

**IRAN NEWS Felicitates Its  
Muslim Readers Over the Start of  
Holy Month of Ramadhan  
Which Began as of April 1 and  
In Iran as of April 3**

# IRAN NEWS

**Government Spokesman  
Ali Bahadori Jahromi Said that the  
U.S.' Imposing New Sanctions  
Against Iran and Denying the  
Iranian Singer to Enter the U.S.  
Indicated Washington's Animosity  
With Iranian People**

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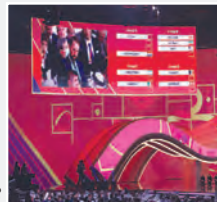


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## SPORTS

**Iran to Face,  
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## Iran Rejects UN Human Rights Resolution

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has categorically rejected a United Nations resolution on the human rights situation in the country, saying it has been drafted by Britain and other Western countries based on groundless claims and incorrect and spiteful information.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran condemns the move by the British government and other founders of this resolution which is a clear example of abusing the transcendent concepts and values of human rights to advance short-sighted political motives and considers it devoid of any legal validity," Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said on Friday.

He added that Western countries are making efforts to continue the spread of Iranophobia and defamation of Iran, emphasizing, "These countries, which themselves have a long history of gross human rights violation, including the sale of weapons to authoritarian, occupying and aggressive regimes, have made human rights as a means to advance their own political aims and ambitions." The Iranian spokesperson warned that such "immoral and unjustified" moves would not only fail to promote human rights and respect for it globally, but would merely fuel negative stereotypes and political labeling against nations which have seriously tarnished the true meaning of human rights.

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## Leader Urges Officials Not to Tie Economy to Sanctions



**IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK**

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei warned state officials against making development of Iran's economy conditional on the removal of sanctions, saying that the country should be run in a way that it would not be hurt by sanctions.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in his New Year speech to the Iranian nation just one day after he issued his Nowruz message in which he designated the Persian New Year as the year of "Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating."

"In economy, the most important issue is the issue of [domestic] production," the Leader said in his Monday speech, adding that this was why he highlighted this issue in his Nowruz message to the nation.

The Leader noted that most of his demands in the area of economy are aimed at state officials, which are mostly addressed to the executive officials, but also to judicial authorities and other concerned officials.

Ayatollah Khamenei said to overcome the economic problems facing the country, the key is to move toward the knowledge-based economy, which means an economic system where knowledge plays an axial role in all fields of production.

"If we pursue this policy and make knowledge the cornerstone of the country's economy and increase the number of knowledge-based companies, this will have many benefits for the country. It will increase productivity, increase quality of products, and lead to production of competitive products."

One of the main problems in our economy, the Leader said, is low productivity of this sector, which must be made up for, adding, "This important economic problem will be solved if we move toward the knowledge-based economy."

"Boosting domestic production is the sole way to achieve equitable progress in economy and overcome the problem of poverty in the country," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader noted that there are almost 7,000 knowledge-based companies in the country, which can create 300,000 direct jobs.

Ayatollah Khamenei said he expects the officials to take steps to double the number of knowledge-based companies in the country, so that the number of direct jobs created by them would be also doubled, especially in those sectors, which are lagging behind in this regard, especially the agriculture sector.

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## Destructive Response Awaits Enemy's Slightest Mistake

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the Islamic Republic will give a destructive response to the enemy's slightest mistake and act of adventurism against the country.

The IRGC made the remarks in a statement issued on the occasion of the Islamic Republic Day on Thursday, noting that it joins hands with other sections of the Armed Forces and security forces to safeguard independence, security, and national interests of Iran.

The IRGC, the statement said, "will give categorical and destructive responses to even the smallest mistake of the evil and adventurist enemy against the Islamic homeland, which will not even give them time to express regret."

It added that the IRGC will continue to fulfill its duties without any attention to recent delusional remarks made by the terrorist regime of the United States against the elite force, as such remarks indicate how the rulers of this regime lag behind the global developments.

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## Tehran Wants Trade With Russia in National Currencies

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran would like to conduct trade with Russia using the two countries' national currencies - the ruble and the toman, and agreements on this matter already exist, Iranian Central Bank Vice Governor Mohsen Karimi has said.

"The relevant agreements and opportunities already exist. Iran would like to use them to conduct trade operations with Russia in rubles and tomans," Karimi told Sputnik.

Trade turnover between Russia and Iran hit a new record in 2021, exceeding the equivalent of \$4 billion, with Russian exports to Iran accounting for over \$3 billion of this figure, and Russian imports from Iran reaching \$967.3 million, a 21.4 percent jump compared to the year before.

During a two-day visit to Moscow in January, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi said that the two countries had discussed monetary and banking issues, and agreed to remove trade barriers to increase trade to the equivalent of \$10 billion a year.

"The two countries can take steps to break the dominance of the dollar over monetary and banking relations and trade with the national currency," Raisi said during his visit.

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## Iraq Granted 120-Day Waiver to Import Energy From Iran

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The U.S. has granted Iraq another 120-day sanctions waiver enabling continued cross-border imports of energy from Iran without triggering penalties, a State Department official has said.

A written statement by the official, cited by industry magazine Iraq Oil Report, said the waiver will allow Iraq to pay for electricity imports from Iran.

"The Secretary of State has renewed the sanctions waiver for Iraq to engage in financial transactions related to the import of electricity from Iran," it quoted the unnamed official's statement as saying. "The waiver ensures that Iraq is able to meet its short-term energy needs while it takes steps to reduce its dependence on Iranian energy imports."

Iraq needs more than 23,000 megawatts of electricity to meet its domestic demand but years of war following the 2003 US invasion have left its power infrastructure in tatters and a deficit of some 7,000 megawatts.

The U.S. has had to repeatedly extend sanctions exemption by 45, 90 or 120 days, to allow Baghdad to import Iranian energy, but it is unhappy with close relationship and trade between Baghdad and Tehran.

In the past, officials in Baghdad have said there is no easy substitute to imports from Iran because it would take years to adequately build up Iraq's energy infrastructure. They have said American demand acknowledges neither Iraq's energy needs nor the complex relations between Baghdad and Tehran.

Gas imports from Iran generate as much as 45 percent of Iraq's 14,000 megawatts of electricity consumed daily. Iran transmits another 1,000 megawatts directly, making itself an indispensable energy source for its Arab neighbor.

The exports have continued despite illegal US sanctions, but Tehran has faced numerous problems for repatriation of its money from those sales. The exact amount of the Iraqi debt is not known. In the past, Iranian officials have said between \$6 billion and \$7 billion of Iranian funds are held in the Arab country.

Iraq imports a wide range of goods from Iran, including food, agricultural products, home appliances, air conditioners and car parts. It imported more than \$8.2 billion of Iranian goods in the 11 months of the last Persian year which ended on March 20, up 20% from the same period in the previous year, new data released by Iran's Ministry of Mining, Industry and Trade showed.

That made Iraq the second importer from Iran after China which took in more than \$12.6 billion of non-oil Iranian goods during the period. Turkey was the third importer of non-oil Iranian goods worth \$5.6 billion, the figures showed.

## Tehran Blasts New U.S. Sanctions

**IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran has slammed the newly-imposed US sanctions as yet another sign of Washington's ill intent in treating the Iranian nation, saying the move shows America misses no opportunity to exert pressure on the country.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh made the remarks, a day after the U.S. Treasury Department announced sanctions on an individual and companies linked with him for providing assistance to Iran's ballistic missile program.

In its statement, the Treasury said the new sanctions target the companies that procured ballistic missile propellant-related materials for a unit of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) that is responsible for the research and development of ballistic missiles. Khatibzadeh said Washington's move "is another indication of the U.S. administration's malice toward the Iranian people and is designed in line with its failed maximum pressure policy against Iran."

"It clearly proves the fact that the current U.S. administration, contrary to its claims, uses every opportunity to level baseless accusations and put pressure on the Iranian people," he added.

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## Iran to Start Drilling At Arash Gas Field

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Oil Minister Javad Owji says Iran will soon begin drilling at the Arash natural gas field shared with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia after the two Arab states signed a document to build the offshore reservoir without Tehran’s participation. “Comprehensive studies of the Arash joint field have been completed by drilling exploration wells and conducting seismic surveys,” Owji tweeted. “With the installation of the jacket , the drilling operation in the field will begin soon,” he added.

Last week, Kuwait said it planned to extract 1 billion standard cubic feet per day of gas and 84,000 barrels per day of condensate from the field under an agreement signed with Saudi Arabia. Iran dismissed the agreement as “illegal”, saying it breached their discussions to build the field together.

Owji said, “Although we want to negotiate and cooperate for development of joint fields, unilateral measures will not prevent the implementation of the project.”

## People’s Livelihood, Economy Not Tied To Vienna Talks

**IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK**

**TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raeisi says the Islamic Republic has not abandoned talks with the P4+1 group of countries on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), nor has Tehran tied the people’s livelihood and the country’s economy to the accord as well as the negotiations in the Austrian capital of Vienna.**

Raisi made the remark in a meeting with a group of scholars and clerics in the holy city of Mashhad in the eastern province of Khorasan Razavi on Thursday.

“JCPOA-related negotiations are pursued with strength and dignity,” the Iranian president said, adding, “We have not left the negotiating table and today the principled positions of the Islamic Republic are expressed with dignity, but in no way have we tied the lives of the people and the economy to JCPOA and [Vienna] talks.”

Raisi went on to say, “Regardless of whether the negotiations [in Vienna] succeed

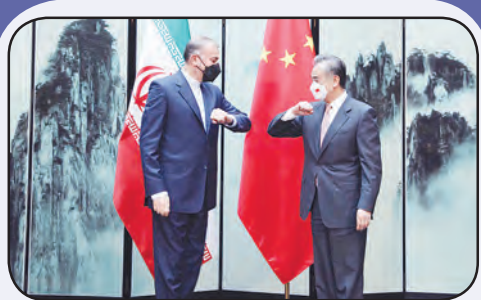


or not, we have our own plans for the management of national economy and we will continue them with full power.”

“We do not pin our hopes on foreigners,” Iran’s chief executive said at the meeting.

“We favor relations with all [countries], but we never wait for others to come and solve our problems. Experience has shown and we have learned from our predecessors never to trust foreigners. They have not helped solve anyone’s problems and will not do it for us either. Our trust is put in the resources and potentialities of the country,” President Raisi said.

### Tehran, Beijing Pledge To Fight Illegitimate, Unilateral Sanctions



TEHRAN (PressTV) - As the United States slaps new sanctions on Tehran, the Iranian and Chinese foreign ministers have asserted that they will fight Washington’s “illegitimate and unilateral” sanctions against independent countries.

On Wednesday, the U.S. Treasury announced a fresh round of sanctions on an individual and companies linked with him for providing assistance to Iran’s ballistic missile program.

Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and Wang Yi talked on Thursday about taking measures to counter the unilateral imposition of illegal sanctions.

During a meeting in Tunxi, China, on the sidelines of the third summit of the foreign ministers of Afghanistan’s neighbors, the two foreign ministers also discussed the latest developments around the Vienna negotiations on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal.

Amir-Abdollahian referred to the use of sanctions as a pressure tool by Western countries against independent nations, saying it was important to defy the sanctions in order to contribute to the establishment of stability and the prevention of Western-created crises.

During the Thursday meeting, Amir-Abdollahian further underscored the necessity of activating the two countries’ capacities to expand ties, especially in the economic sector.

The chief Iranian diplomat also noted that the two countries have important cooperation in international organizations against the politicization of human rights and interference in the domestic affairs of countries.

For his part, Wang thanked Amir-Abdollahian for his attendance at the Afghanistan summit and underscored the need to implement the 25-year strategic partnership agreement between Tehran and Beijing.

In January, Amir-Abdollahian Wang signed the final documents to announce the start of the Comprehensive Strategic Partnership between the two countries.

The deal allows China to commit to hundreds of billions of dollars in investment in various sectors of the Iranian economy. Iran, in return, will commit to providing China with a stable supply of energy over the next 25 years.

The Sino-Iranian Comprehensive Strategic Partnership was announced in a joint statement during a visit by Chinese President Xi Jinping to Tehran in 2016. It was officially signed in March 2021.

## European Gov’ts Provided No Aid for Afghan Refugees in Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - President Ebrahim Raisi says European countries have provided no relief aid for Afghan refugees in Iran and the Islamic Republic is hosting them on its own.

President Raisi said the European countries only made promises but did not keep their word.

The president noted that Iran is now hosting more than 4 million Afghan refugees.

He added that the Islamic Republic of Iran has a sense of responsibility toward the Afghan people, unlike the European governments that pursue the issue of Afghanistan for political purposes.

“What matters today inside Afghanistan is the formation of an inclusive government which represents all Afghan ethnic groups”, Raisi said.

Millions of Afghans have migrated to Iran since the 1980’s when the war began there following the Soviet invasion of the country. The Taliban takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021 also forced huge numbers of them to flee to Iran.

Tehran has time and again called on the EU and the UN to provide the refugees with relief aid. They have yet to provide the Afghans with aid.

## Iran Sends Over 30 Humanitarian Aid Shipments to Afghanistan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s permanent ambassador to the United Nations (UN) says the international community should help Afghans overcome challenges and look toward a bright future, noting that the Islamic Republic continues its humanitarian aid to the Asian nation.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks during a virtual UN donor conference co-hosted by Britain, Germany, and Qatar on Thursday.

“The humanitarian situation in Afghanistan continues to deteriorate, and the country is currently facing great challenges, opportunities, fears and hopes. The international community is expected in the current difficult situation to contribute to helping Afghan people overcome challenges, seize opportunities, dispel fears and boost hopes for a brighter future,” the Iranian envoy highlighted.

Takht-Ravanchi added, “The Islamic Republic of Iran, as a neighboring country, stands by the people of Afghanistan and has used its capacities and facilities to overcome the challenges it has faced over the last four decades.”

“Iran has hosted millions of refugees, who have unfortunately received the least international aid in the last 40 years. Iran has dispatched more than 30 shipments of humanitarian aid to Afghan people in recent months. This is just one example of the assistance that Iran has provided to the people of Afghanistan,” the senior Iranian diplomat pointed out.

“The financial support of the international community is vital to help Afghanistan surmount the current difficult situation,” Takht-Ravanchi said.

He also denounced as illegal the seizure of Afghanistan’s frozen assets, demanding their immediate and unconditional release.

“Hopes for future must be guaranteed among the people of Afghanistan, especially among the younger generation who will lead the country in the future. This will not be possible unless an inclusive government is formed and sufficient attention is paid to the political and social fabrics of Afghanistan, which can involve people from all walks of life, including various ethnicities, men, women and youth,” Takht-Ravanchi said.

## Tehran Welcomes UN-Brokered Truce in Yemen

**IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK**

TEHRAN - Iran has welcomed a two-month ceasefire brokered by the United Nations between the Saudi-led invading coalition and Yemen’s popular Ansarullah resistance movement.

UN Special Envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, announced on Friday the nationwide truce which coincides with the start of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Grundberg also said he plans to intensify his work with the parties during the two-month period, with the aim of reaching a permanent ceasefire, addressing urgent economic and humanitarian measures, and resuming the political process.

In a statement on Saturday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh expressed hope that the ceasefire could be a prelude to the complete lifting of the siege on Yemen and the establishment of a permanent truce in line with efforts aimed at finding a political solution to the crisis.

He further stressed Tehran’s support for a political and humanitarian solution to the Yemen conflict.

On the eve of Ramadan, he added, the Islamic Republic hopes to see improved humanitarian conditions as well as a full exchange of prisoners between the warring sides by assigning top priority to humanitarian issues and the continuation of the ceasefire.

Under the truce, which would come into effect on Saturday at 7 p.m. local time (1600 GMT), the warring parties have accepted to halt all offensive military operations, including cross-border attacks.

They have also agreed for fuel ships to enter Hudaydah port and for commercial flights to operate from the airport in the capital, Sana’a, to predetermined destinations in the region.

The parties have further agreed to meet under the auspices of the UN special envoy to open roads in Ta’izz and other Yemeni provinces.

## Russia Says Will Work With Iran to Bypass Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov says Moscow and Tehran would cooperate to bypass sanctions, as the United States imposes a new round of sanctions against the Islamic Republic in a bitter blow to the prospects of reaching an agreement in Vienna.

The U.S. Treasury Department announced on Wednesday sanctions on an individual and companies linked with him for providing assistance to Iran’s ballistic missile program.

In its statement, the Treasury said the new sanctions target the companies that procured ballistic missile propellant-related materials for a unit of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) that is responsible for the research and development of ballistic missiles.

Earlier in the day, Lavrov had said Russia would work with Iran to take practical steps in an effort to circumvent Western sanctions, the RIA news agency reported.

The remarks come as Russia has become the world’s most-sanctioned country since Moscow launched a military operation in Ukraine on February 24.

## Iran, Pakistan Discuss Holding Joint Economic Commission Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister of Pakistan during a meeting with his Iranian counterpart in Beijing discussed the latest developments related to the Vienna talks, holding of next meeting of the Joint Economic Commission, and cross-border trade.

Pakistan Foreign Ministry in a statement said foreign minister Shah Mahmood Qureshi met with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian on the sidelines of the third meeting of Afghan neighbors in Chinese capital.

Qureshi in his views said Pakistan is eager to convert its friendly relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran to a strong economic and trade partnership.

He stressed that close relations and the exchange of high-level delegations of the two countries in the political, economic, security, and intelligence fields are a manifestation of strong Tehran- Islamabad ties.

Emphasizing that the 21st meeting of the Joint Economic Commission will be held in the near future, the Pakistani foreign minister informed his Iranian counterpart that 85% of the infrastructure development and the construction of the border markets at the new Mand-Pishin crossing has been completed.

He expressed satisfaction with the transfer of goods from Pakistan to Turkey via Iran using the TIR system and expressed hope that the two countries would continue to cooperate in facilitating the export of goods.

Appreciating Iran’s support for Pakistan’s regional positions, Qureshi said that the people and government of the country are looking forward to the visit of Iranian President Ebhram Raisi to Pakistan.

After meeting with Amirabdollahian, the Pakistani foreign minister told the media that the two sides reviewed the developments in Afghanistan and that he was briefed by his Iranian counterpart on the developments in Vienna talks.

The foreign ministers of Iran and Pakistan agreed to continue consultations on important international issues, including developments in the region.

## Road Accidents Claim 17,000 Lives in Iran Annually

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official says an estimated 17,000 people lose their lives in vehicle accidents across the country on an annual basis, while the number is 20-30 times bigger when it comes to cases of injuries and disabilities.

Jafar Tashakkori Hashemi, chairman of the Civil Engineering and Transportation Commission of Tehran City Council said in an Instagram post that at least 552 people died in road accidents from March 20 to 29, amid a rise in trips during New Year holidays, in what he described as “no-return travels that decide a bitter fate for passengers and their families.”

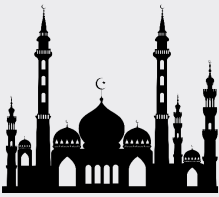
Authorities have warned that the number is expected to rise toward the end of the two-week holidays when many hit the roads back to their hometowns.

The official said although “human errors” are blamed for 80 percent of the accidents, modern technology has come to the aid of car manufacturers to enable the vehicles to prevent fatalities in the case of such errors.

“Unfortunately, due to a lack of competition in car manufacturing and the production of low-quality vehicles in addition to unsafe roads in our country, over 17,000 people lose their lives, with the number being 20 to 30 time bigger in cases of disabilities and injuries, which mainly includes active people aging between 15 to 45.”

The figures, he said, places Iran on the list of high-risk states in terms of road traffic accidents.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

13:07

19:45

05:20

06:46

50. No (chance) will they then have, by will, to dispose (of their affairs), nor to return to their own people!

51. The trumpet shall be sounded, when behold! from the sepulchres (men) will rush forth to their Lord!

Surah 36. Ya-sin ( 50 - 51 )

# Iran Oil Production Has Reached Pre-Sanction Levels

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Oil Minister Javad Owji says Iran’s oil production has reached pre-sanction levels, as the country teams up with new customers to export its oil in defiance of the most draconian sanctions imposed by the United States.**

Finding new customers and markets, using different methods in oil contracts, and making use of highly-qualified experts in the field are among the reasons behind the surge in Iran’s crude oil and gas condensate production, Owji said.

“The current oil production capacity has reached the pre-sanctions era, meaning the daily figure of over 3.8 million barrels,” he said.

He also sounded hopeful on achieving higher figures for exports of crude oil, gas condensate, and other petroleum products in the new Iranian year, which began on March 20.

Earlier this week, Owji said Iran’s condensate exports had risen nearly four-fold over the past eight months.

The exports of condensate reached nearly 240,000 barrels per day (bpd) at the end of the calendar year to March 20, he said.

Meanwhile Owji said the country needs a \$200b investment in the upstream and downstream and petrochemical industries, the bulk of which has been raised under 50 contracts.

He said the contracts pertain to the development of oil fields, gas flares and gas fields as well as the improvement of the operation of refineries in terms of quality and quantity.

The Iranian oil minister said in the event of the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal, foreign companies will rush to participate in this plan.

Owji referred to the designation of the Persian year of 1401 as the year of knowledge-based companies, saying more than 200 knowledge-based firms have announced readiness to cooperate with the Oil Ministry.

He said with the construction of a petro-refinery in Hormozgan Province, in southern Iran, the Oil Ministry will be able to produce 300 thousand barrels and this capacity, alongside the Persian Gulf Star Refinery, will be highly conducive to the provision of oil and gas products.

He noted that most of the fields of activity proposed to knowledge-based companies are related to optimizing fuel consumption, increasing production in oil and gas fields and shallow wells and increasing productivity.

Owji said, “We are capable of producing 1 billion cubic meters of natural gas and 3.85 million barrels of oil by relying on the capabilities of our own experts.”

In remarks last month, the minister said the country had managed to increase its oil sales and receive all the revenues despite intensified pressure from Washington to halt the sales by trying to seize Iranian oil tankers.

“We took oil to the places the Americans cannot even think of,” he added.

## Italian Embassy Screens Documentary on Vincenzo Bianchini

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The humanism in the work of Vincenzo Bianchini, an Italian doctor, poet and artist, who spent a long period of his life in Iran between the 50s and the 70s of last century, was under the spotlight of the seventh and last episode of the fine arts series by the Italian Embassy in Tehran “From Tehran to Rome. A Journey through Art “, screened today at the residence of Ambassador Giuseppe Perrone.

Doctor by profession, humanist by inspiration and artist by nature, Bianchini has left a vivid memory in Iran not only for his humanitarian work, but also for his artistic work, carried out over 24 years spent in the most remote areas of the country, such as the provinces of Razavi Khorasan, South Khorasan, Kurdistan, Khuzestan and Kerman.

Through medicine, literature and art, Bianchini has given voice to the suffering of the most disadvantaged members of society, highlighting their dignity and deeply human experience through simple and direct images of figures portrayed in their absolute, unapologetic loneliness.

Bianchini’s work, associated in its style and inspiration with the Italian artistic movement “Arte Povera”, consists today of a large number of paintings and sculptures, as well as collections of poems translated into Persian by important Iranian artists and writers, including Bahman Mohassess, himself the subject of a documentary in the same series by the Italian Embassy in Tehran.

Some of these works by Bianchini will be the subject of an exclusive exhibition, currently in the making with the support of the Italian Embassy in Tehran, to be inaugurated in the next few months at the Tehran’s Museum of Contemporary Art.

“Vincenzo Bianchini was an important and evocative artist, whose work has yet to be adequately discovered and appreciated” Ambassador Perrone said at the event in his residence. “He has shown that a man, an artist, can become a better person and a better artist by discovering, researching and embracing new cultures and lifestyles”.

“I am happy that the Italian Embassy in Tehran is part of this new project and that the upcoming exhibition at the Tehran’s Museum of Contemporary Art, with the support of our Embassy, will give a voice to an Italian artist who stands as a symbol of the enduring exchange and mutual enrichment between the Italian and the Persian culture”, he concluded.

The documentary “Vincenzo Bianchini. The Humanist and the Artist “, as well as the previous six episodes of the series “From Tehran to Rome. A Journey through Art” featuring Italian and Iranian artists whose life and career have been shaped in both countries, culture and art, are available on the social media channels of the Italian Embassy in Tehran (YouTube, Instagram, Twitter).

## Gov’t to Open 45 Dams by 2025

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran plans to launch 45 new dams until 2025 as authorities warn that water shortage could threaten tens of millions of people across the country.

A report by the official IRNA news agency showed that the new dams will expand the storage capacity of reservoirs in Iran by around 10 billion cubic meters.

Iran’s current water storage capacity is more than 53 billion cubic meters. The country has around 600 dams, including nearly 200 national reservoirs.

The report cited a recent statement by Iran’s Energy Ministry showing that a main focus of the dam construction campaign will be on reservoirs that could supply water to offshore regions in south and north of Iran. It added that Hormuzgan on the Persian Gulf and Sistan and Baluchestan on the Sea of Oman will respectively host seven and five of the planned dams.

Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian said that around 300 cities across Iran, including provincial capitals and large metropolises, are currently facing water tension issues.

Mehrabian said the government will invest heavily on water supply and management projects, including on construction of pipelines and water treatment facilities, to minimize the risks of water shortages for people in those cities. He said the Ministry will introduce grants and loans to encourage efficient irrigation systems in Iran’s agriculture sector which is responsible for more than 80% of the water consumption in the country.

## Iranian Delegation Visiting Russia For Expansion of Trade Ties

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian trade delegation is visiting Russia with the aim of expanding exports and buying livestock inputs and oil seeds from the country.

Ahmad Khani Nozari, Iran’s Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, said given that prices of oil seeds and livestock inputs are going up worldwide, Iran can meet its needs for these products by purchasing them from Russia.

Khani Nozari noted that Russia’s big market provides a good opportunity for Iranian producers to play a more active role.

He added that the visit by the Iranian delegation is aimed at expanding economic cooperation and in line with strategic agreements that were reached during President Ebrahim Raisi’s recent visit to Moscow.

According to the Iranian official, the trip means negotiation for facilitating trade and expansion of exports of Iranian-made goods to Russia at a time when the country is under heavy sanctions by the European Union and the U.S.

## Tehran, Moscow Discussing Possibility of Using MIR Cards

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran’s Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali says Tehran and Moscow are discussing the possibility of recognizing cards using Russian MIR payment system.

This enables both sides to skirt SWIFT.

“The issue is on the agenda of talks and we are discussing it with our Russian colleagues,” Jalali said at a press conference.

MIR is a Russian payment system for electronic fund transfers established by the Central Bank of Russia under a law adopted on May 1 2017.

It was actually created in 2014 following the Western sanctions on Russian financial institutions in the wake of the crisis in eastern Ukraine.

Reports say more than 50 percent of Russians have at least one MIR card. Over 25 percent of financial transactions are also done using the system.

The Western governments including the U.S. have imposed hundreds of sanctions on Russian institutions and companies over Russia’s offensive in Ukraine.

The Russian banks and financial institutions have been effectively cut off from international systems as a result of the bans. Russia is now facing the highest number of Western sanctions in the world.

## Iran to Nearly Double Gas Storage Capacity to 6 bcm

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Oil Ministry plans to expand its underground gas storage (UGS) facilities in center and northeast of the country to allow better management of gas resources during cold winter months.

A report by semi-official Fars news agency said that Iran’s UGS capacity will reach 6 billion cubic meters (bcm) by 2025, nearly double the current figure of 3.25 bcm.

Gas storage is typically filled during the summer season before being used in the winter. Iran has two UGS facilities, a relatively large one located near the northeastern city of Sarakhs under the name of Shurijeh and a smaller system located in Sarajeh near the central city of Qom.

However, the current storage capacity only accounts for 1.7% of the total annual gas production in Iran.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was in Shurijeh on Thursday to order the start of construction works on a second phase of the storage system.


The project will take three years to finish and will need an investment worth \$700 million. It will allow the transfer of another 20 million cubic meters (mcm) per day of natural gas from the storage.

The report by Fars said that a separate expansion project in Sarajeh in central Iran will bring the total gas storage capacity in the country to over 6 bcm by 2025 while daily gas transfer capacity from the two storage systems will reach 55 mcm.

Iran is one the largest producers and consumers of natural gas in the world. The country’s current output is estimated at about 1 bcm per day which is mostly supplied from the giant South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf.

Natural gas is currently available to 99% of the urban population and 86% of the people living in the Iranian countryside through a 37,000-kilometer pipeline system.

Iran, Armenia Stress Development of Energy Relations



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran energy minister and the advisor to the prime minister of Armenia emphasized the development of relations in the energy filed and the removal of barriers in the way of stepped-up relations.

Iranian Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian and Advisor to Armenian Prime Minister Artashes Toumanian held a meeting in Tehran on Monday to stress the necessity of expanding cooperation between the two countries in the field of energy.

During the meeting, Mehrabian described the bilateral ties between Tehran and Yerevan as “privileged” and said that those ties need to further expand.

The Iranian energy minister also stressed the need to prepare the condition for the meeting between the president of Iran and the prime minister of Armenia.

He further pointed to the vast capabilities of Iranian companies active in the field of technical and engineering services and the scope of activities of these companies around the world, as well as construction and repair of power plants, construction of hydropower plants and other areas, and suggested bilateral meetings to introduce capabilities and cooperation capacities of the two countries with the participation of the economic agents from both sides.

Both sides in the meeting also stressed the need to coordinate the holding of the 17th Iran-Armenia Cooperation Summit hosted by the Armenian side on May 10 and 13, and described the summit as important for the development of relations between the two countries in the area of energy.

The advisor to the prime minister of Armenia, for his part, mentioned the important issues of bilateral cooperation, and discussed constructive decisions for the development of trade and economic cooperation, as well as cooperation in the field of energy with the Iranian chief of the joint cooperation commission.

Toumanian also met Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji at Iran’s Oil Ministry compound earlier. Oil Minister Owji met with the advisor to the Armenian prime minister on bilateral cooperation in the field of energy.

Owji received the Advisor to the Prime Minister of Armenia for a meeting in Tehran to discuss cooperation in the field of energy.

According to the news service of the Iranian oil ministry SHANA, Armenia has low hydrocarbon reserves and relies on imports of fuel and a nuclear power plant that was built during the former Soviet Union to provide the energy it needs.

Due to political differences with Azerbaijan, the oil-rich neighbor of the east, and Turkey, the western neighbor of Armenia, Yerevan supplies its energy needs from Iran and Georgia.

Earlier, Armenian sources reported that the two countries agreed to enhance Iranian gas exports to Armenia. Russia now supplies about 80 percent of Armenia’s gas.

In 2004, Tehran and Yerevan signed a 20-year gas for electricity barter agreement, according to which Iran’s exported gas will be consumed by power plants in Armenia, and in return, Iran imports electricity from Armenia. Armenia has been importing gas from Iran since the middle of 2009.



## Honduras Seizes Assets of Ex-President Awaiting Extradition to U.S.

TEGUCIGALPA (Dispatches) - Honduran authorities on Friday seized properties, financial holdings and other assets belonging to ex-president Juan Orlando Hernandez, who is awaiting extradition to the United States to face drug-trafficking charges, the public ministry said.

Following an investigation into Hernandez's family assets, authorities "executed operations to secure and seize material and immaterial assets, commercial businesses and financial products linked to the family nucleus," said the ministry in a statement.

Ministry spokesman Yuri Mora told AFP that 33 properties, eight commercial businesses, 16 vehicles and several financial products had been seized.



## U.S. Lifting Pandemic Expulsion Policy

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States announced Friday it was lifting a public health order imposed because of the Covid-19 pandemic that required the immediate expulsion of migrants arriving at the border.

Department of Homeland Security Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas said the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's so-called Title 42 public health order would be lifted next month.

"Title 42 remains in place until May 23 and, until then, DHS will continue to expel single adults and families encountered at the Southwest border," Mayorkas said in a statement.



## Sri Lanka Declares State of Emergency Amid Street Protests



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's president declared a state of emergency Friday giving sweeping powers to security forces a day after hundreds tried to storm his house in anger over an unprecedented economic crisis.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa invoked the tough laws allowing the military to arrest and detain suspects for long periods without trial as demonstrations calling for his ouster spread across the South Asian nation.

The emergency was declared for "protection of public order and the maintenance of supplies and services essential to the life of the community," he said in a proclamation.

The nation of 22 million is facing severe shortages of essentials, sharp price rises and crippling power cuts in its most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

Police reimposed a nighttime curfew Friday in the Western Province, which includes the capital Colombo, expanding the no-go zone from the previous night.

Earlier in the evening, dozens of rights activists carried handwritten placards and oil lamps in the capital while demonstrating at a busy intersection.

"Time to quit Rajapaksas," said one placard. "No more corruption, go home Gota," said another, referring to the president.

In the highland town of Nuwara Eliya, activists blocked the opening of a flower exhibition by Prime Minister Mahinda Rajapaksa's wife, Shiranthi, police said.

The southern towns of Galle, Matara and Moratuwa also saw anti-government protests, and similar demonstrations were reported in the northern and central regions. All held up traffic on main roads.

Thursday night's unrest outside the president's private home saw hundreds of people demand he step down.

People chanted "lunatic, lunatic, go home", before police fired tear gas and used water cannon.

The crowd turned violent, setting ablaze two military buses, a police jeep, two patrol motorcycles and a three-wheeler. They also threw bricks at officers.

At least two protesters were wounded. Police said 53 protesters were arrested, but local media organisations said five news photographers were also detained and tortured at a local police station, a charge the government said it will investigate.

The police and military presence was beefed up Friday.

Two government ministers said a major intelligence failure had placed the lives of the president and his wife in danger on Thursday.

"Both the president and his wife were at their home when the protests were going on," Health Minister Keheliya Rambukwella told reporters in Colombo, discounting earlier claims that they were away at the time.

## Yemen's Warring Parties Agree To Two-Month Truce

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The UN said Yemen's warring parties have agreed to a two-month extendable truce starting Saturday, the first day of Ramadan for many Muslims, and an accord on fuel shipments and Sanaa airport.

Friday's announcement brings a glimmer of hope in a brutal conflict that has killed hundreds of thousands and left millions on the brink of famine in Yemen, long the Arab world's poorest country.

"The parties to the conflict have responded positively to a United Nations proposal for a two-month truce which comes into effect tomorrow 2 April at 1900hrs," UN special envoy for Yemen Hans Grundberg said in a statement. "The truce can be renewed beyond the two-month period with the consent of the parties."

UN chief Antonio Guterres welcomed the announcement, expressing hope for a "political process" to bring peace to the country. "You must take that momentum in order to make sure that this truce is fully respected and that it is renewed and... that a true political process is launched," he said.

"This demonstrates that even when things look impossible, when there is the will to compromise, peace becomes possible," Guterres added.

The announcement comes as discussions on Yemen's devastating conflict take place in Saudi Arabia.

Riyadh has been leading a military coalition to support the government against the Huthis since March 2015, after the rebels seized the capital Sanaa the year before.

The Huthis, who rejected joining talks held on enemy territory, last week made a surprise offer of a temporary truce and a prisoner swap.

The coalition later said it would cease military operations in Yemen during the Muslim holy month of Ramadan.

The ceasefire, the first since April 2020, has been respected so far.

"The parties accepted to halt all offensive military air, ground and maritime operations inside Yemen and across its borders," Grundberg said.

"They also agreed for fuel ships to enter into Hodeida (province's) ports and commercial flights to operate in and out of Sanaa airport to predetermined destinations in the region."

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## Mexican President Poised to Win Historic, Polarizing Referendum on His Rule

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador is this month poised for victory in a referendum on his rule that could fortify his authority during the final stretch of his administration even as critics dismiss the vote as a sideshow.

The recall referendum on April 10 has given the popular leftist Lopez Obrador a focal point for his constant broadsides against the opposition, which is struggling to capitalize on the troubles he has had delivering on promises.

Lopez Obrador argues the first-of-its-kind vote, which he himself called, is vital to validate his democratic mandate. Much of the opposition sees it as a distraction from governing a country where presidents can only serve a single six-year term.

"It reaffirms the principle that the people are sovereign, that they are the ones in charge," Lopez Obrador said of the vote late last year. "(And) the conservatives don't like it."

Many people, however, seem indifferent.

A poll published in early March by newspaper El Financiero showed 52% regarded the referendum as unnecessary. Some 42% took the opposing view. Still, when asked whether Lopez Obrador should finish his term, 63% said 'yes'. Only 30% said no.

The survey estimated between 18% and 27% of the electorate would take part, well below the 40% threshold required to make the result binding, even

though the president has said he will step down if he loses, irrespective of turnout.

He has helped to keep the referendum in the public eye by accusing the national electoral institute of siding with his critics, and trying to undermine the vote, which it denies.

Lopez Obrador's approval rating has been robust, helped by a divided opposition and his control of the political agenda via daily news conferences. Latest polling shows it around 60%, even though the economy's recovery from the pandemic stalled late last year and homicides remain close to record levels.

Prominent opposition politicians have argued the referendum is a waste of public money and should be ignored, likely depressing the turnout among their supporters, and making the likelihood of an upset vanishingly small, pollsters say.

"The referendum's a joke," said Alejandra, 23, a Mexico City student who voted for Lopez Obrador in 2018 but now opposes him, partly because she disagrees with his energy policy.

Lopez Obrador wants to change the constitution to favor Mexico's state energy companies, which are large consumers of fossil fuels, over private solar and wind firms. He has set a vote in Congress on the issue for the week after the referendum.







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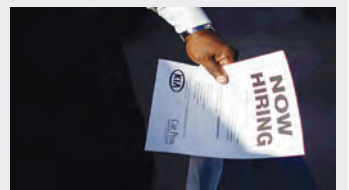


## Eurozone Unemployment Hits Historic Low in February

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The unemployment rate in the eurozone dropped below seven per cent in February to its lowest level ever recorded, the EU's official statistics agency said.

Last month, 6.8 per cent of the workforce were without a job, down by 0.1 percentage point from January, Eurostat said in a statement.

The January figure was revised upwards fractionally from the 6.8 per cent originally reported. Since December 2021, unemployment in the 19-member eurozone has been at the lowest levels since Eurostat began compiling the data in April 1998.



## World Bank Urges Support For Poor as Food Prices Soar

DUBAI (Dispatches) - A senior World Bank official called for more support for poor people globally as the war in Ukraine sends food prices soaring. Developing and import-dependent countries have been heavily impacted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine — the two countries that account for more than a quarter of the world's annual wheat sales.

"It's not so much about food availability," Mari Pangestu, the World Bank's managing director for development policy, told AFP during Middle East and North Africa Climate Week in Dubai.

"The production at the moment is adequate, whether we're talking about wheat, rice or maize, which are the main food products.

"It's more about affordability. Apart from making sure the flow of goods and fertilizers are not impeded, we really need to make sure that affordability of food for the poor households is also going to be addressed."

Net food importers will suffer the most from the economic repercussions of the war, according to the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development, which lists 36 countries as highly dependent on wheat imports from Ukraine and Russia — mostly in Africa and the Middle East.

Among those affected are Egypt, Lebanon, Tunisia and war-torn Yemen, whose humanitarian crisis is already considered the world's worst.

Supply chain problems caused by the Covid pandemic have quickly worsened since the invasion, further adding to the price of food.

The cost of freight has shot up by 34 per cent since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24, according to UNCTAD.

Pangestu, a former Indonesian trade minister, said it was important to maintain and expand programmes to provide food support, especially in the face of rising climate risks.

"This really means social protection schemes in countries which are the most affected — to be able to provide support to the poor households... and then for the farmers, to make sure they can get access to fertilisers and inputs (so) they can produce for the next season," she said.

Pangestu was speaking after an International Monetary Fund report released on Wednesday found temperatures in the Middle East and Central Asia have risen 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit) since the 1990s, twice the global average.

It warned that the region is on the "frontlines" of the climate crisis, with food security and public health in danger, and increased risks of poverty and conflict.

"The fall in food production in (the Middle East) region has been an issue related to climate change even before the (current) crisis," Pangestu said, urging governments to focus on sustainable agriculture practises to address food security longer-term.

## IMF Warns Russia Sanctions Threaten to Chip Away at Dollar Dominance

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Financial sanctions imposed on Russia threaten to gradually dilute the dominance of the US dollar and could result in a more fragmented international monetary system, Gita Gopinath, IMF's First Deputy Managing Director, told The Financial Times (FT).

Russia has been hit with a plethora of sanctions from the United States and its allies for its late-February invasion of Ukraine. Russia has called the invasion a 'special operation' to disarm its neighbour.

"The dollar would remain the major global currency even in that landscape but fragmentation at a smaller level is certainly quite possible," Gopinath told the newspaper in an interview, adding that some countries are already renegotiating the currency in which they get paid for trade.

She said that the war will also spur the adoption of digital finance, from cryptocurrencies to stablecoins and central bank digital currencies.

The IMF did not immediately respond to a Reuters request for comment.

Gopinath told the FT that the greater use of other currencies in global trade would lead to further diversification of the reserve assets held by national central banks.

She had earlier said the sanctions against Russia do not foreshadow the demise of the dollar as the reserve currency and that the war in Ukraine will slow global economic growth but will not cause a global recession.

## U.S. Slaps Sanctions on Russian Tech Firms, Including Largest Chip Maker

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States hit a series of Russian tech firms with sanctions, including the nation's largest chip maker, in the latest economic punishment for Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

The US Treasury said the sanctions are "part of its crackdown on the Kremlin's sanctions

evasion networks and technology companies, which are instrumental to the Russian Federation's war machine."

Mikron, the largest Russian manufacturer and exporter of microelectronics, is among the 21 entities and 13 individuals targeted by the sanctions.

"Joint Stock Company Mikron (Mikron) is the largest Russian manufacturer and exporter of microelectronics," Treasury said, adding the firm is responsible for exporting more than 50 per cent of Russian microelectronics.

Also named were AO NII-Vektor, a software and communication technology firm, hardware sector company T-Platforms as well as Molecular Electronics Research Institute (MERI), which does work for the Russian government, Treasury said.

As a result of today's sanctions, all U.S. property of the targeted people and firms is blocked and must be reported to the U.S. government.

The sanctions also take aim at Moscow-based OOO Serniya Engineering, which Treasury said "is at the center of a procurement network engaged in proliferation activities at the direction of Russian Intelligence Services."

A series of people alleged to be working on behalf of Serniya were named in the sanctions, including Sergey Aleksandrovich Yershov and Viacheslav Yuryevich Dubrovinskiy.

"Russia not only continues to violate the sovereignty of Ukraine with its unprovoked aggression but also has escalated its attacks striking civilians and population centers," said Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen.

"We will continue to target (Vladimir) Putin's war machine with sanctions from every angle," she added.

The Kremlin has scrambled to limit the effects on Russia's economy of the unprecedented sanctions, which have affected everything from the central bank's foreign reserves to McDonalds.

Over one month into the invasion launched on February 24, Moscow has faced heavy military losses and unprecedented sanctions in exchange for relatively meagre progress on the ground.

## OPEC+ Sticks to Modest Oil Output Increase Despite Western Pressure

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The OPEC group of oil producing countries and its Russia-led allies agreed on another modest oil output increase today, ignoring Western pressure to significantly boost production as the Ukraine conflict has rocked prices.

The 13 members of the Saudi-led Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and 10 countries spearheaded by Russia backed an increase of 432,000 barrels per day in May, marginally higher than in previous months.

The group said in a statement following a ministerial meeting that the "continuing oil market fundamentals and the consensus on the outlook pointed to a well-balanced market".

It added that the "current volatility is not caused by fundamentals, but by ongoing geopolitical developments."

The United States has urged OPEC+, as the alliance is known, to boost production as high energy prices have contributed to soaring inflation across the world, which has threatened to severely derail the recovery from the Covid pandemic.

Crude prices have spiked over fears of a major supply shortfall after Moscow invaded Ukraine on February 24. Russia is the world's second biggest exporter of oil after Saudi Arabia.

The international benchmark contract, Brent North Sea crude, flirted with a record high in early March as it soared to almost \$140 (RM588) per barrel.

It has retreated since then on hopes that Moscow and Kyiv could agree on a ceasefire, which would ease concerns over Russian supplies. Covid lockdowns in China have also weighed on prices as the country is the world's top crude consumer.

Analysts said before the meeting that the fall in prices made it even less likely that OPEC+ would further boost output.

Oil prices tumbled again today on reports that the United States is considering tapping its reserves, but they remain above \$100 per barrel.

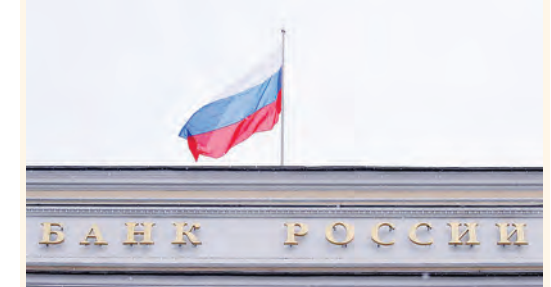
The White House is expected to announce a plan to release a million barrels a day for several months — totalling up to 180 million, according to Bloomberg News.

"If such a gigantic release of emergency reserves actually happens, the oil market would no longer be undersupplied in the second quarter," Commerzbank analyst Carsten Fritsch said, adding that it would even be oversupplied in the third quarter.

The U.S. plan also made it less likely that OPEC+ would raise its output, analysts had said.

The United States, Canada and Britain have decided to ban Russian oil and gas, but the European Union has avoided an embargo as countries such as Germany are highly dependent on imports from Russia.

## Russia Eases Some Curbs On Transferring Abroad



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's central bank money said it was softening restrictions on foreign fund transfers for individuals for a six-month period.

The bank said the measures, which raise an earlier limit on funds that can be transferred abroad, did not apply to residents and non-residents from countries that had imposed sanctions against Russia over Ukraine.

"Within a calendar month, individuals have the right to transfer no more than \$10,000 or the equivalent in another currency from the Russian Federation from their account in a Russian bank to their account or to another person abroad," the bank said in a statement.

The bank added that transfers abroad from bank accounts of non-residents, individuals or legal entities from countries that had imposed sanctions were suspended for the next six months.

The measure will ease strain on Russians who regularly send funds to relatives abroad, or to those who have left the country without access to their funds at home.

Earlier this month, the central bank said it was temporarily suspending transfers by foreign legal entities and individuals from several countries to accounts abroad. It also limited transfers at the equivalent of no more than \$5,000 a month.

The regulator said last week that Russia's central bank imposed in the past month on capital flows out of the country were a tit-for-tat move in response to part of its reserves being frozen by Western countries.

Western sanctions imposed on Russia for what Moscow calls "a special military operation" in Ukraine have limited the central bank's ability to support the rouble currency with dollars and euros held in its foreign currency and gold reserves.

## Americans Pulled Back on Spending in February as Inflation Bit

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — U.S. consumers spent less and saved more in February amid rising prices for a range of goods, even as their incomes continued to increase, government data showed.

The Commerce Department reported personal consumption expenditures (PCE) rose 0.2 per cent last month, less than analysts had expected and much weaker than the upwardly revised 2.7 per cent increase in January.

Incomes rose 0.5 per cent, a figure in line with forecasts, as wages rose but prices ticked up 0.6 per cent compared to January and 6.4 per cent compared to February 2021, with costs for energy and food seeing big yearly gains.

PCE prices are the preferred inflation gauge of the Federal Reserve, and Lydia Boussoir of Oxford Economics said the latest high reading confirms that central bankers are likely to raise interest rates repeatedly this year to bring price increases under control.

"U.S. consumers will face hard choices in the coming months as surging prices of non-discretionary items such as food, energy, and shelter pressure their budgets and lead them to pare back some purchases and dip into their savings," she said.

Boussoir added that rising wages, low unemployment and built up savings could offset some of the hit.

Spending rose \$34.9 billion overall, the data said, with consumers channeling more of their dollars towards services like hotels and restaurants, and less towards goods such as automobiles, which are in short supply as manufacturers struggle to find semiconductors.

Food prices were up eight per cent compared to the same month last year, while energy prices had climbed 25.7 per cent.



With those categories excluded, PCE prices were up 5.4 per cent compared to February 2021, still higher than the month before.

When adjusted for inflation, both disposable income and spending decreased by less than half a percentage point last month, the data said.

The report contained evidence that more Americans are holding on to their money amid the inflation wave, as the personal savings rate ticked up to 6.3 per cent with US\$1.15 trillion in the bank.

Most of the increase in income was from wages and benefits, which was offset by decreases in government aid programs, according to the report.



# Tehran-Damascus Ties Are Strategic

TEHRAN (IP) - People’s Assembly Speaker of Syria, described relations between Syria and Iran as “deeply-rooted and strong”, hailing the development in the special parliamentary relations between the two countries.

Hammouda Sabbagh, who met Deputy Speaker of Iran’s parliament, Ali Nikzad, and an accompanying delegation, highly

appreciated Iran’s principled and firm stances toward regional issues and its limitless support for Syria in its war on terror.

He stressed that Syria, Iran, and countries of the axis of resistance stand united in the face of the Israeli entity and the Western powers that support it, particularly the US, which tries to pressure the people and undermine their unity and independent decision.



# Putin Tells Europe to Pay in Roubles or Russia Will Cut Off Gas

LONDON (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin is demanding foreign buyers pay for Russian gas in roubles from Friday or else have their supplies cut, a move European capitals rejected and which Germany said amounted to “blackmail”.

Putin’s decree on Thursday leaves Europe facing the prospect of losing more than a third of its gas supply. Germany, the most heavily reliant on Russia, has already activated an emergency plan that could lead to rationing in Europe’s biggest economy.

Energy exports are Putin’s most powerful lever as he tries to hit back against sweeping Western sanctions imposed on Russian banks, companies, businessmen and associates of the Kremlin in response to Russia’s invasion of Ukraine. Moscow calls its Ukraine action a “special military operation”.

Putin said buyers of Russian gas “must open rouble accounts in Russian banks. It is from these accounts that payments will be made for gas delivered starting from tomorrow,” or April 1.

“If such payments are not made, we will consider this a default on the part of buyers, with all the ensuing consequences. Nobody sells us anything for free, and we are not going to do charity either - that is, existing contracts will be stopped,” he said in televised remarks.

It was not immediately clear whether in practice there might be a way for foreign firms to continue payment without using roubles, which the European Union and G7 have ruled out.

Italy said it was in contact with its European partners to give a firm response to Russia, adding its own gas reserves would allow economic activity to continue even in the event of disruptions.

Meantime, Germany’s energy firms said they were in close talks with Berlin about how to respond to possible supply disruptions and draw up a roadmap on what to do should Russia stop gas exports.

Under the mechanism decreed by Putin, foreign buyers would use special accounts at Gazprombank to pay for the gas. Gazprombank would buy roubles on behalf of the gas buyer and transfer roubles to another account, the order said.

A source told Reuters that payments for gas delivered in April on some contracts started in the second half of April and May for others, suggesting the taps might not be turned off immediately.

Putin’s decision to enforce rouble payments has boosted the Russian currency, which fell to historic lows after the Feb. 24 invasion. The rouble has since recovered much lost ground.

“What sounded grandiose has turned into a storm in a teacup. By making it the main recipient of money for gas, it puts an extra shield against sanctions around Gazprombank,” said Jack Sharples of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies.

Western companies and governments have rejected any move to change their gas supply contracts to another payment currency. Most European buyers use euros. Executives say it would take months or longer to renegotiate terms.

Payment in roubles would also blunt the impact of Western curbs on Moscow’s access to its foreign exchange reserves.



Meanwhile, European states have been racing to secure alternative supplies, but with the global market already tight, they have few options. The United States has offered more of its liquefied natural gas (LNG) but not enough to replace Russia.

“It is important for us not to give a signal that we will be blackmailed by Putin,” Germany Economy Minister Robert Habeck said, adding that Russia had not been able to divide Europe.

Payments would continue to be made in euros, Germany said.

French economy minister Bruno Le Maire said France and Germany were preparing for the possibility of Russian gas flows being halted. He declined to comment on technical details linked to latest Russian demands for rouble payment.

Putin said the switch to roubles would strengthen Russia’s sovereignty. He said the West was using the financial system as a weapon, and it made no sense for Russia to trade in dollars and euros when assets in those currencies were being frozen.

“What is actually happening, what has already happened? We have supplied European consumers with our resources, in this case gas. They received it, paid us in euros, which they then froze themselves. In this regard, there is every reason to believe that we delivered part of the gas provided to Europe practically free of charge,” he said.

“That, of course, cannot continue,” Putin said, although he said Russia still valued its business reputation and would continue to meet obligations in its gas and other contracts.

European gas prices have rocketed higher on mounting tension with Russia raising the risk of recession. Companies, including makers of steel and chemicals, have been forced to curtail production.

# Sanctions Threatening Iranian People’s Right to Health

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian envoy to the United Nations has denounced the unilateral coercive measures imposed by the US as a “serious threat” to the nation’s right to health and have access to medicines.

Zahra Ershadi, deputy permanent representative of Iran to the UN, made the remarks at the 76th General Assembly session on global health and foreign policy.

She emphasized that affordable health services as well as life-saving medicines, vaccines and diagnostic technologies should be available to all countries without any discrimination or political considerations.

The need for universal access to high quality and affordable health care is a key priority for international development, she added. Health issues should not be politicized in line with the interests of specific parties.

Referring to the unprecedented health situation created by the COVID-19 pandemic, the Iranian diplomat said cooperation, solidarity and unity are more central than ever, urging the world countries to take the opportunity to promote multilateralism and combat unilateralism in order to focus efforts on addressing this humanitarian crisis for the benefit of all.

She also criticized the United States, along with a handful of other countries that blindly follow Washington’s policies, for imposing restrictive measures, including illegal and oppressive economic sanctions, on a number of states, especially those that are affected by the severe consequences of the coronavirus outbreak.

The United States’ inhumane unilateral coercive measures still pose a serious threat to the Iranian people’s right to health and access to essential medicines and medical equipment, Ershadi said.

The Americans claim that unilateral coercive measures do not include foodstuff and medical supplies, but in fact, due to sanctions and the exclusion of countries from the international banking system for financial transfers, it is not possible to have access to these items through existing trade and financial mechanisms, she said.

The envoy further hailed Iran’s significant progress in the field of biotechnology and stem cells, saying that despite unfair sanctions, the country has turned into one of the few producers of the COVID-19 vaccine.

In spite of the Western sanctions, Ershadi noted, the Islamic Republic has hosted millions of Afghan refugees for more than four decades and even vaccinated many of them.

However, international organizations have covered very little of the cost of the services that Iran has provided for the Afghans, she said.

## Tehran Wants Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

Nearly 80 percent of trade between Russia and the Islamic Republic currently consists of agricultural products, with Russia exporting grains and oilseeds to Iran, and importing Iranian vegetables and fruits, dried fruits and nuts, which are valued for their high quality and lack of use of potentially harmful GMOs.

Russian officials have spent years negotiating with allies and partners on trade in national currencies. The crisis in relations with the West sparked by Moscow’s military operation in Ukraine gave this development new impetus, with trade partners in Asia, Africa and Latin America tapped for discussions on the issue.

## Tehran Blasts...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. claims that it is ready to resume compliance with the 2015 Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), while it still continues to violate the agreement and the UN Security Council Resolution 2231, which endorses it, the Iranian spokesperson said.

Iran’s Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said on Sunday that the U.S.’s inability to make a political decision is the main obstacle in the way of Iran and the P4+1 group of countries to reach a final agreement in the Austrian capital of Vienna over the removal of anti-Tehran sanctions and a revival of the JCPOA.

## Destructive Response...

FROM PAGE 1

U.S. allegations against the IRGC, the statement said, reflect the fact that the rulers at the White House “lack a correct understanding of the shift in the power equations in the strategic region of West Asia and even beyond it.”

The statement said undermining and impeding the growth of Iran’s defense power and deterrence capacity is the main goal of the enemy, which is seeking to destroy the Islamic Republic or make it and the Iranian nation submit to the policies of the hegemonic system and Zionism.

“The missile power and the popularity and regional influence of Iran ... [both of] which have been associated with the name of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps, are red lines for the Iranian nation,” the IRGC’s statement said.

“We vociferously announce that the strong Iran has never defined the path to increasing its deterrence power, which guarantees its progress and security, according to aspirations, desires and wishes of the rules of the White House and their evil allies, and will not change it under their pressure, threat or evil media propaganda.”

This comes as Major General Hossein Salami, the chief commander of the IRGC hailed the current status of the combat power of the IRGC units and forces, especially those deployed to the country’s key islands in the south, and their readiness to firmly defend the Islamic Republic’s territories in the face of possible threats.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made substantial headway in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran’s defense capabilities will never be subject to negotiations.

## Iran Non-Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian deputy economy minister announced that the United Arab Emirates, China, Turkey, Germany and the Russian Federation were the five major exporters to Iran in 1400.

China, Iraq, Turkey, UAE and Afghanistan were the five main destinations for Iranian exports, according to him.

Moghaddasi also noted that the amount of foreign goods passing through Iranian borders in 1400, after 7 years, reached 12.5 million tons, showing a growth of 68%.

## Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

The Leader then stressed that it is important for the country to become self-sufficient in production of basic food products as well as related products, such as the livestock feed.

“Unfortunately, our agriculture sector is far from being knowledge-based. If we develop knowledge-based companies in this sector ... we will be able to make the most of this sector and, subsequently, the country’s food security will be guaranteed.”

“Therefore, the number of knowledge-based companies in any economic sector can be considered as an index of its development,” the Leader noted.

Ayatollah Khamenei added that job creation is the second most important economic issue to be addressed by the authorities, noting that development of knowledge-based companies will be the best way to create new jobs and overcome this problem.

Dismissing allegations that sanctions imposed by the United States are an obstacle to promoting production, the Leader said new policies adopted by the Islamic establishment have proven otherwise.

“New policies have shown that it is possible to promote foreign trade in spite of US sanctions and it is possible to enter into regional deals while developing the country’s oil sector.”

He added that despite the existence of US sanctions, Iran has been able to develop its economy and expand regional relations at the same time, advising concerned officials against tying the country’s economy to the U.S. sanctions.

“Of course, I am not saying that we should not seek removal of U.S. sanctions. However, the fundamental point is that we must run the country in a way that it would not be harmed by sanctions,” the Leader said.

In another part of his speech, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said a glance at what is going on in the world proves that Iranians were right in their approach to global affairs by trying to remain independent of world powers and maintaining their country’s independence in the face of all odds.

“The recent developments in Afghanistan and Ukraine proved how right the Iranian nation was in choosing to fight against the [global] arrogance,” Ayatollah Khamenei said.

“In the case of Ukraine, all the world was witness to the West’s racism,” Ayatollah Khamenei said, criticizing discriminatory treatment of people of color who want to flee the war in the Eastern European country.

The Leader said great injustice is done to people in countries that are subservient to the United States, but they show no reaction, but “they try to extort independent countries under the guise of human rights allegations.”

“They are even clearly concerned that the [Ukraine] war is going on in Europe and not the Middle East.” This means that if the war was in the Middle East, they would not care as much.

## Iran Rejects UN...

FROM PAGE 1

Khatibzadeh said the resolution extends the mandate of the Special Rapporteur, who, in recent reports, has shown that he is acting based on the British, American and Zionist directives and is using the UN human rights mechanism as a plaything to achieve their vicious and illegal goals.

“As repeatedly emphasized, the appointment of a special rapporteur on human rights [situation in] a country like Iran is fundamentally unjustified and unconstructive,” he added.

Despite oppressive pressure of the US economic terrorism, the spokesman said, Iran has always lived up to its commitments to its citizens and the international community.

Khatibzadeh said Iran is a religious democratic system that takes steps to promote human rights at national, regional and international levels and is committed to observe the issue.

He emphasized that countries which violate nations’ rights must be held accountable for their crimes committed in gross violation of human rights.

“Proponents of this [anti-Iran] resolution must first condemn the US administration’s measures such as economic terrorism and the intensification of unilateral and cruel sanctions and their destructive impacts on Iranians’ access to basic needs, including medical equipment and items during the coronavirus pandemic,” Khatibzadeh pointed out.

In a resolution on the situation of human rights in Iran, adopted by a vote of 19 in favor, 12 against and 16 abstentions as orally revised, the Council decides to extend the mandate of the special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic for a further period of one year, and requests him to submit a report on the implementation of the mandate to the Human Rights Council at its fifty-second session and to the General Assembly at its seventy-seventh session. It calls upon Iran to cooperate fully with the special rapporteur to permit access to visit the country and to provide all information necessary to allow the fulfillment of the mandate.



## Osaka Rallies Past Bencic To Reach Fina

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Naomi Osaka cried tears of joy after reaching the Miami Open final for the first time before her mind turned towards something else.

The Japanese star has ridden an emotional rollercoaster recently and after a heckler deeply upset her in Indian Wells, in south Florida Osaka couldn't keep the smile off her face.

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## Van Nistelrooy to Take Over As PSV Coach Next Season

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - Former Manchester United and Real Madrid striker Ruud van Nistelrooy has signed a three-year contract to become PSV Eindhoven head coach from next season, the Eredivisie club said.

A former Netherlands international, Van Nistelrooy will take on his first senior management role with PSV, where he spent three years as a player from 1998 to 2001.

The 45-year-old will succeed Roger Schmidt, who will leave when his contract expires at the end of this season.

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SPORTS

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## Iran to Face, U.S. and England In World Cup Group Stage

DOHA (Dispatches) - Global soccer heavyweights were pitted head-to-head and intriguing political storylines drawn as the schedule for the 2022 World Cup was completed at a glitzy ceremony in the Qatari capital on Friday.

Four times champions Germany were drawn in Group E with 2010 winners Spain, while the United States were pitted against Iran, a country with whom they have had long-running political disputes, along with England, and potentially Ukraine, in Group B.

Holders France will meet Denmark and Tunisia in Group D while the tournament will kick off on Nov. 21 with hosts Qatar playing Ecuador.

The toughest group looks to be Group G which put five-times World Cup winners Brazil against Serbia, Switzerland and Cameroon in highly competitive match-ups which had purists rubbing their hands in anticipation.

Brazil coach Tite certainly knows the size of the task ahead. "If you see recent results from our opponents... We will have to work to be able to cope well," he said.

"I watched the Swiss (qualifying) game against Italy, a world-class, high-level game. We will need to be at our highest level."

For others, the group pairing the U.S. with Iran and former colonial masters England was a fascinating one.

"The history of England and the United States it runs deep right?" U.S. coach Gregg Berhalter said. "We can't get away from that, that is something that is in us as a nation."

"Having said that there is the other side is that the PL (Premier League) is the biggest league in the world and the players are the most visible in the world and it is always a great game when we play England."

He did not want to be drawn on the political nuance of the Iran contest, saying: "I think it is about soccer at the end of the day and the best sign of friendship that you can make is competing hard on the field in a fair way and that is what the World Cup is all about and what makes it special."

"We have a ton of respect for Iran and how they qualified and we are looking forward to competing against them."

The U.S. versus England clash will see Berhalter pit his wits against Gareth Southgate, a coach he greatly admires.

"We go way back," Berhalter said. "He's a guy I look up to. He's always been there for me and given me advice. When I first took the job I looked to him as a mentor."

## Liverpool, Man Utd To Clash in Bangkok

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Liverpool and Manchester United will meet in a high-profile friendly in Bangkok in July, the clubs said today, as Premier League teams resume lucrative pre-season tours which stopped when Covid hit.

After the July 12 clash in the Thai capital, Cristiano Ronaldo and his United team-mates will fly to Australia for two more friendlies, including a clash with Crystal Palace, at the 100,000-capacity Melbourne Cricket Ground.

Before the pandemic shut down overseas tours, usually to Asia and the United States, they were a regular money-spinner for Premier League sides — even if managers don't like the travel, hot weather and sometimes questionable pitches.

"It will be the same players as you see now with a few additions if transfer deals happen," said legendary United striker Andy Cole, predicting the two sides' historic rivalry would continue in Bangkok.

"I'm not sure it will be played like a pre-season friendly," he said.

The clash between United and Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool, currently nipping at the heels of Manchester City at the top of the Premier League, at the Rajamangala National Stadium has been dubbed the "Red War" by Thai media and fans.

Both clubs have a strong following in Thailand, with Liverpool shirts and logos especially visible — the Anfield outfit's official Thai language Facebook page has more than 38 million followers.

Former Liverpool defender Phil Babb said he expected Klopp to bring a full-strength squad.

But with tickets ranging from 5,000 to 25,000 baht many ordinary Thai fans have complained of being priced out of seeing their heroes play in the flesh.

Earlier this month senior officials from the two clubs visited Bangkok to check the facilities at the 51,000-seat ground.

Premier League teams touring Asia in the past have complained about substandard pitches, and photos released by the organisers showed Liverpool general manager Ray Haughan on his knees making a detailed inspection of the turf.



The fourth team in Group B will be the winner of the European playoff - Wales, Scotland or war-torn Ukraine - which is set to be played in June.

France's title defence features a clash with Euro 2020 semi-finalists Denmark, who Didier Deschamps' side will play twice in the Nations League before the global tournament.

The 2018 champions, with one of the game's most exciting players in Kylian Mbappe, also face Tunisia and the winners of the playoff series between the United Arab Emirates, Australia and Peru.

Group H features a repeat of the controversial 2010 quarter-final between Uruguay and Ghana. Uruguayan striker Luis Suarez handled the ball on the line in the dying seconds denying Ghana a goal while both teams were tied at 1-1.

Striker Gyan Asamoah blasted the resulting penalty against the bar and over, sending the match to a penalty shootout which Uruguay won 4-2 ending Ghana's hopes of becoming the first African team to reach the World Cup semi-finals.

Portugal, with Cristiano Ronaldo in his fifth World Cup, and South Korea have also been placed in Group H.

Canada's return to the finals, for the first time since their solitary appearance 36 years ago, sees them up against one of the bookmakers' favourites Belgium along with Croatia, the beaten finalists from 2018, and Morocco.

Like Ronaldo, Argentine Lionel Messi is attempting to win his first World Cup in his fifth finals and his side have a potentially tricky task with Mexico, Poland and Saudi Arabia in Group C.

The draw came after a 45 minute musical and video show as FIFA president Gianni Infantino promised the event would "simply be the best tournament ever".



## Hurkacz Stops Medvedev At Miami Open

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev's bid to reclaim the world number one ranking fell short as the Russian lost 7-6(7) 6-3 to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the Miami Open quarter-finals. Defending champion Hurkacz won the first three games and fended off two break points in the seventh as Medvedev, who appeared unwell in the heat at times, struggled with his serve and had four double faults in the first set.

The Russian saved two set points to hold serve in the eighth game and broke in the ninth, but the Polish world number 10 kept his nerve in the tiebreak.

In the second set, Hurkacz broke at the sixth attempt in an 11-minute fifth game as the sweltering heat seemed to get the better of Medvedev.

Sitting on his bench after the seventh game, the U.S. Open champion removed his sweat-drenched shirt and requested assistance from the physio, complaining of dizziness.

"All the match I was not feeling my best," Medvedev told reporters. "After the tough points, I felt that my breath was not recovering fast enough."

In the following game, Medvedev hunched over momentarily and later dropped his racket to the court after he whacked a backhand return into the net.

"Playing Daniil is always fun but it's super competitive," Hurkacz said after the match.



## Hamilton Says He Has Struggled Mentally and Emotionally

LONDON (Dispatches) - Seven-times Formula One world champion Lewis Hamilton has spoken about his mental and emotional struggles, saying in a social media post today that it was "hard some days to stay positive".

The 37-year-old Briton assured fans on Instagram that they were not alone.

"It's been such a tough year already with everything that is happening around us," Hamilton said.

"I have struggled mentally and emotionally for a long time, to keep going is a constant effort but we have to keep fighting, we have

so much to do and to achieve.

"I'm writing to tell you it's OK to feel the way you do, just know that you are not alone and we are gonna get through this."

Hamilton missed out on a record eighth championship last year after a controversial final race of the season in Abu Dhabi that he had led until the last lap.

The sport's most successful driver of all time, with a record 103 wins and poles, shunned social media from the day of that December race until February.

His silence fuelled speculation surrounding his future, with Mercedes team boss Toto Wolff describing Hamilton as "disillusioned".

The sport's only Black driver, an outspoken champion for equal opportunities and diversity, Hamilton has also experienced racism and online abuse.

The Briton has had a difficult start to his 16th season, finishing only 10th in Saudi Arabia last weekend after failing to get through the first phase of qualifying in a car that has been off the pace.

## Infantino Backs Away From Biennial World Cup Plans

DOHA (Dispatches) - FIFA President Gianni Infantino tried to distance himself from a highly controversial project to hold the World Cup every two years as he suggested the plan had never actually been proposed by world football's governing body.

"Let me be very clear that FIFA has not proposed a biennial World Cup," Infantino said on the stage at the organization's congress in Doha on the eve of the draw for this year's tournament.

Despite that, Infantino has pushed the project in recent months along with Arsene Wenger, the former Arsenal manager who is now Fifa's head of global development.

Infantino claimed at a virtual global summit to discuss the topic last December that playing the World Cup more regularly would offer enormous financial benefits for member federations.

Then, FIFA promised an extra US\$19 million (RM80 million) every four years for each national federation, based on feasibility studies projecting major revenue increases.

Yet Infantino had to put off holding a vote on the subject due to vociferous opposition from all sides.

It had initially been thought the subject would feature prominently at today's congress in the Qatari capital, but the agenda was instead dominated by the fall-out from Russia's invasion of Ukraine as well as the build-up to the World Cup.



## Conte Awarded Fourth 'Panchina d'Oro' to Equal Record

MILAN (Dispatches) - Antonio Conte has been awarded Italy's Panchina d'Oro award for the fourth time in his career after leading Inter Milan to their first Serie A title in 11 years last season, the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) said.

The Panchina d'Oro (Golden Bench) is awarded to the best coach in each professional soccer league in Italy by a jury of peers. Juventus boss Massimiliano Allegri is the only coach to have won as many Panchina d'Oro awards as Conte.

But Conte, now managing Tottenham Hotspur, has won six Italian FA coaching awards in total — a record.

He also received one Panchina d'Argento (Silver Bench) in 2008-09 when he was with Bari and a special award for leading Chelsea to their 2016-17 Premier League title win.

"Antonio Conte deserved this award because in a short time he was able to transfer his mentality and his philosophy to the players," Demetrio Albertini, president of the Technical Sector, said.

"He had the great satisfaction of finding his own ideas in the field."

Inter's last league title before the 2020-21 season came in 2010 when they became the first Italian club to win the treble when Jose Mourinho was at the helm.

Last season's Scudetto win also ended Juventus' nine-year reign as champions.

