a modern market that it will play great role in transactions, exports, imports and international interactions with other states. Accordingly Iran Blockchain Home has been registered as a union to register ideas of people who are expert in this field to operationalize plans and to prevent exodus of ideas from the country, he added.

Pakbakhtegan stated that in the issue of exchange platforms, some 12m people are active that unfortunately have suffered due to lack of training and due to the efforts of revolutionary managers of Iran Blockchain Home, a course has been included in curriculum of the Payam Noor University which can guide this track in right direction with offering standard training.

At the end of the ceremony, Head of Payam University Ali Zanjani appointed Eng. Fazel Shiravand, Eng. Sajjad Asghari and Eng. Farhad Bohlooli as heads of different departments which deal with blockchain and cryptocurrencies.

Unprecedented Record-Breaking of PGSR on IRENEX

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN – Marketing and sales manager of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company announced successful offer of three special products of world's super gas condensate refinery at the international ring of Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

Elaborating successful offering of three special products of the company at the international ring of IRENEX, Reza Karamad said this offer happened on Tuesday with offering of 120,000 tons of light naphtha, 70,000 tons of medium naphtha and 105,000 tons of full naphtha which faced unprecedented welcome of the activists in the international market.

He said super Persian Gulf Star Refinery due to the volume of its exports and planning and monitoring of the target market is the main determining of the price of the oil products especially naphtha on IRENEX. He added that still sale price of Persian Gulf Star Refinery naphtha is the highest export price for naphtha in Iran and in the region and this sale bespeaks stability in naphtha products market of Persian Gulf Star Company in the region and East Asia.

Karamad added that offering products on the IRENEX causes more transparency in sales of products and said sales of products at this critical time and in the chaotic international market indicates power, jihadi work and precise monitoring of the international market by his colleagues and expressed hope with logical planning and using all capacity, they would witness broader activities and more brilliance of Persian Gulf Star on the IRENEX.

He went on to say that despite pressures of global arrogance against our dear country, the company could have effective role in providing fuel basket of the country by making the most out of country's young experts and the existing capacities.

He also expressed hope the approach of avoiding raw material sale that has been recommended by the Supreme Leader would continue and the company would attract new consumption market with jihadi efforts of his colleague.

Minimum Wage for Workers Raised by Nearly 60%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has increased minimum wage payable to workers by nearly 60% as a government that came to office in August moves ahead with plans to bridge economic gaps for low-paid people in the country.

Reports published in the local media on Thursday said that minimum wage payable to workers had increased to 1.393 million rials per day and 41.79 million rials (US\$164) per month for the calendar year starting March 21.

The figures represent an increase of 57.4% on the current calendar year. A maximum wage payable under Iran's labor law and regulations approved by the government will be seven times the minimum wage.

However, the lowest wage payable to a worker in Iran, including compulsory payments on housing and pension, will be 56.797 million rials (\$222) over the next calendar year, showed tables published by the Supreme Labor Council of Iran.

The wage rules apply to all workers covered by Iran's Social Security Law and is different from salary regulations covering millions of civil servants in Iran who are on government payroll.

Iranian labor minister Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki said the raise in minimum wage would improve the purchasing power of workers in the country while boosting the effective demand in the economy.

He said the raises will be consistent Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi's order earlier this week to improve the welfare of the workers in the country amid inflationary conditions in the economy.



February Trade up 52% y/y to \$9.85b

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian customs offices (IRICA) figures show the country's foreign trade (excluding crude) rose by 52% year on year in the calendar month to late February.

IRICA spokesman Rouhollah Latifi said that the total value of Iran's non-oil trade amounted to \$9.858 billion in the month to February 19.

Latifi said trade had risen by 45% in volume terms over the same period as shipments reached a total of 15.799 million metric tons.

Iranian exports in February was up 64% against the similar month in 2021 as the country sold \$4.754 billion worth of goods in overseas markets, said the official, adding that February exports were up 31% from January.

China was the top buyer of Iranian export cargoes in the calendar month to late February with \$1.18 billion worth of purchases, showed IRICA figure. Chinese imports from Iran rose by 56% against February 2021 although shipments had dropped 6% from January this year, according to the same figures.

However, Turkey's imports from Iran jumped by nearly 170% month on month to reach \$1.076 billion, an increase

of more than five times against February last year.

It is a first time in years that Turkey's monthly imports from Iran exceeds those of Iraq as the Arab country took delivery of \$927 million worth of goods from Iran in the month to February 19, up 80 against the previous month and 103% more from the similar month in 2021.

Latifi said that imports into Iran had increased by 42% in value terms year on year to reach \$5.104 billion in February.

Largest suppliers were China with \$1.571 billion of shipments, followed by the United Arab Emirates at \$1.271 billion and Turkey with \$472 million, said the official.

Iran Unveils First All-Electric Car for Launch in May

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian automotive company has unveiled a first all-electric vehicle (EV) in the country under the commercial name of the Oxygen.

KSJ Motors, a company based in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz, unveiled the car in a ceremony attended by senior government and industry officials on Thursday.

The company said in a statement to the media that it will produce 1,000 units of the Oxygen in the nine months starting in May 2022, adding that production will reach 10,000 units per year in the calendar year starting March 2024.

KSJ Motors CEO Siamak Hojjat said that the car will be the cheapest two-seat EV in the world with a price tag of 2.7 billion rials (\$10,500).

Hojjat said Oxygen's energy consumption will be less than

15 kilowatt hours (kWh) per 100 kilometers, adding that its range will be around 220 km per charge.

He said KSJ Motors will source only 20% of the parts needed for making the car from outside Iran.

The Iranian Telecommunication Manufacturing Co. (ITMC) has contributed to the development of Oxygen, said a report by the official IRNA news agency which added that the company will hold a stake in the commercialization phase of the Iranian EV.

A senior diplomat from the Senegalese embassy in Tehran was also present in Oxygen's unveiling ceremony, according to a report by the IRIB News which added that West African country is keen to introduce the car to its market.

Senegal hosts a joint car manufacturing site run by Iran's largest carmaker the IKCO.

Strengthening Economic Ties With All Countries Important for Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Affairs Mehdi Safari said here that Iran attached great importance to strengthening and fortifying economic ties with various countries around the world, and especially with our neighboring countries.

Safari emphasized that Iran favored multilateral approach in its economic diplomacy, especially with the neighboring countries, among which Azerbaijan Republic has a special status.

Referring to restoration of the Tehran-Baku flights, he said the 15th Joint Iran-Azerbaijan Economic Commission to meet on tomorrow is an appropriate opportunity for the two countries to reach comprehensive agreements, including in transit, transportation, commerce, technical and engineering services, tourism, provincial cooperation, agriculture and many other fields which would open a new chapter in bilateral economic ties.

Safari meanwhile referred to the signing of a number of construction project contracts in Azerbaijan Republic by Iranian engineering firms, expressed hope that the Iranian companies will prove their high level capabilities in implementing those projects to gain more overseas contracts.

Islamic State Names New Leader

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Islamic State jihadist group confirmed the death of its leader Abu Ibrahim al-Qurashi in a statement Thursday and named Abu Hasan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi as his replacement.

The announcement came more than a month after the IS chief died during a US raid that saw commandos swoop in by helicopter to an area in northwest Syria controlled by rival jihadists.

IS personnel have "pledged allegiance" to "Abu Hasan al-Hashemi al-Qurashi as an emir over believers and the caliph of Muslims," the group's spokesperson said in an audio recording released on its social media channels.

The recording confirmed the death of the former IS chief along with the group's ex-spokesman.



China-Taiwan War Would End in Miserable Victory

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - No matter who wins in any future war between Taiwan and China, it will be a "miserable victory", Taiwan Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said on Thursday, adding it was best if everyone avoided conflict.

Speaking to reporters before a parliament session on the security implications of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Chiu said both sides would pay a heavy price in the event of conflict between China and Taiwan, which Beijing has vowed to reclaim, by force if necessary.

"If there's a war, to be frank, everyone will be miserable, even for the victors," he said.



Putin Says Russia Will Emerge Stronger



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin said on Thursday that sanctions imposed against Russia would rebound against the West, including in the form of higher food and energy prices, and Moscow would solve its problems and emerge stronger.

Putin said there had been no alternative to what Russia calls its special military operation in Ukraine and that Russia was not a country which could accept compromising its sovereignty for some sort of short-term economic gain.

"These sanctions would have been imposed in any case," Putin told a meeting of the Russian government. "There are some questions, problems and difficulties but in the past we have overcome them and we will overcome them now."

"In the end, this will all lead to an increase in our independence, self-sufficiency and our sovereignty," he told a televised government meeting two weeks after Russian forces invaded neighboring Ukraine.

His comments were designed to portray Western sanctions as self-defeating and reassure Russians that the country can withstand what Moscow is calling an "economic war" against its banks, businesses and business oligarchs.

Putin said Moscow - a major energy producer that supplies a third of Europe's gas - would continue to meet its contractual obligations even though it has been slammed with comprehensive sanctions including a ban on U.S. purchases of its oil.

"They announced that they are closing the import of Russian oil to the American market. Prices there are high, inflation is unprecedentedly high, has reached historic highs. They are trying to blame the results of their own mistakes on us," he said. "We have absolutely nothing to do with it."

Hitting back against the West, the Russian government said earlier it had banned exports of telecom, medical, auto, agricultural, electrical and tech equipment, among other items, until the end of 2022.

In total, over 200 items were included on the export suspension list, which also covered railway cars, containers, turbines and other goods.

Speaking calmly, Putin acknowledged that sanctions imposed since the Feb. 24 invasion were being felt.

"It is clear that at such moments people's demand for certain groups of goods always increases, but we have no doubt that we will solve all these problems while working in a calm fashion," he said.

"Gradually, people will orient themselves, they will understand that there are simply no events that we cannot close off and solve."

Putin noted that Russia is a major producer of agricultural fertilisers, and said there would be inevitable "negative consequences" for world food markets if the West made problems for Russia.

His agriculture minister reported at the meeting that the country's food security was ensured.

Erdogan Urges Biden to Lift Sanctions On Turkey's Defense Industry

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Tayyip Erdogan told U.S. President Joe Biden in a phone call on Thursday that it was past time to lift all "unjust" sanctions on Turkey's defense industry.

According to a statement from Erdogan's office, he also told Biden that Turkey expected its request to purchase 40 new F-16 fighter jets and modernize its existing fleet to be finalized as soon as possible.

Ankara had initially ordered more than 100 F-35 jets, made by Lockheed Martin Corp (LMT.N), but the United States removed Turkey from the program in 2019 after it acquired Russian S-400 missile defense systems.

Turkey has called the move unjust and demanded reimbursement for its \$1.4 billion payment.

Reuters reported last year that Ankara had made a request to Washington to buy 40 Lockheed Martin-made F-16s and nearly 80 modernization kits for its existing warplanes.

Turkey's purchase of the S-400s has also triggered U.S. sanctions. In December 2020, Washington blacklisted Turkey's Defense Industry Directorate, its chief, Ismail Demir, and three other employees.

A readout of Thursday's call from the White House did not mention a discussion about sanctions or Turkey's request regarding the F-16s.

But it said Erdogan and Biden had talked about opportunities to strengthen ties, in addition to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The decades-old partnership between the NATO allies has gone through unprecedented tumult in recent years over disagreements on Syria policy, Ankara's closer ties with Moscow, U.S. charges against a state-owned Turkish bank and erosion of rights and freedoms in Turkey.

Washington has repeatedly warned Turkey against buying further Russian weaponry. Ankara has said it intends to go through with the purchase of a second batch of S-400s from Russia, a move that could worsen the diplomatic rift with the United States.

The request for the jets will likely have a difficult time getting approval from the U.S. Congress, where sentiment towards Turkey has soured deeply over recent years.



Sweden to Raise Military Spending Over Ukraine War

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Sweden's government announced plans Thursday for a major boost in military spending to two percent of GDP "as soon as possible", citing the security threat from Russia's war in Ukraine.

Sweden, which ended decades of defense cuts after Moscow's 2014 annexation of Crimea, said it hoped to reach its goal within a decade but gave no specific date.

"We hope to get there as soon as possible," Social Democratic Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson told reporters.

The Scandinavian country, which during the Cold War dedicated up to four percent of its economic output to the defense budget, drastically slashed its spending during the 1990s and early 2000s, to around one percent.

"The war in Europe is going to affect the Swedish people. We need to continue to strengthen Sweden's defense capability," Andersson said.

"The security situation in Sweden's vicinity has deteriorated over time. The Russian attack on Ukraine further exacerbates that," she said.

Andersson also warned that the number of young people called up to do mandatory military service -- which was reintroduced in 2017 -- would increase.

The right-wing opposition is expected to approve the plan in parliament.

Speaking at a later press conference, Swedish Armed Forces chief of operations, Michael Claesson, said the decision to increase funding would affect "all citizens and future generations", though it was too early to say in what areas Sweden's military capabilities would be strengthened.

"There is currently no plan for the (military) growth announced. We will need to see what this will mean in concrete terms in the near future," Claesson said.

In another sign of increased tensions, the Swedish Navy this week encouraged people living on islands in the Stockholm archipelago to keep

a watchful eye out for any indications of suspicious underwater activities, such as submarine periscopes or suspicious wave formations, local media reported.

North Korea to Launch Satellites to Monitor U.S. and Its Allies

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea will launch a number of reconnaissance satellites in coming years to provide real-time information on military actions by the United States and its allies, state media on Thursday reported leader Kim Jong Un as saying.

While inspecting North Korea's National Aerospace Development Administration, Kim said "a lot" of military reconnaissance satellites would be put into sun-synchronous polar orbit in the period of a five-year plan announced last year, state news agency KCNA reported.

"He noted that the purpose of developing and operating the military reconnaissance satellite is to provide the armed forces of the DPRK with real-time information on military actions against it by the aggression troops of the U.S. imperialism and its vassal forces in South Korea, Japan and the Pacific," the news agency said.

North Korea appears to be preparing to launch a reconnaissance satellite, which could prove as controversial as the nuclear-armed country's weapons tests because they use the same banned ballistic missile technology, experts say.

North Korea says it conducted two tests of satellite systems on Feb. 27 and March 5. Authorities in South Korea, Japan, and the United States says the tests involved launches of ballistic missiles.

The launches drew international condemnation and the U.S. military said on Thursday it had increased surveillance

and reconnaissance collection in the Yellow Sea.

The United States also said it had heightened its ballistic missile defense readiness after a "significant increase" in North Korean missile tests.

Kim defended the satellite work as not only about gathering information but protecting North Korea's sovereignty and national interests, exercising its legitimate rights to self-defense, and elevating national prestige, KCNA reported.

"He stressed that this urgent project for perfecting the country's war preparedness capacity by improving our state's war deterrent is the supreme revolutionary task, a political and military priority task to which our Party and government attach the most importance," KCNA said.

The United States and its allies have condemned previous North Korean space launches as violations of U.N. Security Council resolutions that have imposed sanctions on North Korea over its nuclear and missile programs.

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un inspects North Korea's National Aerospace Development Administration after recent satellite system tests, in Pyongyang, North Korea, in this photo released on March 10, 2022 by North Korea's Korean Central News Agency (KCNA). KCNA via REUTERS

North Korea has not tested a nuclear weapon or its long-range intercontinental ballistic missiles (ICBMs) since 2017, but has suggested in could resume such tests because talks with the United States are stalled.



Modi's Party Retains Indian Mega-State



LUCKNOW (Dispatches) - A firebrand monk and poster boy of Hindu nationalism retained power in India's most populous state Thursday, in a triumph for Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling party.

Partial results gave the BJP 202 seats, a majority in the Uttar Pradesh state parliament, the election commission website showed. The part was also leading in 53 of the 99 still to declare.

The victory strengthens local BJP chief Yogi Adityanath's chances of eventually succeeding Modi as an even more divisive prime minister of the world's largest democracy.

The BJP is the first party since 1985 to retain power in the state of more than 200 million people, albeit with a reduced majority.

It was a "historic victory", Adityanath tweeted after addressing celebrating supporters in state capital Lucknow, attributing it to "the good governance, security, nationalism and the heartwarming guidance of respected PM Narendra Modi".

The BJP, helped by its deep pockets and influence on social media -- including through misinformation, according to AFP and other fact-checking organisations -- also held the other three states where it was the incumbent.

In the last of the five polls being held, Punjab, the opposition Congress -- the only other pan-national party -- was crushed by the left-leaning Aam Aadmi Party in a humiliating defeat.

At the BJP national headquarters in New Delhi, Modi said pundits would proclaim the results had "sealed the fate" of the next general election, due in 2024.

Uttar Pradesh, home to more people than Brazil, is India's biggest state-level political prize, sending the most MPs to the national parliament.

Adityanath's sectarian rhetoric -- coupled with a hardline approach on crime and claims of economic performance in one of India's poorest states -- proved a vote winner, experts said.

"Just like there are Islamic countries and Buddhist countries, we should become a Hindu country," BJP supporter Neera Sinha Varsha told AFP in Uttar Pradesh state capital Lucknow.

During the campaign, Adityanath railed against "anti-nationals" -- seen as a euphemism for Muslims who make up around one-fifth of the northern state's population.

Shanon
(adviser)

Zaferanieh Apt (\$2000)
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

(\$2600)
Darrous Apt
300sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, Sauna
balcony, & F.F

Jordan Apt (\$1500)
160sq.m, 3bdrs, & F.F

Parsian

Farmanieh Apt (\$2400)
220sq.m, 3bdrs, S/pool
Sauna, J, Large balcony
pkg, & Fully Furn

Cell: +989121907875
Shanon_tari@yahoo.com
Tel : 88510081
Fax : 88506474

Vanak Villa (\$3500)
800sq.m
4bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
yard, & pkg
Fully Furn

(\$10000)
Velenjak bldg
5storey, 20bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg lots
brand new, & F.F

Vali-e-Asr Office
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Adidas Profits Jump in 2021

FRANKFURT (Dispatches) - German sportswear giant Adidas reported an almost-fivefold leap in its net profit today, with the group betting on double-digit growth in 2022 despite the impact of the war in Ukraine. Adidas booked a net profit of €2.1 billion (RM9.6 billion) on its continuing operations in 2021, up from €432 million the previous year, the company said in a statement. Excluding the Reebok brand after Adidas agreed its sale in August, the net profit on continuing operations came in at €1.5 billion, up from €461 million the previous year. Across the board, the outfitter saw revenues rise by 15.2 per cent to €21.2 billion in 2021, despite strong headwinds.



World Economic Forum Colds Shoulders Russians Over Ukraine War

ZURICH (Dispatches) - The World Economic Forum said today it was freezing all relations with Russian entities, and would not allow anyone on the sanctions list to take part in the annual high-powered meeting in Davos.

"Following its condemnation of Russia's ongoing attack on Ukraine, the forum is complying with the evolving international sanctions and following the rapidly-developing situation," the WEF said in a statement sent to AFP.

"Therefore, the forum freezes all its relations with Russian entities, and will not engage with any sanctioned individual or institution in any of our activities, inclusive the annual meeting" in Davos, it added.

The announcement came as the international outcry mounts over Russia's invasion, which in two weeks has sent nearly 2.2 million people fleeing into neighboring countries.

The West has responded with punishing sanctions, with the United States banning imports of Russian oil, one of its biggest economic weapons against Moscow.

The WEF usually hosts its annual gathering of the global political and business elite in the luxury Swiss resort of Davos in January, but the meeting has been postponed until May 22-26 this year due to concerns over the coronavirus pandemic.

Top Russian politicians, businessmen and oligarchs are commonly seen at the plush event.

But now, "the champagne and caviar days in Davos are over. Or at least the caviar," as Politico put it.

Among those who have been slapped with Western sanctions over the invasion is President Vladimir Putin himself, who has participated in several Davos meets.

Politico pointed out that following Russia's annexation of Ukraine's Crimean peninsula in 2014, Putin was still invited to join the following year, but opted not to come.

WEF founder Klaus Schwab had said he hoped the event could "contribute with some bridge building".

When Putin gave a video address to the meeting during the virtual event held in the pandemic year of 2021, at a time when Moscow's relations with the West were deteriorating, Schwab stressed in his introduction that it was "essential" to hear from him.

"Even and especially in times characterised by differences, disputes and protests, constructive and honest dialogue to address our common challenges is better than isolation and polarisation," the WEF founder said.

Putin told the 2021 gathering of a last-minute agreement to prolong the New Start treaty with the United States on reducing nuclear arsenals as "a step in the right direction".

But just days into his Ukraine invasion Putin ordered his country's nuclear forces to be put on high alert — warned in last year's speech that "differences are leading to a downward spiral".

Citi Sees Malaysia's GDP to Grow at 6.5% This Year

KUALA LUMPUR (dispatches) - Citi analysts expect Malaysia's 2022 gross domestic product (GDP) full year growth to reach 6.5 per cent, driven by optimism with the country's imminent reopening of borders beginning next month.

Apart from this, the forecast incorporates additional boost to capex from reconstruction after the floods in mid-December, adding to earlier drivers from supply chain diversification and cyclical capacity tightness, it said in a statement today.

"Though dampened by floods in the Klang Valley in mid December, Malaysia's fourth quarter 2021 (4Q21) GDP rose stronger than expected at 3.6 per cent year-on-year (YoY) on reopening, which should continue into 2022 despite Omicron uncertainties and external demand headwinds," it said.

While Omicron delays reopening momentum, Citi economist Wei Zheng Kit said it does not derail it, both domestically and internationally.

"Despite the recent surge in daily infections since the start of 2022, the proportion of severe cases have declined drastically, with ICU capacity utilisation rates still low," he said.

This, he said, partly reflects high and rising vaccination coverage, with 78.7 per cent of the population have received two doses and 41.2 per cent have received booster shots as at Feb 15, 2022.

Reopening has thus continued, with officials declaring Malaysia on course for a transition to endemic phase, and a full reopening of the borders without quarantine also on the cards.

"The impact could be significant as tourism receipts accounted for 5.8 per cent of GDP pre-pandemic. Currently, countries accounting for 57 per cent of 2019 arrivals have reciprocal no quarantine arrangements with Malaysia, led by Singapore (39 per cent)," he said.

On the global front, Citi said the economic recovery and bull market are maturing, with moderate growth expected ahead.

"Citi analysts expect less inflationary pressure in the coming year, albeit somewhat higher inflation over the next 10 years compared to the last decade. The assets that perform best over the next year and beyond are unlikely to be those that rebounded most strongly in 2021," it said.

As the inflationary boom ends, and the US Federal Reserve (Fed) possibly overreacts, a peak in long-term yields may also define the trough for higher quality US growth stocks.



Fitch Cuts Russia's Rating Further Into Junk

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Fitch yesterday downgraded Russia's sovereign rating by six notches further into the junk territory to 'C' from 'B', saying a default is imminent as sanctions and trade restrictions have undermined its willingness to service debt.

The country's financial markets have been thrown into a turmoil by Western sanctions after it invaded Ukraine, raising significant concerns over its ability and willingness to service debt.

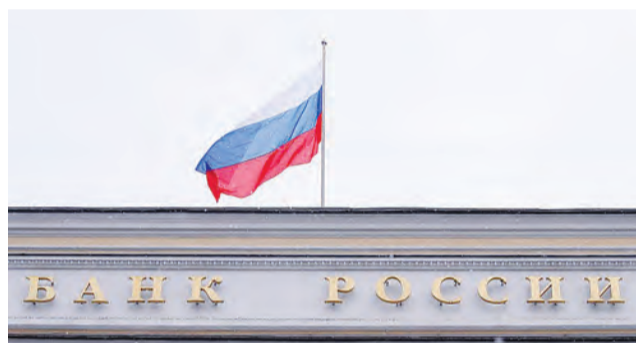
The rating firm pointed to Presidential decree, which could potentially force a redenomination of foreign-currency sovereign debt payments into local currency for creditors in specified countries.

"Further ratcheting up of sanctions and proposals that could limit trade in energy increase probability of a policy response by Russia that includes at least selective non-payment of its sovereign debt obligations," the ratings agency said in a statement.

On March 16, Russia is due to pay \$107 million in coupons across two bonds, though it has a 30-day grace period to make the payments.

The 'C' rating in Fitch's assessment is only one step above default, bringing it in line with the Moody's current equivalent score of 'Ca'.

The change comes less than a week after Fitch revoked Russia's investment-grade status, slashing its rating to "B" from "BBB". Peers Moody's and S&P had also lowered their sovereign ratings.



Libya Oil Flows Again as Blockade Lifted

TRIPOLI (Dispatches) - Libya's National Oil Corporation said today that an armed group blockading two major oil fields had lifted its siege and that production had resumed at one of them.

The NOC had announced the suspension of production on Sunday at the vast Al-Sharara and Al-Fil fields after gunmen closed pipelines to the coast, the latest such shutdown in the crude-rich North African country's decade-long conflict.

The firm had declared force majeure, a legal move releasing it from contractual obligations due to circumstances beyond its control.

In a statement on Facebook today, the NOC announced "the reopening of the pipeline at al-Riyayna", around 140 kilometers south-west of Tripoli, along with "the resumption of production at Al-Sharara and the lifting of force majeure".

It added that the pipeline from Al-Fil, in the country's western desert, had not yet reopened because "vandalism" required a technical team to carry out repairs.

Libya, which sits on Africa's largest crude reserves, has been rocked by 11 years of conflict since a Nato-backed revolt toppled and killed dictator Muammar Gaddafi.

The country found itself facing a new political crisis this month, with two rival prime ministers vying for power in a standoff that threatens a return to violence after a year and a half of relative stability.

In normal times, Libya produces some 1.2 million barrels a day.

Around a quarter comes from Al-Sharara, which is managed by a consortium of the NOC, Spanish firm Repsol, France's Total, Austria's OMV and Norway's Statoil.

The United Nations and the U.S. ambassador to Libya had yesterday urged the lifting of the blockade.

Food Crisis Grows As Spiraling Prices Spark Export Bans

LONDON (Dispatches) - A global food crisis sparked by Russia's invasion of Ukraine escalated on Wednesday as Indonesia tightened curbs on palm oil exports, adding to a growing list of key producing countries seeking to keep vital food supplies within their borders.

The conflict in Ukraine is threatening global grain production, the supply of edible oils and fertiliser exports, sending basic commodity prices rocketing and mirroring the crisis in energy markets.

Palm oil is the world's most widely used vegetable oil and is used in the manufacture of many products including biscuits, margarine, laundry detergents and chocolate. Palm oil prices have risen by more than 50% this year.

Indonesia's Trade Minister Muhammad Luftri said the export curbs aimed to ensure that cooking oil prices at home remain affordable to consumers.

The rise in prices comes at a time when affordability of food is a major challenge as economies seek to recover from the coronavirus crisis and is also helping to fuel a broader surge in inflation across the globe.

Russia and Ukraine are also important suppliers of edible oils as well as contributing nearly 30% of global wheat exports.

Ukraine announced on Wednesday it had banned a wide range of agricultural exports including barley, sugar and meat until the end of the year.

The conflict has not only disrupted shipments from the Black Sea region but is also jeopardizing prospects for harvests as fertilizer prices soar and supplies shrink in response to a sharp rise in the cost of natural gas - a key component in the manufacturing process for many products.

World food prices rose to a record high in February to post a year-on-year increase of 20.7%, according to the United Nations food agency, while many markets have continued to climb this month.

Malaysian palm oil futures rose to an all-time high following Indonesia's announcement while soybean oil prices jumped to a 14-year peak.

Soybean oil prices have climbed by almost 40% this year.

Russia and Ukraine are both major producers of sunflower oil and the two countries account for almost 80% of global exports, leaving customers such as India scrambling to secure supplies of alternatives such as palm oil and soyoil.

Chicago wheat futures have climbed around 60% so far this year, threatening to raise the cost of key food staples such as bread.

The loss of two major exporters in Ukraine and Russia has been compounded by news that the condition of the wheat crop in the world's top producer, China, may be the "worst in history" according to the country's agriculture minister.

Credit Suisse Halves 2022 European GDP Forecast



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Credit Suisse economists slashed their forecast for European growth, expecting the region to expand just 1 per cent this year as the Ukraine crisis turbocharges commodities prices and disrupts supply chains.

The West's moves to punish Russia for invading Ukraine have sent prices of crude oil and metals such as aluminum and nickel soaring, threatening to derail the nascent recovery from the coronavirus pandemic.

The brokerage group's latest forecast, which also factors in a hit to the Russian GDP, is much lower than its previous estimate of 2 per cent-2.5 per cent.

Any fiscal response will have only a limited impact, the brokerage said.

"This time around (unlike the Eurozone crisis, Covid-19 pandemic or the Global Financial Crisis), Eurozone core inflation is above comfort levels, wage growth is back to target levels and the room for fiscal largesse post-pandemic is more limited," Andrew Garthwaite wrote in a note.

The United States, however, seems more resilient, the economists said. US economic growth will probably fall by only 50-100 basis points to still be well above trend at about 3 per cent, Garthwaite estimated.

The European Union's statistics office estimated in January that gross domestic product in the 19 countries sharing the euro expanded a quarterly 0.3 per cent in October-December 2021, slowing sharply from 2.3 per cent growth in the previous three months.

Garthwaite maintained his "benchmark" rating on global equities after their recent downgrade last month.

Yesterday, Citigroup analysts said that the Russia-Ukraine crisis will dent global growth as oil and commodity prices soar, but the hit will be somewhat cushioned by China's push for economic stability and the strength of the US labor market.

UNESCO High Medal Awarded to Winners of Nezami Ganjavi Festival

TEHRAN (IP) - The Iranian artists, as the winners of the first International Nezami Ganjavi Award, received the UNESCO High Medal in honor of their works.

The ceremony in honor of Hakim Nezami Ganjavi was held in the presence of cultural and artistic figures in Tehran's Vahdat Hall, and the UNESCO High Prize was awarded to the ten winners of this cultural event.

The first International Nezami Ganjavi Award includes literature, studies on Nezami Ganjavi and his works, calligraphy, painting, performing arts, popular culture, and music, hosted by the National Commission for UNESCO-Iran.



Russia, Belarus Default Territory on Billions in Debt

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Russia and Belarus are edging close to default given the massive sanctions imposed against their economies by the United States and its allies over the war in Ukraine, the World Bank's chief economist, Carmen Reinhart, told Reuters.

The specter of Russia defaulting on \$40 billion of external bonds - its first major such default since the years following the 1917 Bolshevik revolution - has loomed large over markets since a raft of sanctions and countermeasures by Moscow have largely cut the country out of global financial markets.

"Both Russia and Belarus are in square default territory," Reinhart said in an interview. "They're not rated by the agencies as a selective default yet, but mighty close."

Fitch on Tuesday downgraded Russia's sovereign rating by six notches further into junk territory to "C" from "B," saying a default is imminent as sanctions and trade restrictions have undermined its willingness to service debt.

Reinhart said financial sector repercussions had been limited thus far, but risks could emerge if European financial institutions were more exposed to Russian debt than assumed.

Around half of Russia's sovereign hard-currency bonds are held by foreign investors and Moscow must make \$107 million in coupon payments on two bonds on March 16. Russian corporates have just under \$100 billion in international bonds outstanding.

Foreign banks have exposure of just over \$121 billion to Russia with much of that concentrated in European lenders, according to data from the Bank of International Settlements.

"I worry about what I do not see," Reinhart said. "Financial institutions are well-capitalized, but balance sheets are often opaque... There is the issue of Russian private sector defaults. One cannot be complacent." read more

China also rapidly expanded its lending to Russia

after its 2014 annexation of Crimea, she said.

Analysts say Ukraine will also need debt relief this year given its massive war-related outlays and a heavy debt burden of \$94.7 billion at the end of 2021, although the country has vowed to service its debt on time and in full.

Reinhart said it was reasonable to expect Ukraine to seek cash-flow relief, and expressed confidence that creditors would be receptive given the current situation. Ukraine could also miss an upcoming coupon payment, at least during the grace period, without its credit rating suffering, she said.

"Ukraine has and will have open doors given its very difficult financial situation," she said. "You're not declared in default as long as you're still within the grace period."

Ukraine's sovereign debt includes \$1.6 billion owed to Paris Club creditors, and \$4.9 billion to non-Paris Club creditors, most of which is held by China, according to debt experts.

Israel to Get...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran maintains an advisory mission in Syria at the request of the Arab country with the aim of helping it get rid of the foreign-backed militants who have been fighting the Syrian government since 2011. Back in 2017, Iran's advisory assistance helped Syria defeat the Daesh (ISIS) terrorist group.

Israel, however, has been a key supporter of the terrorist groups and has targeted the positions of Iran's military advisors as well as those of the Syrian army and resistance groups that have been fighting the terrorists.

In his remarks, Sharif also pointed to the successful launch of the IRGC's homegrown satellite Nour-2 into orbit, saying experience shows that the elite forces are vilified by ill-wishers whenever they act powerfully and defend the interests of the Iranian nation and the Islamic Revolution.

Irrespective of the enemy's psychological warfare, the IRGC "will continue its ideal movement with more strength and determination and will keep the enemies in isolation as a result of humiliation and despair," the IRGC spokesman added.

Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution stated that the Assembly of Experts plays an important role in strengthening the Islamic government, and he added, "The necessary condition for all legal institutions to be effective, such as the Assembly of Experts, is for them to act in accordance with the duties that the Constitution has specified for them."

The Leader continued, "The Assembly of Experts must carefully comply with the strict legal regulations regarding the person who is currently in the position of the Leader and the person who will later be elected to this position by the votes of the members of this Assembly."

He said that other organizations too, including the Administration and the Islamic Consultative Assembly, are also obliged to comply with the legal regulations. He emphasized, "The Administration should comply with the laws passed by the Islamic Consultative Assembly, and the Islamic Consultative Assembly too should not get involved in the affairs of the Executive Branch at all."

The Leader stated that strengthening the Islamic Republic brings national power and strength, "National strength is vital for every country. If any nation wishes to achieve independence and greatness, the ability to use its own vital resources at its own volition and resistance in the face of others' [illegitimate] demands, it should be strong. Otherwise, if it is weak, humiliated and intimidated, it will always have to worry about the transgressions of foreigner powers."

He described national strength as being an intertwined combination of different pillars. He explained it in this way, "Science and technology, thinking, reflection and free thought are some of the pillars of national strength. If there is no free thought and intellectual progress, science and technology will not be able to open the way."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution referred to "a strong security and defense," "the economy, the public well-being and the economic welfare of the people," "diplomatic strength and bargaining power for ensuring national interests at a regional and global level," "culture and lifestyle," and "an appealing logic that influences other nations" as being other branches of national strength. Furthermore, he stressed, "Attracting nations brings strategic depth for any country, and this is very important."

He added, "None of these branches of national strength should be eliminated in favor of other pillars and branches." Citing examples in this regard, Imam Khamenei stressed that proposals such as abandoning regional involvement in order to avoid giving the enemy an excuse and stopping scientific progress in the nuclear sciences are actually blows to national strength. He elaborated this point, "Regional involvement gives us strategic depth and more national strength. Why should we stop this approach? Progress in the nuclear sciences too is related to meeting the needs of the country in the near future. If we abandon these, toward whom should we stretch out our hand in a few years?"

Iran Economic...

FROM PAGE 1

The figure is consistent with reports suggesting that Iran's crude exports increased in third quarter of 2021 to levels not seen since 2018 when the United States imposed its sanctions on Tehran's energy trade.

The sanctions were meant to cause an economic collapse in Iran and force the country into giving up its nuclear and defense rights.

Highest GDP growth in the Iranian economic sectors in March-December was reported for manufacturing and mining as the sector expanded by 7.1%, said the report by Fars.

The Iranian services sector grew by 5.1% over the same period while the agriculture sector, a best performer of the economy in recent years, contracted by 3.9%, it added.

Tehran Criticizes...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's UN ambassador emphasized that Syria has complied with its obligations under the Convention and continues to cooperate with the OPCW, while providing regular information to the OPCW and the General Secretariat of the UN about the possession and use of chemical materials by some terrorist organizations in the country.

Takht-Ravanchi stated that Damascus has also provided the world body with information on the fabrication of chemical incidents by foreign-backed terrorist groups in order to blame the Syrian Army for such heinous acts.

"Iran reiterates its opposition to the use of chemical weapons by anyone, anywhere, at any time, and under any circumstances," he said.

Takht-Ravanchi concluded by saying, "Only the complete destruction and elimination of all chemical weapons on a global scale, as well as the implementation of all essential measures to prevent their production, can ensure that chemical weapons are never used again." The Western media and governments have repeatedly accused the Syrian government of using chemical weapons.

Syria, however, surrendered its stockpile of chemical weapons in 2014 to a joint mission led by the United States and the OPCW, which oversaw the destruction of the weaponry.

Non-Iranian Sources...

FROM PAGE 1

The eighth round of the Joint Commission meetings of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) kicked off on December 27, 2021. Representatives from Iran, the European Union and the P4+1 group of countries, including Britain, France, Russia, China plus Germany made efforts to finalize a draft text for a potential Vienna agreement and they are trying to take decisions on certain outstanding issues.

Fire Breaks out...

FROM PAGE 1

"The General Command of the Armed Forces confirms that its operations are continuing and escalating as long as the aggression and siege continue," Saree added.

Initially, Saudi authorities kept silent about the raid, but following Yemen's announcement, the kingdom's oil ministry admitted to the incident and said the drone attack had triggered a fire at the facility.

The ministry, however, claimed that the fire had been "brought under control." It added that the attack had caused no casualties and had not disrupted oil supplies.

Meanwhile, Yemen's al-Masirah television network reported a dozen air attacks on the country's northern province of Hajjah on Thursday evening, saying the Saudi jets bombarded the Harad and Hayran districts.

Fighter jets from the Royal Saudi Air Force also carried out six airstrikes on the al-Dhaher district, two raids on the Kitaf wa Al Boqe'e district and another two on the Shada'a district in the northwestern Yemeni province of Sa'ada. There were no immediate reports about possible casualties and the extent of damage caused.

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT

TENDER NO.:

48-32-0025002

شناسه آگهی: ۱۲۸۹۱۶۵

National Iranian South Oilfields Company (NISOC) intends to purchase the following goods

Items	Material Description	Quantity
01	2 7/8" HT-PAC DRILL PIPEAS BELOW SPECIFICATION : 1 1/2" TOOL JOINT ID, 2.151" BODY ID, S-135 GRADE, PSL2, WT 10.4 PPE , 2 7/8 HTPAC CONNECTION, 3 1/8" OD TOOL JOINT , RANG2, BOX TAPER 18 DEGREE, PIN TAPER 35 DEGREE , BOX TONG LT 13" PIN TONG LT 9", IU(INTERNAL UPSET), 31-32 FT JOINT LT, IPC-207 INTERNAL COATING, ACCORDING TO API SDP	37,200 FT

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tenders are requested to send their " [Intention To Participate](#)" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to Qualitative Assessment Form no. 1, available at: www.nisoc.ir, not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for participation in the tender will be disregarded.

The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 39,668 EURO or 10,867,317,850 RIAL, in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via: www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

ONLY ACCEPTABLE DELIVERY TERM IS D.D.P., NISOC'S WAREHOUSE, AGHAJARI, IRAN
PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL
NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

Bldg. No. 104, Material Procurement Management Complex, Kouy-e-Fadaeian Islam (New Site), Ahvaz, Iran
Tel. No.: 061 34 12 35 89 Fax No.: 061 34 45 74 37

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UEFA Opens Disciplinary Proceedings Against PSG Ppresident

NYON (Dispatches) - UEFA has opened disciplinary proceedings against Paris St Germain President Nasser Al Khelaifi and sporting director Leonardo following Wednesday's 3-1 Champions League defeat by Real Madrid.
 Spanish media reported that Al Khelaifi entered the match referee's dressing room shouting after the match, an incident recorded by a Real Madrid employee with a mobile phone.

Neto Signs New Wolves Deal

LONDON (AFP) - Portugal winger Pedro Neto celebrated his 22nd birthday by signing a new long-term contract at Wolves, committing himself to the Premier League club until 2027.
 Neto joined Wolves in 2019 from Italian club Lazio and has scored 10 times in 83 games in all competitions for club.
 He made his first start of the season in the defeat to Crystal Palace last weekend following a long stint on the sidelines because of injury.

Real Madrid, Man City Into Next Round of Champions League

MADRID (Dispatches) - Karim Benzema scored a quickfire hat-trick as Real Madrid fought back to beat Paris St Germain 3-1 on Wednesday and move into the Champions League quarter-finals 3-2 on aggregate.

Mbappe struck before halftime to put the French side 2-0 up in the last-16 tie and they created many chances to extend their lead as they dominated the first hour of the game.

Benzema equalized in the 61st minute, however, following a bad error from PSG goalkeeper Gianluigi Donnarumma who mishandled the ball inside the area and gifted it to the French striker.

Roared on by a sold-out crowd at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium and with PSG in panic mode, Benzema scored again in the 76th minute from Luka Modric's pass and grabbed his third two minutes later after another costly mistake by a PSG defender to send the record 13-times European champions into the last eight.

"We lost in the first leg, we were losing at the break... It was very hard, but this is a Champions League match and we are Real Madrid," Benzema told reporters.

"The comeback came due to a matter of mental strength. It was not a mistake by Donnarumma, it was my pressure on him. When we pressure like that, we can beat anyone. Every game is a final for us and today we saw that Real Madrid is alive."

PSG were aggressive from the start and knew exactly how to take advantage of Real's uncoordinated attempts to put them under pressure which left space for Neymar and Mbappe to exploit.

Mbappe had an effort ruled out after the video assistant referee spotted a narrow offside before putting PSG ahead when he ran on to a fine pass by Neymar.

The French side continued to dominate possession until Benzema took advantage of Donnarumma's error, a goal PSG coach Mauricio Pochettino felt should have been disallowed.



"It's a disgrace that in 2022 a goal like that stands, it was a clear foul by Benzema on the goalkeeper," Pochettino told a news conference. "After an injustice like that the team had a mental breakdown. It's a shame."

Meanwhile Manchester City sailed through to the Champions League quarter-finals after they played out a 0-0 draw against Sporting in their last-16 second leg, progressing 5-0 on aggregate.

City had already done the hard work in their thrashing of the Portuguese side in the first leg three weeks ago in Lisbon, and could take it easy against an inferior Sporting at the Etihad Stadium.

Coach Pep Guardiola could afford to make several changes to his starting team, with one of those players coming in — Raheem Sterling — going closest to scoring in the first half after his close-range effort was saved.

Brazilian forward Gabriel Jesus, making his first Champions League start of the season, did have the ball in the net early in the second half, but his clever finish was ruled out for offside after a VAR review.

Paulinho almost earned Sporting victory late on, but it was not to be as City held on in cruise control to progress.

Vardy Faces Weeks out With Knee Injury

LONDON (Dispatches) - Jamie Vardy will be out of action for "a few weeks" due to a knee injury, Leicester manager Brendan Rodgers said.

The England international sustained the knock in his side's 1-0 Premier League win against Leeds on Saturday, in which the forward was making his first start of 2022 after recovering from a hamstring injury.

"Vards will be out, he unfortunately got injured in the last game so he's going to be out for a few weeks, which is a shame," Rodgers said on the eve of his side's Europa Conference League last-16 first leg tie at home against Rennes.

"He got a knock to his knee, but hopefully in the next three to four weeks it responds OK. He just felt soreness the day after the game."

Rodgers said the setback was frustrating for the 35-year-old, who scored on his comeback appearance off the bench when the Foxes won 2-0 at Burnley last week.

"You see the difference he makes coming into the team, and so then for us it's frustrating because you miss that level of player."

James Maddison and James Justin are set to return from injury lay-offs on Thursday, but there will be no comeback yet for Wesley Fofana.

Suns Beat Heat to Seal NBA Playoff Berth

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Devin Booker returned from a four-game absence to power Phoenix over Miami 111-90 in a matchup of conference leaders, clinching an NBA playoff berth for the Suns.

Booker, back after being sidelined by Covid-19 protocols, scored a game-high 23 points, passed off nine assists, pulled down eight rebounds, made two steals and blocked two shots for the visitors, who improved to a league-best 53-13.

"I'm just trying to find my rhythm," Booker said. "I had a week off. I felt good. I was ready to get back at it."

The triumph was important to the Suns, who lost 123-100 to Miami at Phoenix on January 8.

"They came to our home court and kicked our ass so we wanted to make a statement here," Booker said.

Mikal Bridges added 21 points for Phoenix while Bahamas big man Deandre Ayton contributed 19 points and 10 rebounds.

Duncan Robinson led Miami with 22 points. The Heat were without star Jimmy Butler, out with sinus congestion.

The Suns stretched their lead in the Western Conference to 8.5 games over Memphis by dispatching the top club in the Eastern Conference, the Heat falling to 44-23.

Phoenix, which lost last year's NBA Finals to Milwaukee, improved to 22-0 this season when keeping an opponent under 100 points and became the first team to secure a post-season berth.

"The playoffs are upon us," Booker said. "We're looking forward to it. We don't want to fall short again."

Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 43 points and pulled down 12 rebounds to spark the reigning NBA champion Milwaukee Bucks over visiting Atlanta 124-115.

It was the sixth victory in a row for the Bucks, who pulled within two games of the Heat for the conference lead at 42-25. Trae Young led the Hawks with 27 points and 11 assists.

Houston rookie Jalen Green scored a season-high 32 points to power the Rockets to a 109-100 overtime home victory over the Los Angeles Lakers despite a triple double from LeBron James.

Chelsea Can Keep Playing After Abramovich Sanction



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's government said today it would enable football club Chelsea to continue playing matches after it imposed sanctions on its owner, Roman Abramovich, halting his plan to sell the English Premier League side.

Abramovich had put the club up for sale, but Britain's asset freeze and sanctions on him bar that process under the terms of the

license granted to the club.

Nadine Dorries, Britain's minister for sport, said the government had issued a special license to enable Chelsea to play fixtures, pay staff and enable ticket holders to attend matches, because it did not want to harm the reigning European and world football champions.

"I know this brings some uncertainty, but the government will work with the league and clubs to keep football being played while ensuring sanctions hit those intended," she said on Twitter. "Football clubs are cultural assets and the bedrock of our communities. We're committed to protecting them."

The government said the license would be kept under review.

Iran to Host West Asia Rugby Championship

IRAN NEWS SPORTS DESK

TEHRAN - Visiting Asia Rugby President Qais Abdulla Al Dhalai on Thursday met Head of Iran Rugby Association Mr. Mir Mehdi Hosseini and talked about Iran's hosting West Asia Rugby competition which will be Iran's first ever international rugby tournament.

Speaking at a presser after the meeting, the Emirati President of Asia Rugby Mr. Al Dhalai hailed Iran's hospitality, adding that he had meetings with Iran's youth and sport minister, Head of Iran National Olympic Committee and President of Iran Federation Sport Associations during his first day visit on Wednesday and he had good talks with them and also with the president of Iran Rugby Association Mr. Hosseini and during visits they talked about Iran's rugby and its progress. He noted he believes Iran's rugby has progressed significantly in the past six years in terms of structure and during Mr. Hosseini's tenure, everybody has been witnessing growing trend.

Al Dhalai added that men's rugby team of Iran won silver in the West Asian championship and women's team won bronze in this tournament and these results show that Iran's rugby is on right track. He noted that Iran's rugby can gain experience during Asian Games Hangzhou 2022 and Asian Youth championship.

He added that Iran in the past 10 years has not hosted any rugby tournament and Asia Rugby is willing the third division competition of the West Asian Championship to be held in Iran, adding that five teams are in the third division and Iran and Lebanon had presented their bids to host it that after Wednesday meeting with Iranian officials it was decided Iran to host this competition on May 9-14.

He also hailed the performance of current president of Iran Rugby Association Mr. Hosseini who has been in office for two years, adding that Mr. Hosseini did his best for participation of Iran's women's and men's teams in the West Asia and it proved he is moving on right track.

He reiterated that rugby is among Olympic sport events.



Djokovic Withdraws From Indian Wells

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - World number two Novak Djokovic has withdrawn from the BNP Paribas Open in Indian Wells, the tournament announced on Wednesday, in the latest setback for the player due to his refusal to take the Covid-19 vaccine.

The Serb had been automatically listed in the draw for the tournament but said he knew it was unlikely that he would be able to gain entry into the United States.

"The (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) has confirmed that regulations won't be changing so I won't be able to play in the US," Djokovic said in a tweet.

"Good luck to those playing in these great tournaments," he said, referring also to the Miami Open, which begins later this month.

Bulgarian Grigor Dimitrov will move into Djokovic's space in the draw ahead of the start of the first round of the Masters 1000 tournament on Thursday.

Djokovic was unable to compete at the Australian Open after immigration authorities detained him on Jan. 6, prompting a legal rollercoaster ride over the country's Covid-19 entry rules that led to the cancellation of his visa later that month.

Rafa Nadal went on to win the tournament and with it a men's record 21st Grand Slam title, one more than Djokovic and Roger Federer.

Djokovic most recently competed in Dubai in February, where Czech Jiri Vesely upset him in the quarter-finals.

The loss meant he would lose his world number one ranking to Russian Daniil Medvedev, who claimed his maiden major title in Flushing Meadows in September and is the top seed at Indian Wells.

