

Health Ministry Announced on Monday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 140,368 With 53 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Oil Minister Said the Methods His Ministry Sold Crude Oil and Gas Condensate Could Not Be Disclosed, Adding That the Ministry Is No Selling More Crude Than Previous Government Era

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President Calls for Dealing With Those Behind Football Violence



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Oil Earning Realized 10% More Than Budget Targets



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Barca Leapfrog Sevilla Into Second Place



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Iran Prepared to Help Qatar Host 2022 World Cup

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has voiced the country's preparedness to provide Qatar with whatever assistance it needs to better and more magnificently host the 2022 FIFA World Cup, which is scheduled to take place from November 21 to December 18 this year in the Persian Gulf kingdom.

During a telephone conversation with Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani on Sunday evening, Raisi expressed Tehran's satisfaction with the holding of the tournament in Qatar and wished the Arab country success in hosting the high-status event.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to provide Qatar with whatever assistance and help it needs to better and more magnificently host World Cup fixtures through Kish Island and other islands nearby. We are confident that the world will see unforgettable matches, given the planning done," the Iranian president pointed out.

In a draw ceremony held in the Qatari capital city of Doha on Friday night, Iran's national football team was drawn in Group B of the 2022 FIFA World Cup along with England, the United States, and the winner of Europe's Path A playoff that contains Wales vs. Ukraine or Scotland.

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U.S. Responsible for Halt in Vienna Talks



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Ministry spokesman has criticized the United States for a halt in the Vienna negotiations on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal, saying American officials need to make a necessary political decision as soon as possible if they want to reach an agreement.

"All of us should not forget that what we are facing today is not an administration that wants to perform its duties, but rather, one that seeks to exploit legal means in order not to honor its obligations," Saeed Khatibzadeh said at a weekly press conference in the Iranian capital city of Tehran on Monday.

Khatibzadeh further said the Vienna talks have come to a grinding halt because of such an American approach. "The United States is trying to hold the remaining issues hostage to its internal affairs. We will not wait forever ... The United States must make a political decision," he said.

"The U.S. is responsible for the current pause in the talks and its [possible] protraction in the coming days. The solution is in the White House too. [The US] must respond logically to Iran's rational demands, which have been approved by the P4+1 group of countries, so that we can go back to Vienna," the Iranian diplomat added.

Khatibzadeh said an agreement is "very much within reach" if the U.S. becomes fully aware that Iran will neither abandon its red lines nor back down from its demands.

The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry made it clear that the top issue in the Vienna talks is for Iran to be able to fully reap the economic benefits promised under the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) - as the deal is officially called.

Khatibzadeh further explained that Tehran has delivered clear messages to Washington via European Union deputy foreign policy chief Enrique Mora, but has yet to receive a new response from Americans.

He said the 63-year-old Spanish diplomat was carrying a message from the US during his visit to Iran last month. "Our message, responses, and demands were crystal clear ... Mr. Mora left Tehran with messages and answers from Iran, and we are still waiting for the answers of the other side, but no new answer has been received yet," Khatibzadeh said.

He also noted that the imposition of illegal sanctions has become part of US policies, stressing that the Biden administration has followed in the footsteps of its predecessor.

"The United States must accept the fact that it must enter negotiations on the basis of equal footing," he emphasized. The foreign ministry spokesman also said that Iran welcomes a ceasefire in Yemen and has been waiting months for it. Khatibzadeh responded about the violation of the ceasefire in Yemen and said that it had not been confirmed by Yemen's National Government yet.

What is important is that Iran has been encouraging Saudi Arabia to stop taking action for months, he added. Khatibzadeh had expressed hope that the move would begin a complete lifting of the blockade, a permanent ceasefire, and a political solution to the Yemeni crisis.

Now, the ceasefire in Yemen must be accompanied by Yemeni conversations inside the country and accessing humanitarian aid for them, Khatibzadeh said.

Regarding Iran's foreign minister, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian's phone talk with the Secretary-General of the United Nations, António Guterres, Khatibzadeh, pointed out that this conversation was about Yemen's situation too.

Khatibzadeh also referred to Afghanistan's situation and expressed concern about the women and children deprived of their fundamental rights.

He added that Afghanistan's government must take responsibility so that Afghanistan can overcome this crisis.

Khatibzadeh, once again, emphasized forming a comprehensive government in Afghanistan and said that the Afghan people are Iran's priority.

5k Afghans Entered Iran Per Day Since Taliban Takeover

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian official says almost 5,000 Afghans have been entering Iran on a daily basis, since the Taliban took power in Afghanistan last August.

Javad Hedayati, Director General of the international transportation and transit with the Iran's Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization says the number of entries was up to 800 a day before the Taliban takeover.

"These are people who enter Iran from official border crossings and have passports and visas ... these are people who have fulfilled legal requirements and their entry is not restricted. Naturally, visas have expiry dates and these people will exit the country at the designated time," he said.

Hedayati, however, said that there is no clear estimate of the Afghans, who enter Iran illegally.

The official added that most deadly accidents in eastern provinces, and even the southwestern province of Fars, during the Nowruz holidays were vehicles carrying smuggled Afghans in their trunks.

Petrochemicals, Mining Overcoming Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Revenues from petrochemical exports in the first 11 months of the last Persian year which ended on March 20 surged 44% against the corresponding period of the previous year, data from Iran's Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (IMT) shows.

Iran exported more than \$22.6 billion of petrochemical and base oil products in that period, up from 15.6 billion the year before. Mineral sales grew 79% to \$11.5 billion.

Petrochemical and mining industries have emerged as the linchpin of Iran's push to diversify its economy away from oil and make it resilient to external shocks, most importantly US-led sanctions.

The ramp-up of petrochemical and mineral exports is a testimony to the shifting industrial landscape in Iran where top authorities including Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei have underlined the need to move toward the sale of value-added products instead of crude.

Like its oil industry, Iran's petrochemical and mining industries are subject to US sanctions, but the wide variety of their products and high international demand make them un-sanctionable.

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India Taken Steps to Operationalize Chabahar Port

TEHRAN (MNA) - President Ram Nath Kovind announced that India has taken steps to operationalize the Chabahar port in Iran.

Addressing young diplomats of Turkmenistan at the Institute of International Relations in Ashgabat, the Indian President noted that his country is a member of both the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Ashgabat Agreement.

He said that building connectivity with Central Asian countries remains a key priority of India.

"India stands ready to cooperate, invest and build connectivity in the region," he added.

"We have taken steps to operationalize the Chabahar port in Iran which can provide a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for the central Asian countries," the President said.

He said that while expanding connectivity, it is important to ensure that connectivity initiatives are consultative, transparent and participatory, with respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of all countries.

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Pakistan-Iran Freight Service Resumes After 24 Hours

NUSHKI (Dispatches) - Freight train service between Pakistan and Iran resumed after remaining suspended for almost 24 hours due to the derailment of a goods train engine near Nushki on Friday evening.

Railway officials told Dawn that the train was carrying sulfur from the Iranian city, Zahedan, and was on its way to Quetta when it met an accident. However, no loss of life was reported.

The derailment occurred due to dilapidated condition of railway track that also caused several similar incidents in the past, the sources said, adding that the routine operation resumed after railway workers managed to put the locomotive back on track.

Such incidents often take place on the Taftan-Spezind railway section in many areas of Nushki and Chagai districts. The railway operations sometimes remain suspended for several days due to harsh weather conditions and far-flung areas where more resources and time were needed for any kind of rescue and rehabilitation work.

Pakistan PM Names U.S. Diplomat Behind Plot to Topple His Gov't

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan on Sunday named the senior U.S. government official behind the controversial letter that threatened to overthrow Khan's Pakistan Tehreek e Insaaf (PTI) government.

Addressing a meeting of party leaders in Islamabad after the no-trust motion against him was dismissed in the country's parliament; Khan said that during the national security committee's (NSC) meeting, foreign interference was noted in the internal politics of the country through a no-confidence motion.

He went on to mention the name of Donald Lu, the top American official dealing with South Asia in the U.S. State Department, as the person involved in the 'foreign conspiracy' to topple his government.

The embattled premier claimed that Lu had warned the Pakistani envoy to the U.S., Asad Majeed, that there would be "implications" if Khan survived the no-trust vote in the National Assembly, the lower house of the parliament.

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Tehran Slams Herat Terrorist Attack

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has lambasted a terrorist attack on a gathering of people in Afghanistan's western city of Herat, warning once again of the enemies' divisive plots.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh on Sunday expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and the people of Afghanistan.

He said Afghanistan's ruling Taliban movement should take responsibility for the security of the citizens and intensify measures to protect the Afghan people, especially the vulnerable ethnic and religious groups.

President Calls for Dealing With Those Behind Football Violence

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has ordered authorities to seriously deal with those responsible for mistreatment of female fans of football in the city of Mashhad.

Raisi said that his administration is strongly opposed to behaviors similar to what happened in Mashhad that hosted the match between Iran's National Soccer Team and Lebanon's.

In late March, the president instructed interior minister Ahmad Vahidi to look into the events outside the Imam Reza Stadium.

Vahidi was tasked to look into whether the rights of people who had bought tickets for the match were violated. The interior minister later said many of the people who tried to enter the stadium had fake tickets.

The match happened during the Nowruz holidays. Many women who had bought tickets to watch the match, failed to enter the stadium. They said police did not let them in and the footage released showed some security forces force them to leave the surroundings of the stadium using pepper spray.

Meanwhile later a report on the state of foreign trade and the stock market in the



year 1400 was presented at the Sunday night meeting of the Cabinet's Economic Coordination Board, chaired by Raisi.

The report refers to the significant growth of trade with various countries, especially neighbors.

In addition, according to this report, the stock market has been in a good condition in the last few weeks and has had a significant and growing potential.

In this meeting, according to this year's slogan on knowledge-based production and job creation, the Ministers of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare and Industry, Mines and Trade presented the proposals of these ministries to strengthen the foundations of employment production and development.

The government has already approved and announced the necessary resolutions in last year's meetings to remove barriers to production.

Majlis Vice-Speaker Says Tehran Will Remain Beside Syria

TEHRAN (IFP) - Majlis Vice-Speaker Ali Nikzad has said the Islamic Republic will continue standing by Syria after the crisis in the country is over.

Speaking during a meeting with Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal Miqdad in Damascus, Nikzad added that Iran is and will remain a supporter of the resistance.

He noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran will remain beside the Syria people and government in reconstructing the regions destroyed in the war.

Addressing the Syrian people, the Iranian deputy parliament speaker said, "You will rebuild Syria better than before."

Nikzad noted that the strategic alliance between Iran and Syria is unbreakable, adding Syria and Iran are on the same page regarding global developments and they are also standing up to the global arrogance and oppressive sanctions.

He hailed the resistance fighters who defeated the Daesh terrorists in Syria, saying were it not for their resistance, Europeans and the US wouldn't enjoy this security now.

The Syrian foreign minister also in the meeting underlined the strong bonds between the two countries in all areas and said Damascus is interested in parliamentary diplomacy with Iran.

Miqdad also called for strengthening bilateral trade relations, saying this will benefit both nations.

The Syrian foreign minister said the US and Western sanctions against Iran and Syria are deplorable and immoral.

U.S. Directly Responsible for Protraction of Vienna Talks



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign minister has blamed the United States for the protraction of the Vienna talks on the revival of the 2015 Iran deal, saying Tehran is ready for a good and sustainable agreement in the Austrian capital.

During a phone conversation with Omani Foreign Minister Badr al-Busaidi on Sunday, Hossein Amir-Abdollahian criticized the US for re-imposing sanctions on Iranian individuals and companies.

He stressed that "The Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for a good and sustainable agreement, but so far the American side, by some of its excessive demands, has been directly responsible for the protraction of the talks."

Negotiations have been held in the Austrian capital since last April to restore the accord, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was ditched by former US President Donald Trump in May 2018.

In quitting the agreement, Trump introduced what he called the "maximum pressure" campaign to bring Iran to its knees. Tehran maintains that the policy has failed dismally. The Joe Biden administration agrees, yet it has not taken any tangible steps to deliver on its promise of repealing the policy.

In recent months, Iran has cited Washington's indecisiveness as the reason behind the protraction of the talks, as a number of key issues remain unresolved, ranging from the removal of all post-JCPOA sanctions to the provision of guarantees by the American side that it will not leave the deal again.

Earlier on Sunday, Amir-Abdollahian told Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres that the negotiating parties in the Vienna talks are close to reaching a final agreement, adding that the ball is now in US court.

During the phone conversation, Amir-Abdollahian and al-Busaidi also discussed bilateral ties and regional and international developments, including a recent truce brokered by the United Nations between the military coalition led by Saudi Arabia, which has been waging a war on Yemen since 2015, and Yemen's National Salvation Government.

Oman's top diplomat welcomed the ceasefire and thanked Tehran for its role and efforts in this regard, expressing hope that the truce would pave the way for talks between all Yemeni sides and the reopening of the country's borders.

The Iranian minister also appreciated Oman's constructive role in this regard and hoped that the ceasefire would last.

He underlined the importance of the complete lifting of the inhumane siege imposed on Yemen and the need for sending humanitarian assistance to the Yemeni people.

Tehran Declares Major Decline in Reservoir Water Storage

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Water management authorities in the Iranian capital Tehran say water storage in reservoirs feeding the city has declined drastically in the water year starting late September.

Mohammad Shahriari, a senior official from Tehran Regional Water Company, said on Sunday that water supply to five reservoirs of the city had declined 30% year on year in more than six months to April 3 to 409 million cubic meters.

Shahriari told the state TV that current water storage in reservoirs in Tehran are estimated at 403 million cubic meters, down from 669 million cubic meters recorded in April last year.

He said that average precipitation recorded in Tehran since the start of the water year had declined by 24% to 155 millimeters (6.1 inches).

The official added that rainfall had dropped by 74% year on year in the two weeks to April 3, leading to a reduction of nearly 50% in water supply to the five dams in the capital.

The figures come amid warnings by authorities that they may be forced to introduce water supply cuts for households in parts of the Iranian capital over the warm summer months.

Lower than expected rainfall and poor management of resources caused major water shortages in the southwestern Iranian province of Khuzestan last summer, leading to protests in several cities and towns.

Iranian Energy Ministry said earlier this week that it is planning to build dozens of dams across the country to ensure a stable supply of water to large population centers.

MPs Condemn Saudi-Led War on Yemen

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian lawmakers have issued a statement condemning Saudi Arabia's continued aggression on Yemen and expressing support for Yemenis' resistance against the Riyadh-led coalition.

The statement, signed by 234 MPs, was read out at the parliament's Monday session.

"Seven years into the destructive war against an independent country ... the dual behavior of the champions of human rights and the United Nations and other international organizations, which claim to champion peace, freedom and rights of nations, is now clear to everyone," the statement said.

The MPs said such organizations are dominated by the US and other "arrogant and evil" powers, leaving no hope for them to defend the "trampled rights" of subjugated nations. "Over the past 7 years, the government of Saudi Arabia, backed by arrogant

superpowers, has committed different war crimes by continued bombing of Yemeni cities and villages.

They have committed bloodshed against thousands of children, women and men among the Yemeni civilians, and with an unjust blockade, have blocked entry of drugs, food and humanitarian aid to Yemen, exposing millions of subjugated women, men and children to hunger, diseases, poverty and annihilation," the statement said.

"At the outset of the eighth year of the destructive war on Yemen, we as lawmakers of the Islamic Consultative Assembly, condemn this evident aggression and call for an end to the military attacks and killing of the subjugated people of Yemen and removal of the blockade on the country, and voice our support for the brave resistance of Ansarullah and the resilient Yemeni nation."

Tehran, Damascus Discuss Development of Educational Relations

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian Ambassador in Damascus met with the Syrian Minister of Education, discussing ways to develop educational relations, boost the exchange of experiences between the two countries, and increase student activities.

In the meeting, Mahdi Sobhani pointed to the richness of the educational system in Syria and its role in building its future, stressing the importance of developing and strengthening relations between the two countries in various fields, particularly education.

For his part, Darem Tabaa described as deeply rooted the relations between the two countries, stressing the importance of strengthening joint ties and activating educational relations through exchanging experiences and benefiting from them in developing the educational process.

Majlis Voices Support for Knowledge-Based Companies

TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker finalized the law on the surge of knowledge-based production in line with the Leader's dubbing the New Year "Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating."

The Parliament commenced its first open session after the new year holidays (Persian year 1401), being chaired by Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf early Monday morning.

Congratulating the arrival of the holy month of Ramadan, Qalibaf noted on Monday that it is essential to seize this opportunity by promptly approving regulations and executive instructions and supporting knowledge-based companies.

In his pre-agenda speech, he emphasized: "The 11th parliament from the first days of its work has paid special attention to strengthening knowledge-based production and expansion of knowledge-based companies."

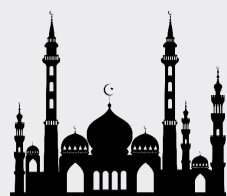
He stated that the 11th parliament had paid special attention to knowledge-based production, and the necessary funds for the country's economic surge in this area

have also been considered in the 1401(2022) budget.

Taking into account the budget row of 11,000 billion Tomans, the parliament has provided the possibility of fulfilling the goals and demands of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in the development of knowledge-based production by the administration as the main trustee, he added.

While emphasizing its oversight role in law enforcement, Qalibaf said, the parliament declares its readiness to approve other legal needs and requirements in order to fulfill the slogan of the year to the administration and activists in the field of knowledge-based production.

The Majlis Speaker expressed hope that in 2022, by giving the command of the country's economy to the motivated, talented, and elite youth of Iran and by preparing the grounds for wealth-creating activities of these young people in the country could be ended.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:46
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:19
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:45

54. Then, on that Day, not a soul will be wronged in the least, and ye shall but be repaid the meeds of your past Deeds.

55. Verily the Companions of the Garden shall that Day have joy in all that they do;

Surah 36, Ya-sin (54 - 55)

Oil Earning Realized 10% More Than Budget Targets

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Oil Minister Javad Owji said the country's oil incomes in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) were 10 percent more than the target set in the national budget bill for the year, Shana reported on Monday.

"The government did not have a budget deficit in terms of oil revenues in [the Iranian calendar year] 1400," Owji said.

The official stressed that Iran is not going to reveal the ways through which the country handles its oil exports.

According to Oji, based on the previous year's national budget bill the government was supposed to realize 1.99 quadrillion rials (over \$7.9 billion) of oil revenues by the yearend while the oil ministry managed to realize 10 percent more than the mentioned figure.



Late Last year, Owji had said Iran's oil exports were on the rise despite the U.S. sabotaging the country's shipments.

"Iran's oil exports have risen under the toughest sanctions and without waiting for the outcome of the Vienna talks," said Owji on March 12.

The increase was thanks to "different methods used to win contracts and finding different buyers," the official added.

Tehran's oil exports have been limited since former U.S. President Donald Trump in 2018 exited the 2015 nuclear accord and reimposed sanctions. Iran views U.S. sanctions as illegal and has said it will make every effort to sidestep them.

The Islamic Republic's oil exports rose to more than one million barrels per day (bpd) in February for the first time in almost three years, reflecting increased shipments to China.

Chabahar Port Posts 78% Growth In Imports of Basic Goods

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Director General of the Ports and Maritime Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province says Chabahar Port enjoyed 78% growth in the import of basic goods last year as well as 3.5-fold rise in exports from this strategic port and announced high port and economic goals of the port in the current year.

Behrouz Aqaei announced that Chabahar Port last year faced 78% growth in unloading and transfer of basic goods and 3.5-fold increase in the export of construction goods and mineral products as well as attracting 2100 tomans of investment from the private sector.

He went on to say that the port enjoyed 41% growth in load and unload operation last year comparing to the preceding year, adding that load and unload of oil and non-oil products posted 68 and 8 percent growth last year respectively.

Aqaei then pointed to the plans and practical actions on course to materializing the slogan of this year, adding that double efforts for easing marine trade with the goal of increasing the goods and ship traffic, attracting investment of the private sector and developing the logistical infrastructures of Chabahar Port, developing marine businesses and creating sustainable jobs in this year are of the priorities of this organization.



Manufacturing Exports at Over \$4b In 11 Months

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's manufacturing exports reached a total of \$4.092 billion in the 11 months to February 19, according to figures provided by the country's ministry of trade (MIMT).

The figures covered in a Sunday report by semi-official ISNA agency, showed that manufacturing had accounted for 9.6% of Iran's non-oil exports over the same period.

Shipments rose to 112 million metric tons, accounting for 3.4% of the total volume of the exports, said the report.

Polymer products, clothing and chemicals were responsible for 60% of Iranian manufacturing exports between March 2021 and February 2022, according to the MIMT figures.

Exports of polymer products rose 16% year on year to \$1.134 billion, while textile, garment and shoe exports increased by 8% to \$726 million.

Manufactured machinery and equipment exports from Iran also increased to reach \$540 million over the 11 months to late February, said the MIMT, adding that home appliances exports had risen to \$326 million.

Exports from other sectors, including electronic and power, cellulose industries, automotive, high tech and pharmaceuticals accounted for over \$750 million of Iran's manufacturing exports over the same period, showed the figures.

Iran has seen a significant growth in its manufacturing sector since the United States imposed sanction on the country's crude oil exports in 2018.

The growth has helped Iran boost its foreign trade and compensate for losses suffered in energy export revenues.

Figures by the Iranian customs office shows that total non-oil exports from the country rose to \$43.5 billion in the 11 months to February 19.

Annual Production by Major Automakers Surpasses 867,000

TEHRAN (MNA) -Three major Iranian carmakers, namely Iran Khodro Company (IKCO), SAIPA Group, and Pars Khodro, manufactured 867,363 vehicles during the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), IRNA reported.

According to the data released by the Securities and Exchange Organization's information portal named Codal, the production by the mentioned companies has declined 3.7 percent compared to the preceding year in which the output stood at 900,794.

During the previous year, IKCO manufactured 451,121 vehicles, which was six percent less than the output in the Iranian calendar year 1399.

In the past year, this industrial group was able to produce 297,817 vehicles in the Peugeot group, 50,095 vehicles in the Samand group, 50,257 Dena vehicles, 35,630 Rana vehicles, 8,647 Haima vehicles, and 8,451 Tara vehicles.

Sarakhs to Become Middle East Sulfur Hub

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of Shahid Hasheminejad Gas Refining Company announced that 100% of domestic power had been used in the construction of Lt. Gen. Soleimani's sulfur complex.

Yahya Faizi, referring to the opening of two factories in the sulfur complex of Lt. Gen. Soleimani in the presence of President Ebrahim Raisi and Iranian Minister of Petroleum Javad Owji, said: "Shahid Hasheminejad Gas Refining Company produces a maximum of 2,000 tons of sulfur per day. The company had previously faced the problem of storing 2.5 million tons of sulfur, which caused safety and environmental problems. At that time, the company had to transport its sulfur in raw form to Bandar Abbas and from there to India and China."

Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated two of the four factories of Gonbadli's Lt. Gen. Soleimani Sulphur Complex on Thursday. He continued: "Now, using the power of knowledge-based companies and private sector investment, this sulfur has been delivered to four private sector factories in molten form and is converted to granulated sulfur with a value added of \$15, bentonite fertilizer with three times value added and micronized sulfur with eight times value added."

The head of Shahid Hasheminejad Gas Refining Company stated that the implementation of this project, in addition to using 100% domestic equipment, has created direct employment for 150 people in the deprived and border area of Sarakhs.

He noted that with the completion of several projects, Sarakhs would become a sulfur hub in the Middle East.

Rich Knowhow, Technical Capabilities of ESCO a Praiseworthy Asset for Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ESFAHAN – Caretaker of Esfahan Steel Company (EORC) in his New Year visit to the dispatcher and main coordinator of all production lines of the company attended a meeting where he was informed of the major activities of these two sections.

In the meeting, Iraj Rokhsati, who was accompanied by head of exploitation Mr. Mehrdad Tavalanian and manager of the technical affairs Mr. Mohsen Soltani, emphasized acceleration in the project of completing the process of



registration and smartization of the control system at ESCO especially in its production lines with using the modern equipment, updated knowhow and operationalizing the infrastructural and knowledge-based projects in this gigantic industrial company. He then said that ESCO as the mother of the national industry with a half-a-century history uses the latest and modern equipment and production lines of the world and it has upgraded its facilities with reliance on the experience of its engineers and domestic experts and this process will continue.

Rokhsati noted that the system for collecting and controlling the production lines has started since 3 years ago and it is implemented and complemented as the schedule and with its full implementation, the company can manage better its resources. He added that the knowledge and capabilities of ESCO experts is a rich asset for the country and industry.

Cooperative Minister Visits Persian Gulf Saba Steel Company



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the fifth day of the new Iranian calendar year, Minister of Labor, Cooperation and Social Welfare Dr. Hojjatollah Abdolmaleki, accompanied by Managing Director of the National Pension Fund Mr. Mohammad Eskandar and deputy governor general of Hormozgan Province Dr. Ehsan Kamrani as well as some provincial officials, visited the first hot briquette iron (HBI) production plant of Persian Gulf Saba Steel Company.

During his visit, Mr. Abdolmaleki talked with staff of different sectors of the plant like the staff of the production line and control room and he got acquainted with the process of production of this strategic product at this hot briquette plant.

On the sidelines of this visit, the CEO of Saba Foolad Company Dr. Ehsan Dashtianeh briefed the minister of the process of production and plans of this plant which are in the pipeline.

Iran Alloy Steel Co.'s Shining Performance

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The rolling plant of Iran Alloy Steel Company with production of 238,869 tons of different types of heavy steel structures had a shining performance last year despite all unpredicted restrictions of energy carriers which had overshadowed the production.

According to the public relations of the company, the heavy rolling plant of the company fulfilled its duty in dynamism and increase of production brilliantly with producing 238,869 tons of different types of heavy steel sections despite unpredicted restrictions of energy carriers which affected the production.

The main schedule of the company was to produce 245,000 tons last year but due to the electricity restriction this goal did not materialize but due to efforts of all staff of the company, the production rose by 6.6% last year comparing to the preceding year. According to the report, Iran Alloy Steel Company produced 83,210 tons of rebar last year which showed 21% growth comparing to the preceding year and heavy rolling plant of the company last year produced 50 different sizes of products like 18 sizes of rebar, 18 sizes of strap and 4 sizes of billet.

شرکت فولاد آلیاژی ایران (سپاس عام)
IRAN Alloy Steel Company

Brazil Storm Death Toll Rises to 16

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - The death toll from torrential downpours that triggered flash floods and landslides in Brazil's Rio de Janeiro state rose to 16 Sunday, with three people still missing, authorities said.

Three days of heavy rain have battered a broad swathe of the southeastern state's Atlantic coast, the latest in a series of deadly storms in Brazil that experts say are being made worse by climate change.

Emergency workers pulled two more bodies early Sunday from the mud and wreckage left by a landslide in the Monsuaba neighborhood of Angra dos Reis, a seaside town 160 kilometers (100 miles) southwest of Rio de Janeiro city, officials said.



Hungarians Vote on Orban's 12-Year Rule

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - The odds were slightly in favor of Prime Minister Viktor Orban, one of Europe's longest-serving leaders, extending his 12-year rule in an election on Sunday where his close ties with Moscow have come under scrutiny.

With the war in neighboring Ukraine dominating the campaign, the six-party opposition alliance has been within striking distance of Orban's Fidesz party in the polls, making the outcome of the ballot uncertain for the first time since Orban swept to power in 2010. With turnout rising to 52.75% after a slow start hampered by unseasonably cold weather and snow in Budapest, both sides took to social media to urge their supporters to go and vote.



Ukraine Accuses Russia of Civilian Massacre; Russia Denies



BUCHA (Dispatches) - Ukraine accused Russian forces of carrying out a "massacre" in the town of Bucha, while Western nations reacted to images of dead bodies there with calls for new sanctions against Moscow.

Russia's defense ministry denied the Ukrainian allegations, saying footage and photographs showing bodies in Bucha were "yet another provocation" by the Ukrainian government.

The images from Bucha came after Ukraine said on Saturday its forces had reclaimed control of the whole Kyiv region and liberated towns from Russian troops.

They prompted outrage in Ukraine and abroad, adding to pressure on Russian President Vladimir Putin by increasing the likelihood of further Western sanctions. Western nations have already sought to isolate Russia economically and punish it for the invasion, which began on Feb. 24.

"Bucha massacre was deliberate," Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba said on Twitter.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken described the images as "a punch in the gut". German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said Russia must pay for "war crimes" and British Prime Minister Boris Johnson said his government would step up sanctions.

"Putin and his supporters will feel the consequences," said German Chancellor Olaf Scholz, adding that Western allies would agree further sanctions in the coming days.

Germany's defense minister Christine Lambrecht said the European Union must discuss banning the import of Russian gas - a departure from Berlin's prior resistance to the idea of an embargo on Russian energy imports.

In Russia's first public comment on the allegations, the defense ministry in Moscow described photos and videos from Bucha as "another staged performance by the Kyiv regime for the Western media".

Russia has previously denied targeting civilians and has rejected allegations of war crimes in what it calls a "special military operation" aimed at demilitarizing and "denazifying" Ukraine. Ukraine says it was invaded without provocation.

On Saturday, Reuters saw bodies in a mass grave and still lying on the streets, while on Sunday the mayor of Bucha, Anatoliy Fedoruk, showed reporters two corpses with white cloth tied around their arms, one of which appeared to have been shot in the mouth.

Oleksiy Arestovych, an aide to Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, said Ukrainian troops had found the bodies of women who had been raped and set alight as well as the bodies of local officials and children.

In Bucha, 37 km (23 miles) northwest of Kyiv city centre, town mayor Fedoruk said 300 residents had been killed during a month-long occupation by the Russian army. read more

Taliban Chief Orders Ban on Poppy Cultivation in Afghanistan

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban's supreme leader on Sunday ordered a ban on poppy cultivation in Afghanistan, warning that the headline Islamist government would crack down on farmers planting the crop.

Afghanistan is the world's biggest producer of poppies, the source of sap that is refined into heroin, and in recent years production and exports have only boomed.

"All Afghans are informed that from now on cultivation of poppy has been strictly prohibited across the country," said a decree issued by Supreme Leader Hibatullah Akhundzada.

The order was read out by government spokesman Zabihullah Mujahid at a gathering of reporters, foreign diplomats and Taliban officials. "If anyone violates the decree the crop will be destroyed immediately and the violator will be treated according to the sharia law," it added.

It is not the first time the fundamentalist group has vowed to outlaw the trade. Production was banned in 2000, just before the group was overthrown by U.S.-led forces in the wake of the September 11 attacks.

During their 20-year insurgency against foreign forces, the Taliban heavily taxed farmers cultivating the crop in areas under their control, experts have said.

It became a key resource for the group to generate funds.

Poppy farmer Abdul Rahman told AFP that Sunday's ban was a blow to his livelihood.

"We have taken loans to cultivate this... If these crops are destroyed our income will be gone," said Rahman, who is from the southern province of Kandahar -- the Taliban's de facto power center.

"We too are not fond of cultivating this crop and are fed up with it. We know our future generations will be addicted to it but we are compelled to cultivate."

The United States and NATO forces tried to curb poppy cultivation during their two decades in Afghanistan by paying farmers to grow alternative crops such as wheat or saffron.



North Korea Warns South Korea of Destructive Action

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea condemned the South Korean defense minister's remarks about its ability to strike against the North and warned it would destroy major targets in Seoul if the South takes any "dangerous military action" such as a preemptive strike.

Kim Yo Jong, the sister of North Korean leader Kim Jong Un, said in a statement that the South Korean defense minister's remarks "further worsened the inter-Korean relations and military tension on the Korean peninsula," according to state news agency KCNA.

That comes after the South Korean minister, Suh Wook, said on Friday that his country's military has a variety of missiles with significantly improved firing range, accuracy and power, with "the ability to accurately and quickly hit any target in North Korea."

Suh also said the ministry will actively support the military to ensure it has the capability to respond overwhelmingly to North Korea's missile threats. He called the north its "enemy."

Kim, the vice department director of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, also said the country would "reconsider a lot of things" and that South Korea "may face a serious threat" due to such remarks.

In a separate statement on Sunday, Pak Jong Chon, secretary of the Central Committee of the Workers' Party of Korea, said the North "will mercilessly direct all its military force into destroying major targets in Seoul and the south Korean army" if the South Korean army engages in a dangerous military action such as a preemptive strike.

The north, however, did not elaborate on where it saw as the major targets within Seoul.

Tensions in the Korean peninsula have sharply escalated in recent weeks after North Korea tested two ballistic missiles on Feb. 26 and March 4 that involved a new ICBM system that the country is developing, and as it conducted a full ICBM test - the first since 2017 - last week.

Sri Lankan Opposition Lawmakers Defy Curfew to Stage Protest

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Armed troops in Sri Lanka blocked a Sunday opposition protest march staged in defiance of an emergency curfew to protest the island nation's worsening economic crisis, after authorities imposed a social media blackout to contain public dissent.

The South Asian island nation is facing severe shortages of food, fuel and other essentials, along with sharp price rises and crippling power cuts, in its most painful downturn since independence from Britain in 1948.

President Gotabaya Rajapaksa imposed a state of emergency on Friday, the day after a crowd attempted to storm his home in the capital Colombo, and a nationwide curfew is in effect until Monday morning.

The Samagi Jana Balawegaya (SJB), Sri Lanka's main opposition alliance, denounced a social media blockade imposed Sunday to quell intensifying public demonstrations, and said it was time for the government to tender its resignation.

Armed troops moved to stop a protest by more than one hundred opposition lawmakers and supporters attempting to march to the capital's Independence Square from the home of opposition leader Sajith Premadasa.

"President Rajapaksa better realise that the tide has

already turned on his autocratic rule," SJB lawmaker Harsha de Silva told AFP.

Fellow SJB legislator Eran Wickramaratne said the spiralling situation raised the prospects of martial law. "We can't allow a military takeover," he said. "They should know we are still a democracy."

Anonymous activists had called for mass protests Sunday on social media before the ban order went into effect.

There was a heavy presence of troops elsewhere in the capital as the curfew was strictly enforced.

News photographers were denied access to Independence Square, a popular venue for demonstrations in Colombo.

Overnight, however, hundreds defied the curfew and staged small demonstrations in various Colombo neighbourhoods and dispersed peacefully, police and residents said.

Facebook, YouTube, Twitter, Instagram and WhatsApp were among the platforms shut down Sunday on the orders of defence authorities, internet service providers told their subscribers.

Private media outlets reported that the chief of Sri Lanka's internet regulator resigned after the order went into effect.



Singaporeans Protest the Death Penalty in Rare Demonstration



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Hundreds of protesters in tightly controlled Singapore staged a rare demonstration against the death penalty Sunday as fears grow the city-state is set to carry out a wave of hangings.

Authorities last week conducted the country's first execution since 2019 when they hanged a drug trafficker. Several other death row convicts recently had appeals rejected.

Organizers said about 400 people joined the demonstration at "Speakers' Corner" in a downtown park, the only place in the city-state where protests are allowed without prior police approval.

They held signs reading "Capital punishment does not make us safer", and "Don't kill in our names", and chanted slogans against the death penalty.

"Capital Punishment is a brutal system that makes brutes of us all," Kirsten Han, a prominent local activist, said in an address to the crowd.

"Instead of pushing us to address inequalities and exploitative and oppressive systems that leave people marginalized and unsupported, it makes us the worst version of ourselves."

Protests are unusual in Singapore, which frequently faces criticism for curbing civil liberties.

Aside from in "Speakers' Corner", it is illegal for even one person to stage a demonstration without a police permit.

Abdul Kahar Othman, a 68-year-old Singaporean drug trafficker, was hanged Wednesday despite appeals for clemency from the United Nations and rights groups.

Next in line to be executed could be Nagaenthran K. Dharmalingam, a mentally disabled Malaysian convicted of heroin trafficking who lost his final appeal last week.

His case has attracted a storm of criticism, including from the European Union and British billionaire Richard Branson.

Three other men sentenced to death for drugs offences had their appeals rejected earlier in March.

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Jacuzzi, pkg
L.balcony
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Zaferanieh Villa (\$5000)
1000sq.m
600sq.m b/up
S/p, Sauna
Jacuzzi, yard
enough pkgs

Parsian

Apt (\$4000)
Zaferanieh
400sq.m, 4bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg
L.balcony, & F.F

Sa`adat abad Apt (\$1700)
170sq.m, 3bdrs, balcony, & F.F

Jordan (\$1400) 2bdrs, & F.F
Jordan (\$1900) 3bdrs, & F.F

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Indonesia, Malaysia Sign Agreement On Protection of Migrant Workers

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Malaysian Prime Minister Ismail Sabri Yaakob witnessed the signing of an agreement to improve protection for domestic migrant workers following a meeting between the leaders in Jakarta.

The memorandum of understanding between the Southeast Asian neighbors follows concerns about migrant worker safety

after several incidents involving the abuse of Indonesian domestic workers in Malaysian households.

"This MoU will ensure that every process and protection mechanism ... will be done comprehensively by all relevant parties, in accordance with the laws of the two countries," the Malaysian leader said after the agreement was signed at the state palace.



Iraq Says March Oil Exports Highest in 50 Years

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq's oil ministry says it exported \$11.07bn of oil in March, the highest level in 50 years, as crude oil prices soared in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

The record oil export, which accounts for more than 90 percent of Iraq's income, is a big boost to the state coffers.

The second-largest producer in the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC), Iraq exported "100,563,999 barrels for revenues of \$11.07bn, the highest revenue since 1972", the ministry said.

The figures published late on Friday are preliminary data but final data "generally does not vary" much, a ministry official said, speaking on condition of anonymity.

In February, oil revenues reached an eight-year high of \$8.5bn dollars, with daily exports of 3.3 million barrels of oil.

Oil revenues are critical for Iraq's government, with the country mired in a financial crisis and needing funds to rebuild infrastructure after decades of devastating war.

Iraq, with a population of some 41 million people, is also grappling with a major energy crisis and suffers regular power cuts.

Despite its immense oil and gas reserves, Iraq remains dependent on imports to meet its energy needs.

Neighboring Iran currently provides a third of Iraq's gas and electricity needs, but supplies are regularly cut or reduced, aggravating daily load shedding.

Crude prices 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.

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

The 13 members of the Saudi-led OPEC and 10 countries spearheaded by Russia - a group known as OPEC+ - backed an increase of 432,000 barrels per day in May, marginally higher than in previous months.

The United States has urged OPEC+ 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.

While OPEC refused to budge, Washington said it would tap its strategic stockpile by a record amount in a bid to cool soaring prices.

The international benchmark contract, Brent North Sea crude, flirted with a record high in early March as it soared to almost \$140 per barrel, but has retreated since then.

On Friday, oil was about \$100 a barrel.

Malaysia Opens Borders for Int'l Travel

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia has opened its borders for international travel, ending restrictions that have been in place since the Covid-19 pandemic began in 2020.

Among measures adopted by the authorities to facilitate the travel of non-Malaysian nationals to the country are the abolishing quarantine requirements for vaccinated travelers, with only a pre-departure test and a test within 24-hours of arriving in the country, reports Xinhua news agency.

There is already optimism that the move into the endemic phase will see economic recovery, especially for the country's hard hit tourist sector which has been largely closed off.

Tourism, Arts and Culture Minister Nancy Shukri said over 10,000 foreign travelers and Malaysians residing abroad were expected to arrive at airports nationwide on Friday and the Ministry is targeting over 2 million tourist arrivals within the year. "After two years, today is a historic moment and a huge relief for our tourism industry as we welcome international tourists, newcomers and regulars alike, back to Malaysia, supporting our economy again," she told reporters at an event to mark the reopening at the Kuala Lumpur International Airport (KLIA).

Malaysia attracted 4.3 million tourists in 2020 because of lockdowns following the pandemic, a sharp decline from the 26.1 million in 2019.

Transport Minister Wee Ka Siong noted the influx of travellers moving across the bridge connecting Malaysia and Singapore, allowing families to reunite ahead of Ramadan, the Islamic fasting month, and Qingming, a traditional tomb-sweeping festival.

"Some were on motorcycles or in cars, and some even walked. This is the result of good discussions between the Malaysian and Singaporean governments to benefit the people of both countries.



Turkey Hikes Gas Prices by Up to 50%

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey increased natural gas wholesale prices by 50 percent for industrial facilities and by 35 percent for households in a latest blow to consumers and businesses suffering from sky-rocketing inflation.

Natural gas costs for electricity production also rose by 44.3 percent, state-run pipeline company BOTAŞ said. Consumer price inflation in Turkey surged to 54.4 percent in February, the highest level in two decades, and is expected to accelerate further in March, when the war in Ukraine caused a surge in the cost of oil and natural gas. Turkey imports nearly all the oil and gas it consumes, leaving its economy vulnerable to price swings.

At the start of January, BOTAŞ announced an increase of between 15 percent and 50 percent in natural gas prices. The Energy Market Regulatory Authority (EPDK) introduced price hikes of between 52 percent and 130 percent for electricity the same month, prompting protests by businessmen and Turkey's main opposition party leader to say that he was refusing to pay his bill.

Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan approved a 50 percent increase in the minimum wage in December to help cushion the impact of accelerating price increases on the poorest segments of Turkish society. He faces elections by June 2023. Erdoğan's unconventional economic policies, which have included ordering the central bank to cut interest rates, have exacerbated Turkey's economic woes and pushed up inflation.

Erdoğan sought to dampen speculation in the media of a further increase in the minimum wage in a statement on Thursday.

Australia, India Sign Trade Deal in Virtual Ceremony

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Australia formally signed a trade deal with India as the two nations signaled an intention to forge closer trade ties.

The Australia-India Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement was signed in a virtual ceremony by Trade Minister Dan Tehan and India's Minister of Commerce & Industry, Piyush Goyal.

Australia's Prime Minister Scott Morrison and India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi witnessed the virtual ceremony.

Morrison is expected to call a general election within days, and has been eager to secure the trade deal before campaigning begins, having been in negotiations with India for a decade.

Speaking to reporters in Tasmania, Morrison said the agreement with the world's second most populous nation represented "one of the biggest economic doors there is to open in the world today".

"These are never all or nothing deals as far as we're concerned, we see all of these as the next step and the next step and the next step," he said, expressing both countries intention to build closer trade links.

Morrison's government is seeking to diversify export markets and reduce Australia's dependence on its biggest trading partner China, after diplomatic spats led to Beijing sanctioning certain Australian products.

The deal with India removes tariffs on more than 85% of Australian goods exports to India, worth A\$12.6 billion, rising to almost 91% over 10 years.

Tariffs will be scrapped on sheep meat, wool, copper, coal, alumina, fresh Australian rock lobster, and some critical minerals and non-ferrous metals to India.

It will see 96% of Indian goods imports enter Australia duty-free.

Both countries would continue to work towards a full free trade agreement, the federal government said on Friday.

After signing the deal, Minister of Commerce & Industry Goyal said India wanted to progress a full free trade agreement with Australia in an "accelerated manner".

"Soon after this current agreement comes into force, we'll get down to cracking the whip on the next stage to make this a comprehensive economic partnership," he said.

Trade Minister Tehan said he was confident negotiations would advance even if the Morrison government was replaced at the upcoming national election.

IEA States Agree on Coordinated Oil Release But Not Volumes

TOKYO (Dispatches) - U.S.-allied countries agreed to their second coordinated oil release in a month to calm markets roiled by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the International Energy Agency said on Friday, without specifying volumes.

The silence on the size of the agreed release left crude prices largely unmoved, with benchmark Brent trading near \$104 a barrel, underscoring supply concerns as releases from finite supplies struggle to make up for a loss of 3 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil estimated by the IEA.

The announcement showed IEA member states' "strong and unified commitment to stabilizing global energy markets," the Paris-based group of 31 industrialized nations but not Russia said in a statement following an emergency meeting.

"Details of the new emergency stock release will be made public early next week," the IEA said, a day after the United States pledged its biggest oil release ever.

IEA member countries did not agree on volumes or the commitments of each country.

"In light of the current situation ... the participants in the IEA meeting agreed on the additional release itself, but they could not agree on the total volume and the allocation of each country," Hidechika Koizumi, director of the international affairs division at Japan's Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry told reporters.

IEA last presided over the largest coordinated oil release in its history on March 1 of nearly 62 million barrels, about half of which was contributed by the United States.

European countries, heavily dependent on Russian oil and gas supplies as inflation hits multi-decade highs, committed to providing around a quarter of that release.

To fill a shortfall caused by sanctions and buyer aversion to Russian oil, President Joe Biden on Thursday authorized a release from the U.S. Strategic Petroleum Reserve of 1 million barrels per day of crude for six months starting in May, the equivalent of a total of 180 million barrels.

Soaring gasoline prices and inflation have drawn strong domestic political criticism of the White House ahead of mid-term elections in November.

Biden said U.S. allies and partners could release an additional 30 million to 50 million barrels.

A Reuters analysis of IEA data showed government-controlled oil stocks among members states was at its lowest since 2005 even before the March 1 release, while U.S. SPR levels have dropped to their lowest since 2002, government data showed.

Most Japanese Firms Eye Profit This Year



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh was ranked fourth in terms of business confidence for 2022, up five notches from 2021, said the "2021 Jetro Survey on Business Condition of Japanese companies operating in Asia and Oceania with focus on Bangladesh".

Yuji Ando, the country representative of the Japanese agency, released the survey report at a program at the Pan Pacific Sonargaon hotel in Dhaka.

Bangladesh is forecast to come third in terms of profit growth among all countries and regions.

The Jetro said 68 per cent of companies are planning to expand their businesses in the next one to two years, up from 41.8 per in the year prior. The increase would take the number to almost to the pre-pandemic level.

Two per cent of the firms want to relocate to another country after withdrawing investments, down from 3 per cent in 2021.

A total of 320 Japanese companies are doing business in Bangladesh and the number has risen in recent years due to the continuous economic growth in the past decade and huge business potential.

Those expressing intent to widen their footprint cite growth potential and sales increases for the plans.

Some 54.6 per cent of companies are willing to expand the function of sales, 45.5 per cent plan to go for the production of high-value products, and 27.3 per cent for making general-purpose products.

More than 15 per cent of companies intended to expand research and development activities to drive their business growth.

The survey report describes Bangladesh as the top place for export-oriented industries, with the ratio of exports to total sales by Japanese companies standing at 65.4 per cent.

Bangladesh has the most competitive wage among the surveyed countries and regions.

"This is the time for Japanese companies to expand in Bangladesh and procure from local sources," said Yuji Ando.

U.S. Logistics Convoy Targeted In Iraq's Saladin

TEHRAN (MNA) - An Iraqi security source announced that an explosion had taken place in the path of a U.S. convoy in Saladin province in northern Iraq.

The convoy was carrying logistics belonging to the US-led international coalition. There were no casualties caused by the blast.

Issuing a statement, the Ashab al-Kahf group claimed responsibility for the operation.

In recent months, the attacks on the US logistics convoys have increased in various parts of Iraq amid growing anger among the Iraqi people towards the illegal presence of the U.S. occupying forces.



Coronavirus Infections in Asia Pass 100m Mark

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Coronavirus infections in Asia passed 100 million on Wednesday, according to a Reuters tally, as the region records a resurgence in cases, dominated by the BA.2 omicron sub-variant.

The region is reporting over 1 million new COVID-19 cases about every two days, according to a Reuters analysis. With more than half of the world's population, Asia contributes 21% of all reported COVID-19 cases.

The highly contagious but less deadly BA.2 sub-variant of omicron has pushed the figures to greater highs in recent weeks in countries such as South Korea, China and Vietnam. BA.2 now represents nearly 86% of all sequenced cases, according to the World Health Organization (WHO).

South Korea leads the world in the daily average number of new cases reported, accounting for one in every four infections reported globally each day, as per Reuters analysis.

While the number of cases has leveled off since earlier in March, the country is still reporting over 300 deaths on average each day, with authorities ordering crematoriums nationwide to operate longer.

China is trying to tame its worst outbreak since the pandemic began. The rise in COVID-19 cases in Shanghai, fueled by the BA.2 sub-strain, has prompted the financial hub to go into lockdown. The city moved into a two-staged lockdown of its 26 million residents on Monday, restricting movement through bridges and highways to contain the spread.

China has reported over 45,000 new cases since the start of this year, a figure higher than it reported in all of 2021. Even though China has inoculated 90% of its population, not enough elderly people have received booster doses, making them susceptible to reinfections.

Though China is sticking to its plan for crushing the outbreak, experts overseas remain skeptical about the efficacy of lockdowns in the face of the highly infectious omicron variant.

"It is clear from Australia and elsewhere in the world that lockdowns are simply not effective against omicron - so expect a big wave coming," said Adrian Esterman,



an expert in biostatistics at the University of South Australia.

India alone accounts for 43 million COVID-19 cases, more than the total in the next three worst-hit Asian countries of Japan, South Korea and Vietnam.

India has reported fewer than 2,000 cases per day for the past 11 days versus its peak this year in January of over 300,000 cases on average per day.

Earlier in March, Asia passed 1 million coronavirus-related deaths. There have now been 1,027,586 million COVID-19-related deaths across the continent.

Vaccines are considered less effective against the BA.2 sub-variant compared to its predecessors. Studies have shown omicron can re-infect people previously diagnosed with different coronavirus variants.

Germany Looks to Buy Israeli or U.S. Missile Defense System



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Berlin is considering buying a missile defense system from Israel or the United States to defend against threats including Russian Iskander missiles in Kaliningrad, German weekly Welt am Sonntag reported.

The Iskander missiles can reach almost all of western Europe and there is no missile shield in place to protect against this threat, Germany's chief of defence Eberhard Zorn told Welt am Sonntag in an interview published on Saturday.

"The Israelis and the Americans possess such systems. Which one do we prefer? Will we manage to establish an overall (missile defense) system in NATO? These are the questions we need to answer now," Zorn said.

He did not specify the names of the systems but was most likely referring to Arrow 3 built by Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI) and the U.S. system THAAD produced by Raytheon.

Russia said in 2018 it had deployed Iskander missiles to its Kaliningrad exclave, a slice of Russia wedged between Poland and Lithuania. A mobile ballistic missile system, the Iskander replaced the Soviet Scud missile and its two guided missiles can carry either conventional or nuclear warheads.

In a landmark speech days after Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24, German Chancellor Olaf Scholz said Berlin would hike its defense spending to more than 2% of its economic output by injecting 100 billion euros (\$110 billion) into the military.

Zorn belongs to a group of high-ranking officials consulting with Scholz on how to spend this money.

"So far, only one thing is clear: We have neither the time nor the money to develop these (missile defense) systems on our own because the missile threat is known to already be there", Zorn said.

Referring to Germany's lack of a short-range missile defense, which can be used to protect troops on the move or under threat while deployed, he said Berlin had started looking into the purchase of such systems and it now had to make a decision.

Beyond this, the Bundeswehr will have to invest 20 billion euros by 2032 to replenish its ammunition storages, Zorn added.

Swiss Cold War Bunkers Back in Vogue as Ukraine Conflict Rages

MEYRIN (Dispatches) - Russia's invasion of Ukraine has reawakened interest in Switzerland's concrete nuclear fallout shelters, built during the Cold War with enough space to shelter everyone in the country.

Since the 1960s, every Swiss municipality has had to build nuclear bunkers for their residents, while such shelters have also been mandatory in all homes and residential buildings over a certain size built since then.

The shelters have become an integral part of the Swiss identity, on a par with the country's famous chocolate, banks and watches.

But the underground spaces, long seen as a quirky curiosity mostly used for storage or as very well-protected wine cellars, are being viewed in a new light since Russia invaded Ukraine on February 24.

Just days into the attack, Russian President Vladimir Putin put the country's strategic nuclear forces on high alert, sparking global alarm.

Fierce fighting near Ukraine's nuclear power plants, including Chernobyl -- the sight of the world's worst nuclear accident in 1986 -- have also heightened fears that even traditionally neutral Switzerland could be affected by the war.

"People are discovering that Ukraine is very nearby," Marie Claude Noth-Ecoeur, who heads civil and military security services in the mountainous southern Wallis region, told AFP.

The wealthy Alpine country has pledged that each and every resident will have a shelter space if needed.

In fact, the country of 8.6 million people counts nearly nine million spaces across 365,000 private and public shelters.

But while there are more than enough spots at a national level, there are vast regional differences.

Geneva is worst off, with only enough places for 75 percent of its population.

Nicola Squillaci, head of Geneva's civil protection and military affairs division, said the shelters were conceived to provide protection "especially in the case of a bombing and a nuclear attack".



They would help protect the population "against the shock waves, and against radioactivity in the air", he told AFP.

Ducking into a private shelter for around 150 people, underneath a brand new residential building in the Geneva suburb of Meyrin, Squillaci pointed out how, in peace time, it was equipped with basement storage units for the apartment dwellers above.

But unlike most storage facilities, this one comes with composting toilets, kits for quickly assembling beds, and a ventilation system that filters the air coming in from the outside.

"It is like a capsule, with airlocks on emergency exits and main exits," Squillaci said.

"If the building were to collapse, the shelter would remain intact."

Switzerland's vast network of nuclear bunkers have a range of other day-to-day uses, including as military barracks or as temporary accommodation for asylum seekers.

But Swiss authorities require that they can be emptied and reverted back to nuclear shelters within five days.

So far, Switzerland's population has never been ordered down into the shelters, not even in the wake of the Chernobyl disaster.

Experts say the most likely scenario for needing to use them has always been a possible accident at one of Switzerland's own nuclear power plants.

But now the conflict raging in Ukraine has added a new, urgent layer to the national nuclear anxiety.

With public concern growing, Swiss authorities have published overviews of the available shelter spots, and have urged households to always maintain a stock of food to last at least a week.

With Ukraine, "the geopolitical situation has altered the paradigms a bit," Squillaci said, adding that authorities were receiving "enormous numbers of legitimate questions from citizens."

A number of property owners who previously sought to pay a fine rather than build bunkers were also backtracking, he said.

Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

He further said that minutes of the communiqué regarding a meeting between the ambassador of Pakistan in the U.S. and the U.S. officials were shared in the NSC meeting.

Khan said the embassy officials of the US were also in contact with the PTI members who had defected, reiterating that the no-confidence motion against him was a "foreign conspiracy".

On Saturday, Khan openly and defiantly held the U.S. responsible for the "foreign conspiracy" to overthrow his government.

"Ok I'm taking the name of U.S., the conspiracy has been hatched with the help of America to remove me," he told his party colleagues in Islamabad.

In a high-drama event on Sunday, the lower house of the parliament rejected the no-trust vote tabled by the opposition parties against Khan.

Later, in his televised address on the state-run television, Khan congratulated the people of Pakistan and repeated that the move to overthrow him was a "foreign conspiracy."

He also requested President Arif Alvi to dissolve the parliament under Article 58(1) of the constitution and called on the nation to gear up for a fresh election.

Talking to his party colleagues later in the day, Khan said that the opposition members were in a state of shock after the vote failed and they did not know what had happened to them.

The President of Pakistan has dissolved the Parliament after the deputy speaker of the National Assembly blocked a vote on a no confidence motion against the Prime Minister.

Pakistan's Supreme Court is set to decide whether the deputy speaker's move to reject the opposition's vote of no-confidence and the subsequent request by Khan to the President to dissolve the parliament is constitutional or not. President Alvi, in a Twitter post on Monday, said Khan would stay on as prime minister in a caretaker role. Khan's fate is now in a state of limbo which would lead to fresh political instability in the country. The court could bar him from standing again if he is found to have acted unconstitutionally.

Iran Prepared to Help...

FROM PAGE 1

Sheikh Tamim, for his part, voiced his satisfaction with Team Melli's participation in the World Cup.

"In this tournament, we will welcome our brothers well," he said, noting that Iran's group is a sensitive one that will surely produce entertaining games.

The Qatari emir went on to highlight that Qatar's Minister of Transport and Communications Jassim bin Saif Al Sulaiti and Iranian Minister of Roads and Urban Development Rostam Qasemi will soon meet in Kish Island to discuss cooperation for the 2022 FIFA World Cup matches.

Also on Sunday evening, Raisi pointed to the enormous potential for upgrading the level of Tehran-Doha relations, calling for the activation of all capacities for cooperation and closer coordination to serve the interests of both nations and establish stability and security in the region.

The Iranian president said great decisions will be made during the forthcoming visit of the Qatari emir to Tehran in the near future, emphasizing that the decisions will help further develop bilateral relations and cooperation between the two countries in various areas.

Petrochemicals...

FROM PAGE 1

The scramble to bolster non-oil exports has involved tapping new markets. The wide diversity of these markets and the products they deal in make it easier to conceal them from exposure to the illegal US sanctions than the grades of oil.

The number of items on the list exported by Iran last year amounted to more than 30.

Gas export revenues rose 84% to \$4.8 billion, with Turkey and Iraq being Iran's main markets. Methanol sales soared 88% to \$1.9 billion. Iran is the largest exporter of methanol to China which is the world's largest importer and accounts for some 60% of global consumption.

China is also the largest importer of polyethylene, the most common plastic. Iran's overall exports of the substance in four grades surpassed \$3.7 billion in the period.

Propane exports grew 88% to \$1.6 billion, butane exports 99% to more than \$1 billion and urea sales by 142% to \$1.5 billion. Iran also sold \$1.2 billion of bitumen and \$715 million of gasoline, a strategic fuel in which the country achieved self-sufficiency under sanctions.

In the mining sector, sales of metals rose more than 90% to \$10.4 billion. More than \$1 billion worth of non-metallic products were also exported in the period.

Iran is a major steel producer, which aims to export 20 to 25 million tons of the metal annually by 2025.

Its agricultural production is also immense. The country is the world's top producer of pistachio nuts but the position is under threat from the US. Last year, exports of the popular nibble declined 35% to \$656 million. Overall, Iran exported \$4.7 billion of agricultural products in the 11 months of the last Persian year, down 15% from the year before.

Exports of handicrafts grew by a whopping 119% to \$122 million but sales of hand-woven carpets, once one of Iran's key non-oil exports, dropped to a trickle of \$56 million.

Industrial exports, including polymers, textiles, clothing and footwear, machinery and equipment, home appliances, electrical and electronic products, cellulose products, vehicles and medicine, brought in more than \$4 billion in revenues, up 31 percent from a year ago.

India...

FROM PAGE 1

Kovind said that India's foreign policy has been constantly evolving since its independence. India's emergence as one of the major economies of the world and the relevance of India's technological capabilities has shaped key global negotiations, he said.

India agreed with Iran in 2015 on the development of the Chabahar port and the construction of a railway line connecting India to Afghanistan. In 2016, during a visit to Iran, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi signed a \$ 500 million investment agreement with Tehran to develop Chabahar.

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Matsuyama Nervous at Joining Masters Champions Club

AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - Defending Masters champion Hideki Matsuyama says he will start feeling nervous long before he tees off at Augusta National next week, notably at Tuesday's Masters Champions Dinner. The first Japanese man to win a major and the first Asian-born golfer to win the green jacket feels the expectations after his history-making triumph last April. "Looking forward to returning to Augusta National," Matsuyama said. "I really hope I play well. There's some expectations from myself, whether it's pressure or not."

Swiatek Withdraws From Charleston

PARIS (Dispatches) - Poland's Iga Swiatek, whobecame world tennis number 1 on Monday, has pulled out of the Charleston tournament in the United States. Swiatek scooped her third successive WTA 1000 title by beating Naomi Osaka in the Miami Open final on Saturday. Swiatek said cumulative fatigue was on the verge of leaving her injured. "Sorry everyone but after playing a marathon three finals I'm tired, and have a slightly injured arm," she explained.

Barca Leapfrog Sevilla Into Second Place

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona's teenage sensation Pedri scored a magnificent goal in the second half to secure a 1-0 win over fading Sevilla on Sunday as they climbed above their opponents into second spot in LaLiga after extending their winning streak to six games. The 19-year-old Pedri created and scored the winner in a similar style to the trademark goals Lionel Messi scored for Barcelona before leaving to join Paris St Germain last year. The midfielder was surrounded by defenders just outside the box but with three quick moves he left three opponents on the ground before finally finding a gap and rifling a precise shot past goalkeeper Yassine Bounou and inside the far post.

Barcelona are level on 57 points with Sevilla, who slipped to fourth, and third-placed Atletico Madrid but with a game in hand having played 29 matches. Real Madrid are top with 69 from 30.

Pedri's goal in the 72nd minute broke the deadlock in a nervy game that could have gone either way as Sevilla made it difficult for Barca, dominating the majority of the first half and creating several opportunities to score at a packed Camp Nou.

But coach Xavi Hernandez's side took control as the second half wore on, with Bounou making at least four great stops from Barca strikes from close range, before Pedri worked his magic.

"Pedri is a superlative player," Xavi told reporters.

"I always tell him to take his chances from outside the box. It's a player that I don't have a comparison for, he is unique with his talent both as a creator and as a finisher."

Pedri praised his team mates and thanked the fans who ended the match chanting his name.

"It's a crazy sensation listening to these



fans, this stadium is amazing," Pedri told reporters.

"Every time I saw a leg in front of me I just jinked. When I made the last jink and shot, I knew I had it. I knew it was a goal."

On Saturday, Karim Benzema and Joao Felix ensured Real Madrid and Atletico Madrid claimed morale-boosting victories in La Liga before facing the Premier League's heavyweights next week in the Champions League quarter-finals.

Benzema missed one penalty but scored two as Real Madrid defeated Celta Vigo 2-1 to get back to winning ways ahead of Wednesday's crunch meeting with Chelsea.

And Atletico Madrid sailed past Alaves 4-1 before their trip to Pep Guardiola's Manchester City on Tuesday, the in-form Felix scoring twice, with Luis Suarez adding a brace of his own after coming on as a substitute.

Felix now has seven goals in his last eight games for Atletico and the 22-year-old is likely to be key if Diego Simeone's men are to spring a surprise against City and reach the semi-finals.

"We go with confidence but with our feet on the ground as well because we know it will be very tough game," said Felix.

Madrid's victory at Balaídos will calm any nerves in La Liga's title race too, allowing the leaders to draw a line under their thrashing at the hands of a resurgent Barcelona before the international break.

Medvedev Set for Hernia Operation

PARIS (Dispatches) - World number two Daniil Medvedev announced he will undergo surgery to fix a hernia problem and could be sidelined for up to two months, casting doubt on his participation in next month's French Open.

"The last months I have been playing with a small hernia," the 26-year-old Russian said in a post on Twitter.

"Together with my team I have decided to have a small procedure done to fix the problem. I will likely be out for the next 1-2 months and will work hard to be back on court soon."

The second Grand Slam of the season takes place in Roland Garros from May 22 to June 5.

Medvedev won the US Open last year but lost the Australian Open final to Rafael Nadal in January.

On Friday, the Russian failed in his bid to reclaim the world number one ranking from Novak Djokovic falling 7-6 (9/7), 6-3 to Poland's Hubert Hurkacz in the Miami Open quarter-finals.

During this match, he looked physically diminished, taking a long break in the locker room between the two sets and asking for the intervention of the physiotherapist after having been repeatedly forced to lean on his racket, back bent, to recover after rallies.



Swiatek Wins Miami Open

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Iga Swiatek's dream season continued as the incoming world number one scooped her third successive WTA 1000 title to beat Naomi Osaka in the Miami Open final.

The Polish 20-year-old became only the fourth — and youngest — player to win the "Sunshine Double" of Indian Wells and Miami in the same year following Steffi Graf, Kim Clijsters and Victoria Azarenka with a 6-4, 6-0 win over Osaka.

Swiatek, who will be formally confirmed as world number one when the new WTA rankings are announced on Monday, has now won 17 straight games, a winning streak that includes titles in Doha, Indian Wells and now Miami.

Osaka, 24, enjoyed a welcome return to form in Florida even if the four-time Grand Slam champion's first final since the Australian Open in 2021 ended in a comprehensive defeat.

"I feel privileged to be among those players who have done this double before, I knew it would be tough playing these tournaments in a row but I took it step by step," said Swiatek, who won her maiden Grand Slam at the French Open in 2020 as a 19-year-old and will be the favourite to win another Roland Garros crown next month on her favoured surface.

"I was in the zone in the second set - that's the easiest way for me to be dominant. I was surprised I could handle all these matches."

"I am still the same person though. My idols were like that and I don't want the success to change me in a negative way. It gives me confidence."

Frankfurt Expect Bumper

Crowd for Barcelona Visit

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Eintracht Frankfurt could have sold out their ground five times over as the hosts target a historic win over Barcelona in Thursday's Europa League home quarter-final against Barcelona.

This is the first time Eintracht have faced Barcelona in European competition with an electric atmosphere expected for the first leg.



Gelmisa, Jeptum Triumph at Paris Marathon

marathon winner and compatriot Seifu Tura.

Tura finished three seconds behind the 24-year-old Gelmisa, whose previous title came at the Porto marathon in 2019.

PARIS (Dispatches) - Ethiopian Deso Gelmisa produced a burst of speed in the final stretch to claim the biggest title of his career with victory in the Paris marathon in cold conditions on Sunday.

Gelmisa covered the 42.195 kilometres in two hours five minutes and seven seconds - 14 seconds outside his personal best - as he finished ahead of 2021 Chicago

Morhad Amdouni finished third by setting a new French record in 2:05.22, improving the mark set by Benoit Zwierchiewski in 2003 by more than a minute.

Kenya's Judith Jeptum won the women's race by beating the course record in two hours 19 minutes and 48 seconds.

"The conditions were tough but I'm happy with what I did today," Jeptum said.

The race started shortly before 8am local time with a temperature just above zero degree Celsius.

Jeptum was in a league of her own, surging ahead of her rivals before the 30km mark and never looked back as she beat the previous best Paris mark set by Kenyan Purity Rionoripo in 2017 by 67 seconds.

Ethiopians Fantu Jimma and Besu Sado were second and third respectively, more than three minutes off the pace.

West Ham Sink 10-Man Everton

LONDON (Dispatches) - West Ham United boosted their bid for European qualification as defender Aaron Cresswell's brilliant freekick and forward Jarrod Bowen's second-half strike sealed a 2-1 Premier League win over 10-man Everton at the London Stadium.

Bowen scored the winner by stroking the ball into the net in the 58th minute after Michail Antonio had his effort saved, but Everton only had themselves to blame as Alex Iwobi had gifted possession to David Moyes' side in the build-up.

Earlier, boyhood Liverpool fan Cresswell heaped the misery on their 17th-placed Merseyside rivals in the 32nd minute as he curled the ball into the top right corner to make it 1-0 after Bowen drew a foul from Mason Holgate in a promising position.

Holgate, a late addition to the Everton team after Donny van de Beek's injury during the warm-up, made it 1-1 after the break with his first league goal of the season although his shot took a big deflection to go past Lukasz Fabianski.

Everton were reduced to 10 men for the third straight league match as skipper Michael Keane was shown his second yellow card for a lunging tackle on Antonio, leaving Frank Lampard's side facing an even more daunting task for more than 25 minutes.

Victory helped West Ham climb three places to fifth with 51 points from 31 games before their midweek Europa League quarter-final first-leg clash against French side Olympique Lyonnais. Everton travel to Burnley in the league on Wednesday.



Celtic Close in on Scottish Title With Old Firm Win

GLASGOW (Dispatches) - Celtic inflicted Rangers' first home league defeat for two years to close in on regaining the Scottish Premiership title with a 2-1 win at Ibrox on Sunday.

Ange Postecoglou's men extended their lead at the top of the table to six points and a much superior goal difference with just six games to play.

Aaron Ramsey gave Rangers the perfect start, but it was 1-1 after just seven minutes when Tom Rogic swept home to equalize.

Cameron Carter-Vickers then drilled home the winner just before half-time and Celtic held out at the break to move to the brink of not only the title but the automatic qualification for next season's Champions League it will bring.

It was for those Champions League riches that Rangers splashed out to get Ramsey on loan from Juventus in January.

The Welsh international has been blighted by more injury problems during his time in Glasgow, but looked to be coming good at just the right time when he opened the scoring.

Ryan Kent got in behind the Celtic defense and squared for the former Arsenal midfielder to score his first goal at Ibrox.

Celtic did not take long to strike back as Callum McGregor weaved into the Rangers box and after Rogic and Reo Hatate saw shots blocked, Rogic pounced the sweep the ball high into the net.

The visitors then began to take control and could have had a penalty when Allan McGregor clipped Daizen Maeda.

But it was a scrappy goal that claimed a huge three points as Carter-Vickers smashed in the loose ball after Rangers failed to clear a free-kick into the box.

