

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 138,949 With 118 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Saeed Khatibzadeh During His Meeting With Students in Mashhad Announced That All Sanctions Which Bar Iran's Economic Benefits Have to Be Removed

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IRGC Targets Mossad Bases in Erbil

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has issued a stern warning to Israel following a retaliatory missile strike on the "strategic center of Zionist conspiracy and evil" in the northern Iraqi Kurdistan city of Erbil.

In a statement issued Sunday, the IRGC indicated that the operation was in response to an Israeli airstrike on the Syrian capital of Damascus last Monday, in which two IRGC officers were killed.

"Following the recent crimes of the fake Zionist regime and the previous announcement that the crimes and evils of this infamous regime will not go unanswered, the strategic center for conspiracy and evil of the Zionists was targeted by powerful and pinpoint missiles of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps," it said.

Scores of ballistic missiles hit secret Mossad bases in Erbil, reportedly leaving several Israeli operatives dead.

Citing security sources, Iraq's Sabereen News reported that two Mossad training centers were targeted by ballistic missiles in the early hours of Sunday. **See Page 7**

Iran Temporarily Suspends Talks With Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reportedly suspended a fifth round of talks with Saudi Arabia, which was slated to be held in Iraq next week as part of a diplomatic process aimed at mending troubled ties between the two Persian Gulf neighbors.

Nournews, which is affiliated to Iran's Supreme National Security Council, reported on Sunday that the Iranian side had "unilaterally and temporarily" suspended the talks.

The development comes as Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein revealed during remarks at a diplomatic forum in Antalya on Turkey's southern coast that Baghdad was going to host another round of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia on Wednesday.

The report did not provide any reason for the suspension or a specific date for a new round of talks.

The two Middle East heavyweights have held four rounds of talks in Iraq since last April, including a meeting in December under the administration of President Ebrahim Raeisi, who assumed office in mid-2021. **See Page 7**

Gov't Not to Extend Ban On Car Imports in June



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade says the government will not extend ban on imports of cars to the country from next June.

Speaking on a TV program, Seyed Reza Fatemi Amin said that the government will not extend the ban on imports of cars and when the deadline of the ban ends in June, the government will not extend it.

He went on to say that decision to slap ban on car imports was aimed at managing the forex consumption in the country and it was not aimed at improving the quality of cars. He said the demand for cars in the country is over 1.5m while its supply is around one million and therefore demand has exceeded supply and if the domestic carmakers fail to fill this gap, the country will need imports and government will not extend ban. He added that next year the country does not face the forex restrictions like in 2019 and this year the forex balance is in good position and non-oil exports exceed \$47b and for this reason there will be no force for extending ban on car imports.

Fatemi Amin went on to say that the ministry has set a goal for improving the auto industry in the country and carmakers have to improve quality of their products. He reiterated that ministry has set production of 1.5 cars for next year to meet the market demands. He said that production of three old models of cars will be stopped and three new models of cars will roll on the streets.

He admitted existence of mafia in the field of cars and their interests do not let this industry improve. He said existing weaknesses and defects of auto industry can be resolved and automakers should do their best.

Fatemi Amin also said that inflation is the long term malady of Iran's economy and the country has been struggling with it for years. He noted that liquidity, production and foreign prices (forex and tariffs) are the other important factors in inflation and these factors account for 80% of inflation issues.

He admitted the country lags in production and its development and most platforms of production lines are old.

He reiterated that the government is determined to bring back the country's production to the level of 2018 and 2019 with 9% economic growth next year. He emphasized that the country has enough infrastructure to reach 8% economic growth.

Tehran Slams Sweden's Anti-HR Measures Against Iranians

IRAN NEW POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Deputy for Iran's Judiciary and Secretary of the county's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi criticized Sweden's allegations and anti-human rights measures against an Iranian national named Hamid Noori.

Gharibabadi said that Noori was trapped in 2018 in Stockholm airport under the pretext of a complaint case filed based on unfounded allegations. The Swedish attorney asked the court to issue Noori's arrest warrant without adequate and comprehensive investigation, leading to violation of the presumption of innocence principle and the right to freedom of movement in relation to the aforementioned, Gharibabadi added.

He also said that Noori was kept in solitary confinement for 21 months from his arrest until the investigations were over which proves that his arrest was arbitrary and without documented proof.

The Iranian official accused Sweden of violating the 1963 Vienna Convention on Consular Relations and failing to inform Iran of the arrest.

Swedish official have refused to let Noori's family meet him, although they have travelled the country twice, according to Gharibabadi who also added that Swedish official have deprived Noori of access to medical treatment.

Noori has also been humiliated and tortured by Swedish officials and has been undress in front of the female agents against his own desire, Iran's human rights official noted.

Gharibabadi also firmly criticized Sweden's support of terrorist groups like Alahwaziah and the MEK, saying that Sweden has turned into a command center of anti-Iran terrorism in Europe.

Later in an interview with PressTV Gharibabadi slammed the U.S. and the Western European countries for politicizing human rights issue as a pressure tool against non-aligned countries.

He said the Islamic Republic is against imposing a set of "unified rights standards" on other countries and urges respect for cultural diversity in this regard.

"Human rights is human rights. If it is violated, it is bad everywhere, whether in Iran or other countries. We do not have bad or good violation of human rights, but what we are witnessing is a political approach towards human rights," he explained.

"The Western European countries and the United States have this selective approach, unfortunately. So, the countries that are not allies to these states are under political pressure in international human rights mechanisms and structures because they are going to abuse human rights as a political tool to achieve their own foreign policy goals." Gharibabadi also noted that there are countries with no democratic structures, which are immune from being criticized at international organizations.

ViewPoint Non-Stop Crimes Against Muslims

For years Zionist regime has been busy with committing crimes against Muslims, mainly Palestinians, and its crime has gone unnoticed by the international bodies and recently Saudi-led coalition has joined the Zionist wagon to commit crimes against Yemenis with no concern about getting due punishments from the international bodies or countries.

In recent days while the world and especially the United Nations have been mobilized against Russia to punish this country regarding Ukraine war, Zionists and Saudi-led coalition forces continue their crimes comfortably without getting any even small condemnation from the UN.

It seems crimes against Muslims will continue non-stop mostly by Zionists and by some so-called Muslim states while the world is indifferent towards Muslims' condition in Palestine and Yemen.

On Tuesday, the secretary general of Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement sharply criticized the United States for exercising double standards on human rights, saying Washington has remained silent on decades of Israeli atrocities against Palestine as well as the horrendous criminal acts that the Saudi-led coalition is perpetrating in war-torn Yemen.

"While U.S. officials accuse Russia of committing war crimes in Ukraine, they tend to turn a blind eye to the atrocities committed against civilians in all their wars. The United States has carried out crimes worldwide, spanning from Japan to Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Somalia. U.S. warplanes have bombed Afghan weddings, turning them into funerals," Seyed Hassan Nasrallah said in a televised speech broadcast live from Beirut.

He added, "What can Americans say about the massacres being perpetrated by Zionists in Palestine and Israel's war crimes? What can they say about the siege of the Gaza Strip? What can they say about the massacres of the Saudi-American aggression in Yemen? What can they say about the blockade of Yemen?"

The Hezbollah chief noted that thousands of trials should be held to bring American and European military officials to justice for crimes committed in Algeria, Libya and elsewhere in the world.

He also lambasted the international community's apathy towards Friday's attack on a Shia mosque in Pakistan's northwestern city of Peshawar, which killed at least 61 people and injured another 196, stating that the bombers who carried out the attack were US creations and instructed to play out the scenario. **See Page 7**

Iran Foreign Trade Expected to Hit \$100b

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran's Export Confederation, Mohammad Lahouti said that the country's foreign trade is expected to reach \$100bn by March 20 when the current Iranian year ends.

Lahouti told reporters that Iran's exports surpassed \$43bn and imports were worth \$46bn during the first eleven months of the current Iranian year that started on March 21, 2021. Taking those figures into account, he said, Iran's foreign trade stood at \$90bn during the mentioned period, which is expected to increase to \$100bn in the remaining days of the Iranian year 1400.

Lahouti said, during 1400, intermediate goods made up 85% of imports, which indicates that production has improved.

He said the government's policy is to increase exports, but when exports are reduced, limitations will be put on imports accordingly. He added that at the current conditions, exports and imports grew 40% and 36% respectively. **See Page 7**

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Iranian Army Unveils Newly-Built Trailer Trucks

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Army Ground Forces held an unveiling ceremony of trailer trucks that were built by the young Iranian experts at the army.

An unveiling ceremony was held with the participation of Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Forces Brigadier General Amir Nozar Nemati at Shahid Zarahran technical base in Tehran on Sunday to unveil newly manufactured and engineered trailer trucks that are capable of carrying huge shipments.

The trailer trucks could carry loads that weigh 50 to 60 tons.

Intelligence Forces Urged to Fight Injustice

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Emphasizing that our culture is the culture of Martyr Qassem Soleimani, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi emphasized, "Thinking revolutionary, acting revolutionary, not being influenced by politicians, and pursuing affairs with firmness and completing them are the characteristics of the forces of the Ministry of Intelligence".

Speaking in a meeting with the Minister, managers and staff of the Ministry of Intelligence on the occasion of the week commemorating the anonymous soldiers of Imam Zaman (AS) appreciated the hard work of Ministry of Intelligence staff.

The President explained the serious duties and missions of the Ministry of Intelligence and noted, "The most important mission of the Ministry of Intelligence is to preserve and protect the system and assets of the Islamic Revolution".

"Today, all the capitals and capacities of the country in the economic, cultural, scientific fields and components of the strength and power of the nation, such as the "faith and trust of the people" are threatened by the enemies," he said.

In honor of the memory of the martyrs of the Ministry of Intelligence, the President stated, "We must recognize the dimensions of the fight against the enemy and take strong steps in this direction".

Stating that efforts should be made to promote valuable work and there are no shortcomings, Raisi added, "Today, the best people who can evaluate the record of the Ministry of Intelligence are the forces of this ministry, from veterans to youth and the developments of the Islamic Revolution".

He said, "Whenever you are satisfied with the current situation, you will face problems in the future, so you need to change things to progress".

The President outlined three basic steps for transformation, adding, "The first step is a change in approaches. The second step is transformation of processes. The third step is institutional transformation".

Raisi emphasized, "The most important component of power is the presence of religious people, and these people should increase their trust in the administrative system and its efficiency day by day".



Emphasizing that the Ministry of Intelligence is a valuable fruit of the Islamic Revolution that must be protected, the President stated, "The protection of this complex requires its members to be careful about the enemy's influence and creating deviations."

He added, "Another component of power is an efficient administrative system. The administrative system of the country can be trustworthy, participatory and satisfactory, but this administrative system may also be damaged, which also causes the components of power to be damaged. Therefore, the administrative complexes of the country must be protected so that corruption and unhealthy relations do not enter it".

Raisi underscored that the Ministry of Intelligence should be at the forefront of pursuing the demands of the people and said, "Today, we need to increase public participation of 80 million people because in the Popular Government, the people are trustworthy and guard the country alongside the security apparatus".

Explaining the security duties of organizations and departments, the President emphasized, "The security guards are the eyes of the Ministry of Intelligence and the system and should not allow corruption to bother the people".

Raisi stressed that the intelligence services should have convergence, cooperation and overlap with each other, underscoring, "The Ministry of Intelligence should be a pioneer in recognizing issues and problems and provide solutions to pursue the result".

The President emphasized, "Today, giving ground to the revolutionary forces with Basiji thinking in the Ministry of Intelligence should be more than all other apparatuses".

Raisi emphasized, "In the thirteenth government, there is no "we cannot" and "there is no credit". Our culture is the culture of Martyr Qassem Soleimani and "we can".

Baghdad Keen on Establishing Best Ties With Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein has expressed his country's readiness to establish the best relationship with neighboring states in particular the Islamic Republic of Iran.

The Iraqi FM made the remarks in a meeting with Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister Mohammad-Hassan Sheikholslami on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomatic Forum in Turkey Thursday night.

The Iraqi Ministry of Foreign Affairs reported that the two sides reviewed the political and security situation in the West Asia region as well as the pace of nuclear talks between Iran and the P4+1 group (Britain, France, Russia, China plus Germany) and its positive outcome on peace and security in the region.

Hussein emphasized on the deep ties between Iraq and Iran based on interests of both nations, saying that the today's relationships of world countries are founded on joint interests, fight against common threats and consolidation of social ties among nations.

The Iraqi top diplomat and Iran's deputy FM also discussed the negative repercussions of current crisis between Russia and Ukraine on global economy as well as the need for enhancing joint efforts to confront existing challenges in order to guarantee stability and development in Iraq and Iran.

For his part, Sheikholslami underlined that one of principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran's foreign policy is supporting Iraq in numerous fields and assisting reconstruction of cities of the war-torn neighboring country.

Baghdad and Tehran have tried to consolidate mutual cooperation in different arenas in recent years following the downfall of the Baathist regime in Iraq.

The Iraqi foreign minister visited Tehran in December and held talks with some Iranian high-ranking officials such as President Ebrahim Raisi and his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian, discussing ways to expand cooperation in different fields.

No Country More Important For Iran Than Azerbaijan

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - No country is as important to Iran as Azerbaijan, Iranian MP and Spokesman for the National Security and Foreign Policy Committee of the Iranian Parliament Mahmoud Abbaszadeh Meshkini told Trend.

According to Abbaszadeh Meshkini, Iran's new government attaches special importance to neighboring countries. Among the neighboring countries, Azerbaijan has a special place for Iran. There are many ties between Iran and Azerbaijan.

The spokesman added that after the new government came to power in Iran (August 2021), a number of meetings were held between various officials, including the presidents of the two countries.

"The Iranian Ministry Foreign Affairs is working to remove all obstacles to strengthening relations between the two countries. Currently, there are almost no obstacles for the development of relations between the two countries. In this regard, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian submitted a special report to the Iranian parliament on strengthening relations, and steps are being taken in accordance with this report," he said.

The MP also noted that one of the tasks of the Iranian Oil Ministry is to establish relations with Azerbaijan in the oil sector. Within the meeting of the presidents of Azerbaijan and Iran in Ashgabat, Turkmenistan, talks were held in the field of energy and an agreement was reached. Based on this, Iran's relations with Azerbaijan in the energy sector could reach a maximum level.

5,500 Housing Projects Inaugurated Across Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - 5,500 housing projects in 13 provinces of Iran were inaugurated via video conference on Sunday morning.

The Minister of Labor, Cooperation and Social Welfare Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki and the Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Ghasemi attended the ceremony held at the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development.

Rostam Ghasemi stated that in the next year's budget, the National Housing Fund has a budget of 30,000 billion tomans, and in this regard, sufficient authority has been given to the governors. He noted that the volume of provided land has been acceptable from the beginning of the Raisi administration, and by the end of next year, the administration will fulfill its obligations in the field of housing.

Alborz, Bushehr, Tehran, Khorasan Razavi, Khuzestan, Sistan and Baluchestan, Qom, Kerman, Kermanshah, Gilan, Lorestan, Mazandaran, and Hormozgan were the 13 provinces in which housing projects were inaugurated today (Sunday) in line with the Mehr National Housing Plan.

Iran, Qatar FMs Discuss Bilateral Ties, JCPOA on Phone

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign ministers of Iran and Qatar have stressed the need for pursuing agreements that the two sides reached during the last month visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the Arab country.

On Saturday, Iran's top diplomat Hossein Amirabdollahian held a phone conversation with Qatari foreign minister and deputy prime minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

The two officials also discussed the latest regional and international developments as well as the ongoing talks in Vienna to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, known as the Comprehensive Plan of Action, or the JCPOA.

Amirabdollahian criticized the US for bringing up new issues in the Vienna talks and stressed that Iran is seriously working in order for a good, strong and sustainable agreement to be reached on the revival of the JCPOA.

The Qatari foreign minister, for his part, said it is important that Iran and other parties to the Vienna negotiations are making efforts to reach an agreement.

He also stressed the importance of relations between Iran and Qatar as well as the positive outcomes of President Raisi's visit to Doha.

Raisi arrived in the Qatari capital on February 21 for a two-day visit. There, he attended the 6th summit of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum. The Iranian president also held high-level talks with Qatari Emir Tamim bin Hamad al-Thani. During the trip, Iran and Qatar signed several agreements aimed at boosting their relations.

The administration of President Raisi says developing ties with neighboring countries is a priority of its foreign policy. 1424

Key for Iran to Have Friendly Ties With Neighbors

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, in a message to his Azerbaijani counterpart, has said that friendly ties with neighboring countries, especially Muslim states, has a special place in Iran's foreign policy.

In his message, Amirabdollahian congratulated Jeyhun Bayramov on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between Azerbaijan and Iran.

Amirabdollahian said the Republic of Azerbaijan has a top place in Iran's foreign policy, due to historical, cultural and religious connections. He added that based on these factors, Iran has always supported the territorial integrity of Azerbaijan.

The top Iranian diplomat expressed satisfaction that Tehran-Baku relations over the past 30 years have been based on mutual respect and covered different fields such as energy and transportation. Amirabdollahian said the existing capacities of the two countries will open new horizons for further developing bilateral relations, and called for efforts to use those capacities.

The Azeri foreign minister also sent a message to Amirabdollahian, congratulating him on the 30th anniversary of the establishment of diplomatic relations between the two countries.

Bayramov said the relations are based on friendship, good-neighborliness as well as historical, cultural and religious commonalities.

He referred to a summit of the Economic Cooperation Organization that took place in Turkmenistan's capital in November last year. Bayramov said the summit and the talks that Iranian and Azeri presidents held on the sidelines of that event gave a boost to Tehran-Baku efforts to further expand their ties.

The Azeri foreign minister stressed that bilateral relations continue to grow in different fields including economy and transport, and added that joint projects the two sides have carried out in the past years help them boost their relations too.

Over the past years, Bayramov further said, parliaments and other governmental bodies of Iran and Azerbaijan have established mutual ties and their cooperation is continuing successfully.

He said the two countries will definitely continue efforts to deepen their ties and bolster cooperation in accordance with their national interests.

Iran Opposed to U.S., NATO's Swallowing of World

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran has adopted an independent stance on the war in Ukraine based on its foreign policy, the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry said, voicing Tehran's opposition to devouring of the world by the U.S. and NATO.

In remarks at a meeting of the Iranian university students and professors, held in Mashhad on Saturday, Saeed Khatibzadeh said the international system has been undergoing changes since the dissolution of the Soviet Union, and the ground for the current war between Russia and Ukraine has been prepared since three decades ago.

Highlighting Iran's independent stances on the Ukraine war on the basis of its foreign policy, the spokesman said the Islamic Republic is opposed to war and swallowing of the world by the US and NATO.

Iran is not the satellite state of any country, he underlined, adding, "We are strong enough and will spare no effort to protect the country's national interests, independence and territorial integrity."

Khatibzadeh also emphasized that Iran will not allow any country to interfere in its internal affairs.

Iran Keen on Gas Export To Neighbors

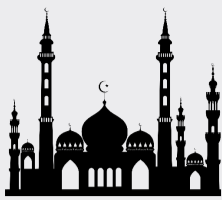
TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) voiced Iran's preparedness to export natural gas to its neighbors such as Turkey, Iraq, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, etc.

Regarding Turkmenistan, Majid Chegeni said the National Iranian Gas Company has focused its efforts on attracting gas to the southern borders and importing gas to Iran.

He said the NIGC plans for cooperation with Turkey and Iraq, to which the Iranian gas transmission infrastructure is now connected, is primarily focused on implementation its current contracts at full capacity, and in the next step, by developing the transmission infrastructure, enhance trade capacity between the two countries.

Chegeni added: "Countries with which there is currently no infrastructure connection are divided into two categories; first, the countries where the pipeline infrastructure network is designed to transport gas, such as Pakistan and to some extent Afghanistan and Oman, about which we are trying to provide the ground for implementation of these projects and the relevant gas contract to be signed and implemented."

In the case of other neighboring countries, where little work has been done and pipelines have not been designed, efforts are being made to work closely with these countries to define joint projects.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:13
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:28
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:51
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:15

45. When they are told, "Fear ye that which is before you and that which will be after you, in order that ye may receive Mercy," (they turn back).
46. Not a Sign comes to them from among the Signs of their Lord, but they turn away therefrom.

Surah 36, Ya-sin (45 - 46)

Shafei Warns Over Rise In Number of Free Zones

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCMIA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei warned over the rise in the number of free zones in the country and reiterated it seems there is no logic behind it.

Addressing the gathering of representatives of the chamber which was held in the presence of free zone officials, Shafei said that free zones have been one of the important tools of the governments in promoting trade and strengthening exports in the developed countries, adding that when we compare the performance of free zones of the country with successful countries like Taiwan, China and South Korea, we see many weaknesses and shortages in free zones of the country from their establishment.

He noted that study shows that free zones in the under developed countries which have insignificant share of the global markets can have destructive effects, adding that free zones were formed to boost blessing of international trade and to protect the domestic protection capacity from being elimination on this course.

He then highlighted major goals and performance of free zones, adding that Iran is gradually becoming fully free zones but it is still unknown with which infrastructure it happens, noting that the launch of free zones should be after thorough technical and economic studies.



Shafei also reacted to the Vienna talks and Ukraine war and said they will have their own consequences on Iran's economy. He criticized Covid pandemic, sanctions and management in recent years as the main reasons for economic flop, adding that all economic activities have been just for survival rather than developing.

He noted if the Vienna talks end successfully and sanctions are lifted, country is necessary to change its economic management towards developmental economy, something that the country has been missing it in the past years.

He also warned over opening the borders for imports of useless commodities which will hurt the economy, adding that it may reduce the forex rate for short term but it will hurt the economy in long term.

Shafei urged the government to study the past decisions to avoid their repetitions and called for control of the inflation and fore market which are essential for having a stable economy.

Call for Nomination: The 2023 Mustafa (PBUH) Prize

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The nomination for the fifth round of Mustafa (PBUH) Prize has been opened.

The 2023 Mustafa (PBUH) Prize Award Ceremony will be held in October 2023, announcing the Mustafa (PBUH) Prize Laureates from the Islamic World.

The Mustafa (PBUH) Prize is awarded in the four categories of Information and Communication Science and Technology, Life and Medical Science and Technology, Nanoscience and Nanotechnology, and Basic and Engineering Sciences.

In this round of the Mustafa (PBUH) Prize, a prize is also awarded to scientists residing in the Islamic countries regardless of their religion with the aim of developing science and technology in these countries.

The nominees can only be nominated by renowned scientists and/or one of the following scientific institutions: universities and research centers, Science and technology associations and centers of excellence, academies of sciences, and science and technology parks.

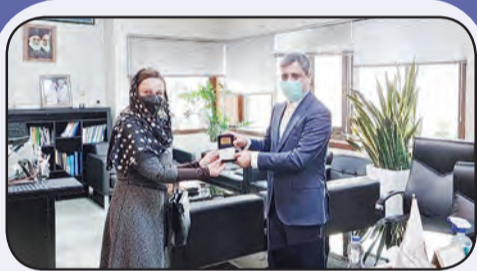
The prize includes the Mustafa (PBUH) Medal, the Prize Certificate, and a special cash gift that is provided from the endowment of science and technology, and so far more than 400 benefactors from different countries as members of the Khadem Al-Mustafa (PBUH) community have supported this scientific-cultural movement.

The deadline for nominations is August 31, 2022.

For more information about the criteria and submit a nomination, visit www.mustafaprize.org



Sofia Ready to Boost Trade With Tehran



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Bulgarian ambassador to Tehran, Nikolina Kuneva has announced her country's readiness to set up a joint economic committee with Iran and boost trade with the Islamic Republic.

The Bulgarian envoy made the comment in a meeting with deputy Iranian minister of Industry, Mine and Trade, Ali Rasouliaan.

Kuneva referred to the decades-long relations between Tehran and Sofia, and said there are still untapped economic capacities which the two sides can use to bolster their ties.

She also said that it is a great chance for the Bulgarian Small and Medium Enterprises Promotion Agency (BSMEPA) to have cooperation with Iran's Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO).

The Bulgarian envoy called for increased direct ties between small and medium companies of the two countries, and said that based on a new memorandum of understanding Tehran and Sofia will formulate, the BSMEPA and ISIPO will play key roles in expanding economic relations between the two parties.

She said the Covid pandemic has reduced the volume of trade between Iran and Bulgaria to less than \$100mn, and expressed hope that the figure would surpass \$110mn this year through cooperation between the two organizations.

The Bulgarian ambassador also expressed hope that trade and economic ties between her country and Iran would be facilitated once restrictions on Iran are removed as a result of the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal.

The Iranian official, for his part, stressed that trade and economic ties between the two countries should be increased. He also stressed the importance of supporting small and medium industries with the help of private sector.

Rasouliaan referred to the huge capacity existing across Iran, and said, there are more than 48,000 economic enterprises in 832 industrial parks and zones, 81 specialized industrial zones, 4 special economic zones as well as 6 high-tech parks across the country, and invited Bulgarian investors to make investment in Iran.

He also said Iran and Bulgaria can have cooperation in other fields including dairy products and related industries, auto parts and herbal medicine.

The Iranian official expressed hope that the new MoU that Tehran and Sofia are working on results in the expansion of cooperation between economic enterprises of the two countries.

The Bulgarian ambassador was the second European diplomat to meet with the deputy Iranian minister of industry, mine and trade over the past month. The other European official was the German ambassador to Tehran, who also held talks with Rasouliaan on how to bolster cooperation between small and medium companies of Germany and Iran. 1424

German Firm Inks MOU With MERDCI

TEHRAN (MNA) - Micro Electronics Research Center of Iran (MERDCI) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the German firm Dr. Heigenbart Unternehmensberatung GMBH & Co. to cooperate in the manufacturing of solar panels and modules.

As reported, the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICMIA)'s Energy Committee has been the coordinator for the signing of the mentioned MOU, the ICMIA portal reported.

In this regard, Arash Najafi, chairman of the mentioned committee, stressed that transferring new technologies to Iran is one of the main priorities of the ICMIA Energy Committee.

Based on the mentioned MOU, the German company is going to install a fully automatic production line for the manufacturing of solar panels in the central Fars Province.

In this memorandum, it is emphasized to use the maximum capacity of domestic manpower, resources, and materials to facilitate the technology transfer.

Najafi pointed to the said MOU as a step towards the development of technological capabilities and engineering of solar power plants in the country and noted that: "This memorandum provides a comprehensive mechanism to ensure the improvement of domestic technology in the mentioned area."

He also announced the launch of a consortium comprising of the private sector companies active in the field of energy and added: "This consortium is also going to sign an agreement with the mentioned German company to transfer technology while producing solar panels and promote self-sufficiency in this section."

"We have also put the export of solar panels on the agenda," Najafi said.

Iran Knowledge-Based Firms to Participate in Russia NEFTEGAZ

TEHRAN (MNA) - Several Iranian knowledge-based companies are set to participate in the 21st International Exhibition for Equipment and Technologies for Oil and Gas Industries (NEFTEGAZ) in the Russian capital of Moscow.

Head of the International Science and Technology Interaction Center of the Iranian Science and Technology Vice-Presidency Mehdi Ghalenoei announced the upcoming International Exhibition for Equipment and Technologies for Oil and Gas Industries (NEFTEGAZ) will host a number of knowledge-based companies.

The 21st NEFTEGAZ will be held in Moscow on April 18-21, 2022.

The exhibition and forum bring together the whole industry to show all new products and trends.

Electricity Production Growth Drops by 42%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - New figures from Iran's ministry of electricity show that despite targeting 3,500 mw of electricity generation growth this year, only 965 mw of new power plants have been launched in the past 11 months.

These figures represent the slowest growth rate in decades, with the exception of 2015. Over the past three years, only half of Iran's electricity generation growth goals have been met.

On the other hand, Iran's electricity exports fell by 42 percent in the first 11 months of this solar year to 5 twh.

Last year, following the electricity deficit, Iran at times doubled its electricity imports and added more than 10 percent this year to electricity imports.

In addition to failing to meet the goals of electricity generation growth, a significant drop in hydropower generation due to drought has also affected the country's severe electricity deficit. Ministry of energy statistics show that last year electricity generation from hydropower plants fell by a third and dropped again this year by nearly 44 percent.

One way to compensate for the drop in electricity generation from clean sources was to develop solar and wind renewable energy projects.

Tehran to Host Azerbaijani Corridor Bypassing Armenia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Azerbaijan have agreed to build a transport corridor that links the Caucasian state to its exclave of Nakhchivan bypassing Armenia through the Iranian territory.

Tehran and Baku had reportedly signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) on building the 55-Kilometer Zangezur-Nakhchivan highway through Iran.

The MoU was signed between Azerbaijan's Deputy Prime Minister Shahin Mustafayev and visiting Iranian transportation minister Rostam Qassemi.

However, details of the project published in the Azerbaijani media showed that the link connecting Zangezur in west Azerbaijan to Nakhchivan will be in the form of a corridor that runs just five kilometers from the border between Iran and Armenia and will include railways, roads and electricity transfer facilities.

Baku had been seeking to set up a similar corridor to Nakhchivan through the Armenian territory in return for granting access to Armenia to a corridor that connects the country to Karabakh region inside Azerbaijan.

The idea has been mooted periodically since the end of a war between Azerbaijan and Armenia in July 2020. However, it has been rejected by Armenia while getting a cold reception from Iran.

Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev said in a Saturday meeting with Qassemi that the corridor between Zangezur and Nakhchivan through Iran will become a major transit route in the region.

Aliyev's foreign policy advisor Hikmat Hajiyev also described the signing of the MoU on the project as a historic event.

"Armenia's policy of blockade of Nakhchivan over many years will be ceased thanks to the implementation of this project," Hajiyev was quoted as saying by Azerbaijan's official Azertac news agency.

Simultaneous Unloading of 3 Ships Carrying Basic Goods at Chabahar Port

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Director

General of Ports and

Marines Organization of

Sistan and Baluchestan

announced simultaneous

docking of three ships

carrying basic goods at

Shahid Beheshti Port of

Chabahar which shows 73%

growth in loading and

unloading of basic goods at

Chabahar Port comparing to

the same period last year.

Behrouz Aqaei announced the news and said that

unloading operation of three vessels carrying basic goods of

wheat and rice with the weight around 139,000 tons is

underway at Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar and three

vessels carrying wheat and corn wit weight of 200,000 tons

at Chabahar Port quay is waiting for formality process.

Aqaei went on to say that operation of loading and

unloading of basic goods of basic goods in Chabahar

Port this year has grown by 73% comparing to the same

period last year. He added that Chabahar Port after

Imam Khomeini (R) and Shahid Rajaei Port is the third

port of entry of these kinds of goods.



Isfahan to Host 3rd Exhibition on Home Jobs, Self-Occupation Industries

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The third exhibition on home jobs, self-occupation industries, traditional arts and industries with an approach of supporting Iranian products will be held in Isfahan.

According to the public relations of Isfahan Province International Exhibition Company (IPIECO), this exhibition will be held on 15-18 March and it will provide the ground for 160 businesses in four main categories of food industries, traditional and handicrafts industries, apparel and textiles and auxiliary services to put on display their goods and services for the public.

The exhibition will be held on an area around 9,000 square meters with the presence of companies and businesses from Tehran, Isfahan, East Azarbaijan, Hamedan, Kurdistan, Zanjan, Razavi Khorasan, Yazd, Chaharmahal and Bakhtiari, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer Ahmad, Lorestan and Gilan provinces.

The interesting point of this exhibition is that most of participants and businesses attending the exhibition are from help-seekers and members under the support of certain organs.

The exhibition will be open to the public from 10 to 20 hrs. on March 15-18 at Isfahan International Exhibition located at the East Ring Road opposite of Roshan Dasht district.

China Daily Local COVID Cases Hit Two-Year High

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Mainland China reported more than 1,500 new local COVID-19 infections on Saturday, the most since the first nationwide outbreak in early 2020, as the Omicron variant prompted Beijing to introduce self-testing kits for the first time.

China's current case count is far fewer than those of many other countries, but the growing number could complicate Beijing's "dynamic-clearance" ambition to suppress contagion as quickly as possible.

The National Health Commission on Saturday said it had found 476 locally transmitted cases for Friday, including five people initially classified as asymptomatic who developed symptoms later.



Vatican Protests Over Expulsion of Its Ambassador to Nicaragua

VATICAN CITY (Dispatches) - The Vatican protested to Nicaragua over the effective expulsion of its ambassador to Managua, saying the unilateral action was unjustified and incomprehensible.

Archbishop Waldemar Sommertag, who was ambassador since 2018, had to leave the country suddenly this week after the government of President Daniel Ortega withdrew its diplomatic approval of the envoy, known in diplomatic language as an agreement.

Sommertag had been critical of the Central American country's slide away from democracy. "(The Holy See) is convinced that such a grave, unjustified and unilateral measure does not reflect the sentiments of the Nicaraguan people, who are profoundly Christian," the Vatican said in a statement.



Fighting Rages Outside Kyiv as Air Strikes Continue



LVIV (Dispatches) - Conflict raged near Kyiv and Ukrainian officials said heavy shelling and threats of Russian air attacks were endangering attempted evacuations of desperate civilians from encircled towns and cities elsewhere.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Russia was sending in new troops after Ukrainian forces had put 31 of its battalion tactical groups out of action in what he called Russia's largest army losses in decades.

He said 500-600 Russian troops had surrendered on Friday alone and that about 1,300 Ukrainian troops had been killed since the conflict began. It was not possible to verify his statements.

Zelenskyy also said he had spoken to German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and French President Emmanuel Macron about pressuring Russia to release the mayor of the city of Melitopol, who Ukraine says was kidnapped on Friday by Russian forces.

More than 2,000 residents of the southern city, which is now under Russian control, protested outside the city administration building to demand the release of the mayor, Ivan Fedorov, Kyrylo Tymoshenko, deputy head of the president's office, said.

Russia has not commented on the fate of Fedorov, who Ukrainian officials said was kidnapped by Russian forces on false accusations of terrorism.

Scholz and Macron urged Russian President Vladimir Putin to declare an immediate ceasefire in a 75-minute phone call on Saturday, Scholz's spokesperson said. The Kremlin said Putin had briefed them about the state of play in negotiations and responded to their concerns about the humanitarian situation.

Zelenskyy said the conflict meant some small Ukrainian towns no longer existed and that any negotiations must start with a ceasefire. Existing talks had begun to broach concrete topics rather than just exchange ultimatums, he said.

The Kremlin readout of the call with Macron and Scholz did not mention a ceasefire and accused Ukraine of using civilians as human shields.

Zelenskyy said Ukraine could not stop fighting but was upholding a ceasefire around an agreed "humanitarian corridor" out of the besieged southern port of Mariupol and called on Russia to do the same. Moscow has previously blamed Kyiv for failed evacuations.

Putin launched the invasion on Feb. 24 in an operation that has been almost universally condemned around the world and that has drawn tough Western sanctions on Russia.

The bombardment has trapped thousands of people in besieged cities and sent 2.5 million Ukrainians fleeing to neighboring countries.

Ukrainian officials had planned to use humanitarian corridors from Mariupol as well as towns and villages in the regions of Kyiv, Sumy and some other areas on Saturday.

Pakistan Demands Joint Probe Into Accidental India Missile Fire

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan on Saturday demanded a joint probe into a missile India said it accidentally fired into its territory, rejecting New Delhi's decision to hold an internal inquiry into the incident and calling on the international community to play a role.

"Such a serious matter cannot be addressed with the simplistic explanation proffered by the Indian authorities," Pakistan's foreign office said in a statement.

"Pakistan demands a joint probe to accurately establish the facts surrounding the incident," it added.

India said on Friday it had accidentally fired the missile into Pakistan this week because of a "technical malfunction" during routine maintenance, giving its version of events after Pakistan warned New Delhi of "unpleasant consequences."

The international community must play its "due role in promoting stability in a nuclearised environment", the foreign office statement from Pakistan said,

warning of "dire consequences" if any misinterpretation by one of the sides lead to an escalation.

Military experts have in the past warned of the risk of accidents or miscalculations by the nuclear-armed neighbors, which have fought three wars and engaged in numerous smaller armed clashes, usually over the disputed territory of Kashmir.

Tensions have eased in recent months, and the incident, which may have been the first of its kind, immediately raised questions about safety mechanisms.

Pakistan demanded clarifications from India over its safety mechanism to prevent accidental missile launches, and whether it was appropriately handled by its armed forces.

According to the U.S.-based Arms Control Association, the missile's range is between 300 km (186 miles) and 500 km (310 miles), making it capable of hitting Islamabad from a northern Indian launch pad.



Turkey, Armenia Hold Fruitful, Constructive Meeting

ANKARA (Dispatches) - A historic bilateral meeting took place on Saturday between the foreign ministers of Turkey and Armenia on the sidelines of the Antalya Diplomacy Forum.

Speaking to reporters, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu described the meeting with his Armenian counterpart Ararat Mirzoyan as "extremely fruitful and constructive."

Following their one-on-one closed-door meeting, Çavuşoğlu thanked Mirzoyan for accepting the invitation to attend the forum, which he said was "open to all" and "a platform where everyone's voice should be heard."

"As you are aware, we have started a process to normalize our relations," he said, citing the "positive messages" of both Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan and Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan.

Çavuşoğlu also commented on the normalization talks between the special envoys of the two countries, of which the first was held in Moscow and the second in Vienna.

"Here (at the talks), they (special envoys) also discussed the steps to be taken to normalize our relations," Cavusoglu said, noting that he and Mirzoyan had discussed these talks "a little bit and evaluated" them.



Russia Warns Sanctions Could Cause Int'l Space Station to Crash

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Western sanctions against Russia could cause the International Space Station to crash, the head of Russian space agency Roscosmos warned, calling for the punitive measures to be lifted.

According to Dmitry Rogozin, the sanctions, some of which predate Moscow's invasion of Ukraine, could disrupt the operation of Russian spacecraft servicing the ISS.

As a result, the Russian segment of the station -- which helps correct its orbit -- could be affected, causing the 500-tonne structure to "fall down into the sea or onto land", the Roscosmos chief wrote on Telegram.

"The Russian segment ensures that the station's orbit is corrected (on average 11 times a year), including to avoid space debris", said Rogozin, who regularly expresses his support for the Russian army in Ukraine on social networks.

Publishing a map of the locations where the ISS could possibly come down, he pointed out that it was unlikely to be in Russia.

"But the populations of other countries, especially those led by the 'dogs of war', should think about the price of the sanctions against Roscosmos", he continued, describing the countries who imposed sanctions as "crazy".

Rogozin similarly raised the threat of the space station falling to earth last month while blasting Western sanctions on Twitter.

On March 1, NASA said it was trying to find a solution to keep the ISS in orbit without Russia's help.

Crews and supplies are transported to the Russian segment by Soyuz spacecraft. But Rogozin said the launcher used for take-off had been "under US sanctions since 2021 and under EU and Canadian sanctions since 2022".

Roscosmos said it had appealed to NASA, the Canadian Space Agency and the European Space Agency, "demanding the lifting of illegal sanctions against our companies".

Finland Starts Much-Delayed Nuclear Plant

HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Finland's much-delayed Olkiluoto 3 nuclear reactor started test production on Saturday, operator TVO said, delivering power to the national grid which over time is expected to reduce the need for electricity imports and lead to lower prices.

Plagued by technological problems that became the subject of lawsuits, the 1.6 gigawatt (GW) reactor had originally been due to open in 2009. It is Finland's first new nuclear plant in over four decades and Europe's first in almost 15 years.

Olkiluoto 3 started test production at just over 0.1 gigawatt, a small fraction of its capacity, with a ramp-up to full, regular electricity output planned by the end of July.

"OL3 significantly improves Finland's electricity self-sufficiency and helps in achieving carbon neutrality goals," operator Teollisuuden Voima (TVO) said in a statement.

Once fully operational, it is expected to meet 14% of Finland's electricity demand, reducing the need for imports from Russia, Sweden and Norway.

"Olkiluoto 3 will decrease Finland's import dependency and it will become a cheaper price zone," Aurora Energy Research economist Alexander Esser told Reuters.

Finland's net imports of power averaged 13 terawatt hours (TWh) over the last few years, which should drop to 5-8 TWh by 2025 with Olkiluoto 3 in operation, Esser said.

Nuclear power remains controversial in Europe, with some countries such as Germany phasing out reactors amid safety concerns, while others including France and Britain discussing new developments. TVO is owned by Finnish utility Fortum and smaller energy and forestry firms.

Finland is the only Nordic country with a large power deficit, said Marius Holm Rennesund, a partner at Oslo-based consultancy Thema.

Thema predicts that Finnish wholesale power prices will drop to 60 euro per megawatt hour (MWh) in 2023 from a predicted average of 70 euro/MWh in 2022, although the expected reduction will also come from lower gas prices.

In 2024, Finnish wholesale power prices will likely fall further to 45 euros/MWh, Rennesund said.

Prices of Essential Items Soar in Sri Lanka After Rupee Depreciation

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - The prices of a number of essential items in Sri Lanka increased on Friday after the country's central bank allowed the country's rupee (LKR) to devalue to 230 per U.S. dollar. On Friday, the All Ceylon Bakery Owners Association increased the price of a loaf of bread by 30 LKR, and the new price of a loaf of bread is between 110 to 130 LKR, reports Xinhua news agency. The country's biggest wheat importer PRIMA increased the price of a kg of wheat flour by 35 LKR. Meanwhile, Lanka Indian Oil Corporation, the country's second-largest retail fuel distributor, increased the selling price of diesel by 75 LKR per liter and petrol 50 LKR per liter on Thursday midnight.



ECB Speeding Up End to Economic Stimulus

LONDON (Dispatches) - The European Central Bank (ECB) said that it will make an early exit from its economic stimulus efforts as it combats record inflation that threatens to go ever higher as energy prices soar during Russia's war in Ukraine.

The move was a tough choice because the invasion also has exposed Europe to a potential hit to economic growth. But the ECB chose higher inflation as the bigger threat, surprising many analysts who had expected no change in the bank's roadmap for the coming months.

The bank was keeping its options open and could modify its stimulus exit depending on what happens with the economy, President Christine Lagarde said. That is hard to answer right now because of huge uncertainty over the effect of the war.

"The prospects for the economy will depend on the course of the Russia-Ukraine war and on the impact of economic and financial sanctions and other measures," she said.

"At the same time, other headwinds to growth are now waning," Lagarde said, pointing to signs some of the supply bottlenecks that have held back business are showing "signs of easing".

She said the effect of sharply higher energy prices could be "partly cushioned" by savings that people could not spend during the pandemic restrictions.

The bank's 25-member governing council headed by Lagarde decided to end its bond purchases in the third quarter. Previously, it said it would taper them off to 20 billion euros (\$22bn) per month by the last three months of the year and continue them as long as needed.

The purchases aim to keep borrowing costs low for companies and promote business investment and hiring.

But the bank did not move up its schedule for a first interest rate increase, dropping a promise that rates would go up shortly after the end of bond purchases. Instead it said only that rate changes will take place "some time after" the end of the purchases and "will be gradual".

During a news conference, Lagarde refused to be drawn out on whether an interest rate increase was possible this year. After the end of the bond purchases, "it can be the week after and it can be months after," she said, depending on inflation and growth.

"The ECB has signaled that it is more concerned about a further sharp rise in inflation than the negative shock to demand which will result from the war in Ukraine," said Andrew Kenningham, chief Europe economist at Capital Economics.

Inflation in the 19 countries that use the euro currency is running at an annual 5.8 percent, the highest since statistics started in 1997, and is expected to keep climbing in the coming months. The bank sees inflation running well above its 2 percent target throughout this year but falling to 2.1 percent next year.

The European bank is still behind the U.S. Federal Reserve, which is set to raise interest rates several times this year, beginning with a modest rise next week after inflation came in at a 40-year high of 7.9 percent.

The recovery from the pandemic recession has lagged in Europe, which only reached pre-pandemic levels of output at the end of last year, well behind the US, where stimulus and support spending was higher.

Turkish Businesses Expect Progress on Using Rubles in Trade With Russia

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Since the currency dispute with shipping companies is causing problems in the delivery of goods passing through customs, Turkey should actively work to develop a mechanism to facilitate trade with Russia in rubles, Istanbul Chamber of Commerce (ITO) head Şekib Avdagiç said Friday.

Avdagiç stated that the companies working with Russia see the withdrawal of Western countries from Moscow as a new opportunity and emphasized that it is important to enable the use of the national currency of Russia.

The issue was also brought up during President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan's phone call with his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin, he reiterated. Erdoğan told Putin that, apart from the euro and dollar, trade between the two countries can be carried out using the Russian ruble and Chinese yuan.

"We can do it with gold," he was quoted as suggesting.

Stating that they also expect air transport to be made more competitive so they are able to deliver ongoing orders, Avdagiç said, "The brutality of the war is showing itself once again, and the humanitarian and geopolitical consequences of Russia's invasion of Ukraine overshadow its economic effects. The war, so to speak, has added yet another global humanitarian catastrophe. We share the approach put forward by our president, and we find it unacceptable that an independent country is occupied by another power."

He further noted that the measures taken by Turkey's government to mitigate the effects of geopolitical risks on the economy are very important, saying: "We are following with appreciation the efforts put forward in this framework. The close monitoring mechanisms established by the economic administration during this period and the close dialogue it developed with all producers

Japan to Defer Economic Cooperation Projects With Russia Over Ukraine

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan will put economic cooperation projects with Russia on hold for the time being, including an eight-point plan intended to break the deadlock over a territorial issue, the top government spokesman said as Tokyo hardens its stance on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine.

Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno said the Russian aggression in Ukraine has made it difficult to deepen bilateral cooperation in the economic field. Japan has taken a spate of sanctions including an asset freeze targeting Russian President Vladimir Putin.

"Based on the stance that government projects related to economic cooperation with Russia, including the eight-point plan, should be put on hold, we will respond by taking into account our energy security and humanitarian standpoint," Matsuno told a press briefing.

The eight-point plan was proposed in 2016 when then Prime Minister Shinzo Abe was seeking closer ties with Putin to resolve the territorial dispute over a group of islets off Hokkaido and advance talks toward a postwar peace treaty.

Private-sector companies have been involved in various projects in the eight areas such as energy, health care and high-tech technology. They include a liquefied natural gas development project.

"There are a variety of energy, health care and other projects in the private sector and their progress varies," Matsuno said. "We believe due consideration will be made to each project as needed."

Japan has strongly criticized the invasion as unilateral use of force to change the status quo in violation of international law.

India Tightens IPO Valuation Scrutiny, Jolts Startups Eyeing Listings

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has tightened scrutiny of IPO-bound firms by questioning how key internal business metrics are used to arrive at valuations, unsettling bankers and companies which fear delays in listing plans, sources with direct knowledge told Reuters.

India's push comes after the flop listing of SoftBank-backed payments firm Paytm's (PAYT.NS) \$2.5 billion IPO in November which sparked criticism of lax oversight of how loss-making companies price issues at what some say are lofty valuations.

The Securities and Exchange Board of India (SEBI) last month flagged concerns in proposing stricter disclosures, saying more and more new-age tech firms which "generally remain loss making for a longer period" were filing for IPOs, and traditional financial disclosures "may not aid investors."

But even before the proposal is finalized, SEBI has in recent weeks asked many companies to get their non-financial metrics -- KPIs, or key performance indicators -- audited, and then explain how they were used to arrive at an IPO's valuation, five banking and legal sources said.

Typically for a tech or app-based startup, KPIs could be figures like the number of downloads or average time spent on a platform -- metrics sources said are disclosed but difficult to audit or link to a company's valuation.

SEBI is asking us to "justify the valuation," said one Indian lawyer advising several companies eyeing IPOs, adding it was "creating uncertainty and increasing cost of compliance."

SEBI did not respond to a request for comment. Regulators in major markets including Hong Kong do follow practices that subject companies to tighter scrutiny about their business practices and financials, but they don't usually make granular checks on valuation metrics.

One document from February containing SEBI's remarks to an Indian IPO-bound company, seen by Reuters, asked for "explanation regarding how KPIs form basis" for arriving at the IPO issue price, adding they should be "certified by a statutory auditor."

Indian digital healthcare platform PharmEasy, which had filed papers for a \$818 million IPO in November, is one company which was hit by such scrutiny: one source with direct knowledge said the company raised concerns with SEBI about auditing and supplying such details, and is likely to get some relaxations. PharmEasy didn't respond to a request for comment.

UK Economy Bounces Back From Omicron

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy bounced back from the effects of the Omicron Covid variant at a faster pace than expected during January, as consumers returned to eating and drinking out in pubs and restaurants.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said all sectors of the economy returned to growth, helping to lift gross domestic product by 0.8% in January from a month earlier, fuelled by a rise in consumer-facing services.

GDP was estimated to be 0.8% above its pre-pandemic level, reflecting a weaker impact on the economy than expected after the emergence of the Omicron variant led to a sharp rise in coronavirus infections. City economists had forecast a slower growth rate of 0.2%.

However, experts warned the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine would cut short the economic rebound as surging energy prices erode consumer spending power and discourage business investment.

"[It's] as good as it gets for this year," said Paul Dales, the chief UK economist at the consultancy Capital Economics. "The hit to households' real disposable incomes from the surge in energy prices, the latest chunk of which is due to the war in Ukraine, and higher taxes will start to be felt from March and April. As such, GDP growth will probably slow throughout the year."

According to the latest snapshot from the ONS, all sectors grew in January after a slowdown a month earlier, including wholesaling, retailing, restaurants and takeaways. Computer programming and film and television production also had a good start to the year.

The main driver of growth in January was wholesale trade, which was up 3.8%, amid a bounceback after weakness in December because of the impact of Omicron. Despite persistent supply chain issues in some sectors, output in both the construction industry and manufacturing grew for the third month running.

Reflecting the return of consumers to pubs and restaurants, activity in the food and drink sector rose by 6.8%, after a fall of 8.1% in December when Omicron led to a wave of cancelled bookings for Christmas parties and gatherings.

However, the figures come amid expectations that Vladimir Putin's invasion of Ukraine will damage the global economic recovery from Covid-19.

Suren Thiru, the head of economics at the British Chambers of Commerce, said: "The figures have been pushed into the rear-view mirror by renewed domestic and global shocks, including Ukraine."

"The UK's economy could stall in the near term as rising inflation, soaring energy bills and higher taxes increasingly drag on activity despite a probable boost to output in February from the end of plan B Covid restrictions."

Canada Posts Significant Jobs Gains as COVID Restrictions Lift



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada's labor market blew past expectations last month after the nation lifted COVID-19 restrictions meant to contain the spread of the Omicron variant.

The country added 336,600 jobs in February, more than making up for losses in the previous month, Statistics Canada reported on Friday from Ottawa. Economists in a Bloomberg survey were expecting a gain of 127,500.

The unemployment rate fell to 5.5%, from 6.5% in January. That's the first time the jobless rate has fallen below its pre-COVID level, and it's now near a five-decade low.

Friday's report shows the economy is back up against what the Bank of Canada believes is full capacity and will reinforce expectations for as many as six more interest rate increases this year after the central bank began a hiking cycle earlier this month.

The loonie jumped as high as C\$1.2715 per U.S. dollar and bonds tumbled. Two-year yields were up more than 7 basis points on the day to 1.627% as of 8:58 a.m. Toronto time.

Tight labor markets have persisted throughout the Omicron wave, with unemployment rates remaining below pre-pandemic levels in provinces including Alberta and British Columbia, according to a March 10 report from RBC Economics. Canadian employment is now about 369,000 positions above pre-pandemic levels.

Full time employment was up 121,500 jobs in February, while part-time work rose by 215,100 positions. Gains in full-time work more than offset January losses, while part-time growth erased cumulative losses sustained over the previous two months.

The country shed about 200,000 jobs in January, ending a seven-month run of gains. Most of the losses were in pandemic-exposed sectors like accommodation and food services, and that industry recorded the biggest gain last month, with a 12.6% increase.



Iran-Russia to Bolster Energy Ties

TEHRAN (Shana) -- The Iranian Deputy Minister of Petroleum for International Affairs and Trade said: "Iran and Russia, with the cooperation of each other and some other major countries, can figure out new equations in the field of international economy."
Ahmad Asadzadeh addressed the coordination meeting of the Joint Economic Commission for Trade and Economic Cooperation between Iran and Russia.
"We hope to open new spaces in cooperation with Russia in the new round of joint activities," he said.



Italy Annuls Sale of Military Drones Firm to Chinese Investors

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy on Thursday annulled the sale of a military drones company to Chinese investors, three government officials told Reuters, the latest in a series of moves by Prime Minister Mario Draghi to curb Beijing's forays into the euro zone's third-largest economy.

The government opened an investigation last year into the 2018 sale to the Chinese players of a 75% stake in Alpi Aviation, based in northern Italy.

Rome decided to annul the deal after the probe concluded that those involved should have informed the government about the transaction under Italy's so-called "golden power" regulations aimed at shielding strategically important assets.

The decision was ratified at a cabinet meeting on Thursday, the sources said. Prime Minister Mario Draghi's office declined to comment.

The case showed how easy it is for changes in corporate ownership to slip under the radar at a time when pressure is rising in the United States and Europe to monitor potential risks to national security from Chinese investors.

The Chinese groups involved in the takeover are China Corporate United Investment Holding (CCUI) and CRRC Capital Holding, which are in turn controlled by the Management Committee of Wuxi Liyuan Economic Development Zone and SASAC.

A request for comment sent to these groups went unanswered outside of business hours. The Chinese embassy in Rome was not available to comment.

The operation was conducted through a chain of investment vehicles originating from a Hong-Kong based firm called Mars, which holds 75% of Alpi Aviation.

As well as annulling the deal, the Italian government has also imposed fines on those involved, one of the officials told Reuters, without giving details.

The case became public in September, when Italian tax police disclosed they were looking into a possible breach of rules regarding the sale of military materials, saying six people were under investigation.

Police at that time said the deal was "clearly" a predatory investment in technology.

The lawyers for Alpi Aviation declined to comment. They had previously said the sale of the stake was transparent and complied with all regulations.

Italy's use of its golden power usually results in deals being approved with recommendations intended to preserve national interest.

Since the golden power was introduced in 2012, government authorities have



actually blocked foreign forays into Italy just six times. Five of these headed off Chinese bids, and four have come since Draghi took office 13 months ago.

Alpi Aviation's case prompted Italy's parliamentary committee on national security (COPASIR) to urge the government to strengthen the golden power.

"Rome should create a body similar to the Committee on Foreign Investments in the United States (CFIUS), which actively investigates any market deal deemed of strategic importance and not only notified transactions," COPASIR member Enrico Borghi told Reuters.

However, the increasing use of golden powers has triggered legal challenges from both Chinese investors and their Italian prey.

It has also increased red tape for firms which are informing the government of any mergers to avoid possible infractions and fines, even when this would not be necessary.

Last year the number of notifications jumped to almost 500, compared with 342 in 2020 and just 83 in 2019, said one of the officials. More than 40% of the notifications in 2021 regarded operations in non-strategic firms.

Non-Stop...

FROM PAGE 1

Hezbollah's leader warns that the Russia-Ukraine conflict can lead to repercussions that would be very dangerous to the whole world.

What Nasrallah said is just a small portion of many crimes which are committed in the world which go unpunished and even unnoticed.

"Trusting Americans translates into stupidity, foolishness and ignorance," Nasrallah said, adding, "Ukrainians have been let down by those who they counted on, and they have started to announce their readiness for discussions with Moscow," Nasrallah said.

"The treatment of the recent wave of refugees from Ukraine exposes discrimination based on religion, race, and color. Is this the Western civilization?" he said.

The double standard approach towards different issues by the West and the international bodies hurts the nations in the world especially when it comes to the Muslim states or anti-West countries, this approach widens so that ever body can see and feel the double standard regarding the mentioned states.

The strange thing is that Muslim states help the Zionists and the West to get bolder action against Muslim states because they know that Muslim states are divided and they will not take a united action against the committed crimes.

As Nasrallah said, the U.S. and mainly the West cannot be trusted and even Ukrainian people saw it in practice that the U.S. and Europeans are not ready to fight for them when they need it. Ukraine war has taught us many lessons and especially to the Muslim countries.

One of the main lessons is that Muslim countries should not rely on assistance of other countries and they themselves should fight for success and prosperity. The second lesson is that they should fight for their cause as Ukrainians do for it because they have realized that Western countries prefer to talk rather than to act.

So it is up to Muslim nations whether to accept suppression by their enemies or to stand against it because as long as they wait for the international bodies' reaction to crimes against Palestine and Yemen or even other Muslim country like Sudan, it will be waste of time because the non-stop crimes against them will continue without getting due reaction and punishment.

Muslim nations need leaders like Seyed Ali Khamenei and Sayed Nasrallah to stand against arrogant states otherwise they have to seat and watch crimes against them going on. Lack of the brave leadership is the missing link in Muslim states which hurts them and makes happy the hostile nations.



Africa Could Be Hit Hard By Loss of Ukrainian Grain Exports



HAMBURG (Dispatches) - African countries may be hit hard by any continuing halt to Ukraine's grain exports caused by the war, a report from Germany's Kiel Institute for the World Economy (IfW) said on Friday.

"The war in Ukraine could significantly worsen the supply of cereals used in food production in African countries, making food more expensive if Ukraine ceases to be a grain supplier," the institute said.

"The country supplies large quantities of grain to North African states in particular, which other sources of supply could not replace even in the long run."

Grain importers globally have been hit by surging prices, with wheat around 14-year highs following the sudden stop of exports from Ukraine and a sharp reduction from Russia. The conflict has closed grain export ports.

Russia and Ukraine contribute nearly 30% of global wheat exports along with large volumes of animal feed grains and edible oils, with shipments massively cut by the fighting.

"Due to the war, Ukraine is likely to be initially cut off from the global economy, trade routes have been cut, infrastructure destroyed and all remaining production factors are likely to be directed towards a war economy," said the institute.

High Hopes and a Raft of Challenges as Chile Shifts Left Under Boric

SANTIAGO (Dispatches) - Chile shifted sharply to the left on Friday when Gabriel Boric, 36, was sworn in as the South American country's youngest ever president after pledging social and economic reforms, and riding a wave of voter dissatisfaction with the political status quo.

Boric, a tattooed former protest leader, marks a sharp departure from outgoing billionaire Sebastian Pinera. He has sparked hope among progressives as well as fears that Chile's decades of economic stability will come under attack.

The leader of a broad leftist coalition including Chile's communist party, he has vowed to overhaul a market-led economic model to fight inequality that sparked violent protests in 2019, though he has moderated his fiery rhetoric in recent months.

Boric's ascension marks the sharpest shift in Chilean politics since the country's return to democracy 30 years ago after the bloody dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet.

Pinochet, whose shadow still looms large over the Andean country, ousted socialist President Salvador Allende, who committed suicide in 1973 during a military coup. Boric has often praised Allende's legacy.

"He reminds me of Allende, but I hope it has a happier ending," said Marigen Vargas, 62, who traveled all night to be at Boric's inauguration outside Congress in the port city of Valparaiso. "We want a more united, happier Chile."

Boric faces a raft of challenges from an economic slowdown, high inflation and a split legislature that will



test his deal-making abilities to push through reforms in healthcare and pensions, while toughening environmental regulation.

Carlos Ruiz, an academic at the University of Chile who taught Boric, said Boric would have to deal with a rising ultra-conservative bloc that did

well in elections last year and find consensus to push through his reforms.

"This is the task now ahead of Boric," he said.

Chile, a bastion of free markets and economic responsibility in volatile South America, finds itself at a crossroads. The country is also redrafting its Pinochet-era Constitution, which has underpinned growth but been blamed for stoking inequality.

Boric's female-majority Cabinet was sworn in on Friday before he took the presidential sash, with delegations from the United States, Spain, Argentina and others in attendance.

"This is an era full of hope for the defense of society, young people, a green future and equality," tweeted Yolanda Diaz, Spain's second vice president who flew to Chile, referring to Boric's environmental and feminist agenda.

High hopes may quickly butt up against a divided electorate and legislature, split down the middle between the right and left. Bubbling issues of crime, immigration and indigenous rights mean Boric's government also has a full in-tray.

"I wish him success in his future government," Pinera said in his final address, but cited concerns about identity politics, weakening of the judiciary and crime. "But also the wisdom to distinguish right from wrong."

Boeing Tests Suppliers on 787 Output Hikes

LONDON (Dispatches) -Boeing Co is yet to see any respite from a freeze in deliveries of its 787 Dreamliner - but that has not stopped it testing suppliers' capacity to meet output scenarios as high as seven a month by end-2023, three people with knowledge of the matter said.

The planemaker has stopped making public predictions on when it will win approval from U.S. regulators to resume deliveries, halted for nearly a year by factory defects in a still-running saga that is costing \$5.5 billion overall.

But, the people said, it has discussed what some analysts consider ambitious scenarios with parts makers as it surveys an industry crippled by successive crises and now facing labor and materials shortages deepened by Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Boeing's production strategy hinges on several key unknowns including when deliveries restart, how quickly it can reduce an overhang of more than 100 undelivered 787s and the extent to which the Ukraine crisis dampens already weak demand.

While some industry sources have pegged a delivery restart as early as next month, the date is increasingly under scrutiny with April just days away.

Boeing's recovery plan could see it increase the current rock-bottom monthly rate of two 787s to three around May, if deliveries have started by then, and again to four around November, two of the people said.

From there, suppliers have been asked to be ready to tackle rates as high as seven a month around October 2023, if requested, the sources added.

That is more than most analysts reckon the market will absorb and the sources stressed no decision has been made on what, for now, remains purely a planning scenario.

The more Boeing produces the harder it may be to shift the backlog of undelivered planes.

Jefferies analyst Sheila Kahyaoglu this week estimated monthly output would stay at two in 2022, rising to 3.5 in 2023 but remaining below 5 "to facilitate the burndown of inventory".

"April delivery restart may be aggressive," Kahyaoglu added.

Boeing has repeatedly referred questions on the timing to the U.S. Federal Aviation Administration, which did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

Iran Foreign Trade...

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Export markets must be diversified

Lahouti said Iran has had most of its exports to China, Iraq, Turkey, the UAE and Afghanistan, and as long as imports are concerned, the UAE comes first and is followed by China, Turkey, Germany and Switzerland.

The official explained that Iran has numerous plans to increase trade with its neighboring countries, because exports to these nations are carried out in an easier way and currencies are exchanged easier.

Lahouti at the same time said export markets should be diversified and plans are needed to enter markets in non-neighboring states.

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Roglic Dominates on Biggest Paris-Nice Climb

PARIS (Dispatches) - Primoz Roglic launched the final, decisive attack up the biggest climb on this year's Paris-Nice to win the seventh stage and tighten his grip on the race lead.

One after another, the Slovenian's main rivals attacked on the 15-kilometre ascent of Col de Turini. Each time, Roglic responded.

The Jumbo-Visma rider then attacked himself entering the final kilometre.

PSG Ultras Call for Al-Khelaifi to Leave

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain's ultra fans group on Saturday said Qatari club president Nasser Al-Khelaifi should step down after the French giants' Champions League elimination to Real Madrid.

"Management resignation," the Collectif Ultras Paris (CUP) group wrote on social media, calling for supporters to join them in "showing our dissatisfaction... without violence" during Sunday's Ligue 1 match against Bordeaux.

LeBron's 50 Leads Lakers Victory

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James unleashed his second 50-point performance in a week to spark the Los Angeles Lakers over Washington 122-109 on Friday but missed a historic NBA milestone.

James scored 50 points on 18-of-25 shooting, including 6-of-9 from 3-point range, and was 8-of-8 from the free throw line while contributing seven rebounds and six assists to power a Lakers team that had lost nine of its prior 11 games.

"We missed a lot of chippies, but we kept fighting, we kept defending, and I was able to hit a hot streak at one point," James said.

The 37-year-old forward, a four-time NBA champion and four-time NBA Most Valuable Player, scored 56 points last Saturday in a home win over Golden State. James had the first back-to-back 50-or-more Laker totals at home since the late Kobe Bryant in 2007.

James was in a "zone" after hitting 17 in the first half, scoring 12 points in a row for the Lakers at one stage in the third quarter.

"I just try to stay in that zone as long as possible," James said. "I was able to hit a couple."

It was the 14th career 50-point game for James, tying him for sixth on the all-time list. But James finished two assists shy of becoming the first player in NBA history with 30,000 career points, 10,000 career rebounds and 10,000 career assists.

James was pleased to get a hug during the game at one stage from his mother Gloria. "The fact she was here tonight was a treat for me," James said. "She's my biggest supporter, my biggest inspiration and my biggest love."

San Antonio's Gregg Popovich won his NBA record 1,336th regular-season coaching victory, with Dejounte Murray scoring 27 points to lift the Spurs over visiting Utah 104-102.

Popovich, 73, has guided the Spurs to five NBA titles and was coach of the US Olympic squad of NBA stars that won a gold medal last year in Tokyo. He thanked former players, coaches, mentors and those who have backed the club during his tenure. "It's just a testament to a whole lot of people. Something like this does not belong to one individual," Popovich said. "All of us share in this record. It's not mine. It's ours."

The Spurs made 6-of-8 free throws in the final 14.2 seconds to hold off the Jazz (41-25). San Antonio improved to 26-41, one game



behind New Orleans for the last play-in spot for the playoffs.

Toronto's Gary Trent Jr. scored 42 points and Pascal Siakam added 25 points, 10 assists and seven rebounds to lead the Raptors to a 117-112 victory at Phoenix, dropping the NBA overall leaders to 53-14 on the season.

Cameron Payne led the Suns with 24 points while Devin Booker added 22 for Phoenix, who still lead the Western Conference by 7 1/2 games over Memphis.

Bam Adebayo scored 30 points and grabbed 17 rebounds while Jimmy Butler added 24 points to spark the Eastern Conference-leading Miami Heat over visiting Cleveland 117-105.

The Heat improved to 45-23, stretching Miami's lead in the East to 2 1/2 games over idle defending champion Milwaukee.

Ja Morant scored 37 points and dished out eight assists to rally the Memphis Grizzlies from a 15-point second-half deficit to defeat visiting New York 118-114.

Morant delivered his 24th 30-point game of the season and scored 15 in the last 12 minutes for his 12th double-digit fourth quarter of the campaign.

Slovenia's Luka Doncic had 30 points and 14 rebounds to lead the Dallas Mavericks to a 113-110 victory at Houston.

Boston's Jayson Tatum had 31 points, eight rebounds and six assists to spark the Celtics over visiting Detroit 114-103. Jaylen Brown returned from a right ankle sprain to score 22 points for Boston (41-27).

Trae Young had game highs of 27 points and 11 assists to spark Atlanta over the visiting Los Angeles Clippers 112-106.

Miles Bridges scored 26 points and Terry Rozier added 25 to lead Charlotte in a 142-120 triumph at New Orleans.

Orlando's Mo Bamba scored 27 points and grabbed 12 rebounds to spark the Magic over host Minnesota 118-110.



Neymar Returns for Brazil World Cup Qualifiers

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Neymar will rejoin Brazil for its final two World Cup qualifiers, after missing the national team's first two matches of the year due to injury, coach Tite said, announcing his squad.

The Paris Saint-Germain star, back from an ankle injury, will be looking to exorcise PSG's humiliating Champions League exit Wednesday at Real Madrid as he returns to the Selecao.

The five-time world champions, who qualified for Qatar back in November, play Chile in Rio de Janeiro's Maracana stadium on March 24 and Bolivia on March 29 in La Paz.

Tite, who recently announced he plans to leave the post after the World Cup, said Neymar had "played well in the first half" against Real Madrid, before "collapsing, like the entire team."

"He's got extraordinary quality, but he's coming off a natural process for anyone who gets injured. He's in the process of searching to get his top form back," he said.

Neymar will be joined by forward Vinicius Junior of none other than Real Madrid.

New names on Tite's list include Arsenal forward Gabriel Martinelli and Juventus midfielder Arthur, back on the team after a year-long absence.

Everton striker Richarlison also rejoins the squad.

Left out were forwards Gabriel Jesus of Manchester City and Gabigol of Flamengo.

Murray Joins ATP 700 Club With Indian Wells Win

INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray notched a milestone win and US Open champion Emma Raducanu made a victorious return from injury in a one-two punch for Britain at the Indian Wells WTA and ATP Masters hardcourt tennis tournament.

Murray, a three-time Grand Slam champion now ranked 88th in the world and playing on a wildcard invitation, rallied after a dismal first set to beat Japanese qualifier Taro Daniel 1-6, 6-2, 6-4 in the first round.

Raducanu, seeded 11th, reached the women's third round with a 6-1, 3-6, 6-1 victory over France's Caroline Garcia.

Murray claimed the 700th ATP match win of his career.

"Reaching that number is a really, really good achievement," said Murray, who is one of just four active players to hit the milestone after Roger Federer, Rafael Nadal and Novak Djokovic.

"It has not been easy getting there," he added, noting that he had reached 600 match wins in 2016 before his victory rate was slowed in large part by injury.

In the early going, it didn't look like a landmark day for Murray, who dropped the first set in just 28 minutes.

Unable to convert two early break points, Murray would eventually be broken at love four times before bearing down in the third set to seal the win.

It was another smidgen of revenge against the 106th-ranked Japanese player, who stunned Murray in the second round of the Australian Open before Murray turned the tables in the first round at Doha.

Raducanu got off to a strong start in a match she didn't expect to be playing when a hip injury forced her out of a match in Guadalajara two weeks ago.

Raducanu, who was hindered by a blisters at the Australian Open and was playing just her fifth match of 2022.

"It has been challenging," said the 19-year-old, who was also slowed by Covid-19 in December. "The injuries, the blisters, I think they were all a knock-on effect of getting Covid and not training for three weeks."



Odermatt Wins World Cup Giant Slalom Crystal Globe



France's Alexis Pinturault had posted the fastest time in the first run ahead of Braathen but finished 11th as he chased his first win of the season.

KRANJSKA GORA (Dispatches) - Olympic champion Marco Odermatt won his first World Cup giant slalom crystal globe after finishing second behind Norway's Henrik Kristoffersen in Kranjska Gora.

Odermatt came in 0.33sec behind Kristoffersen with Norway's Lucas Braathen setting the same time as the Swiss skier to share second place.

The 30-year-old, who has endured a miserable defence of his overall crown this season, finished at 1.55 seconds.

Odermatt, Olympic champion in Beijing last month, had struggled in the first run in Slovenia, finishing seventh-quickest.

But with two races left this season the Swiss cannot be caught with a 207-point lead in the discipline.

The 24-year-old has dominated the season with four wins and two second places in six races and is also practically assured of winning the overall title as he leads 2020 champion Aleksander Aamodt Kilde by 269 points.

Norway's Kilde is not competing in Slovenia this weekend, with five races left this season.

There is another giant slalom in Kranjska Gora on Sunday ahead of the season-ending finals in Courchevel next week.

Abramovich Disqualified As Chelsea Director By Premier League

LONDON (Dispatches) - Roman Abramovich has been disqualified as a Chelsea director by the Premier League board after the British government sanctioned the Russian billionaire.

Chelsea owner Abramovich was one of seven more oligarchs sanctioned this week by the UK following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The European champions have been placed under tough restrictions due to the sanctions on Abramovich.

Chelsea are unable to sign players, renew contracts or sell tickets to matches, with limits on the amount of money they are allowed to spend on travel to away games.

Now Premier League chiefs have taken action against Abramovich, who is described by the government as part of Russian President Vladimir Putin's inner circle despite his denials of any association.

"Following the imposition of sanctions by the UK Government, the Premier League board has disqualified Roman Abramovich as a director of Chelsea Football Club," a Premier League statement said on Saturday.

"The board's decision does not impact on the club's ability to train and play its fixtures, as set out under the terms of a licence issued by the Government, which expires on May 31 2022."



Rashford Still Happy at Man United

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United interim manager Ralf Rangnick disputed suggestions that Marcus Rashford is unhappy with his lack of game time, saying the forward is committed to turning around his poor run of form and getting back to his best.

Rashford scored 21 goals in all competitions last season but has found the net only five times this season after making his return from shoulder surgery in October.

The England international has found playing time hard to come by in recent weeks, with his last start in a league game coming on Feb 12 in a 1-1 draw with Southampton.

"I don't think that he's not had enough game time," Rangnick told reporters. "He's had 13-14 games since I've been here now, he played more games from the start than he didn't play from the start."

"He said to me that he's still happy and that he wants to perform on a high level here for the club. He didn't mention a thing about not being happy here. I don't think this is an issue and he never said anything about that when we spoke."

"The (transfer) window is closed right now. Even in case he and his agents or his family think about going to another club, well, he can do that but in the summer."

