

Iran Foreign Ministry Has Denied Rumors of a Potential Assassination Attempt on Qatar's ambassador to Tehran Mohammed bin Hamad Al Hajri and Called Media Outlets To Be Watchful on Such Reports

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Permanent Envoy to the UN Has Said That the International Financial and Trade System Is Now, More Than Ever, Facing Different Challenges and Called It A Blow to Multilateralism

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Iran Definitely Collected UK Payment To Settle Historic Debt

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has rejected media reports claiming that Tehran has yet to receive a payment made by the United Kingdom last month to settle a historic debt.

Spokesman of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) said on Thursday that the bank has had full access to London's £390 million payment to settle a 40-year-old debt related to an unfulfilled military contract.

Mostafa Ghamari Vafa denied a Wednesday report by the Guardian newspaper which claimed that the funds have remained blocked in a bank account in Oman, the country which has mediated in diplomatic disputes between Iran and Western powers.

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Quds Day Should Continue As Long as Zionists Exist



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says as long as the usurping and criminal Zionist regime is dominating al-Quds, all days must be Quds Day.

The Leader made the remarks in a live televised speech on Friday on the occasion of the International Quds Day.

Ayatollah Khamenei also lauded the Iranian nation for gloriously marking the day.

He said the usurping Zionist regime is wallowing in a convoluted network of problems in both political and military arenas, adding, "Holy Quds is the heart of Palestine, and the entire occupied country of Palestine, from the river to the sea, is a continuation of Quds. Every day, the Palestinian nation shows that it has stood up and will stand up against the oppressor with exemplary courage. The Palestinian youth have acted as a defensive shield for Palestine with their self-sacrificing activities, and they are harbingers of a different future."

The Leader went on to say, "We are carrying out this year's Quds Day while everything is signaling a new equation in Palestine's present and future. Today, an "invincible willpower" in Palestine and throughout West Asia has replaced the "invincible army" of the Zionists. Today, that criminal army has been forced to turn its aggressive formation into a defensive one. In the political arena today, the most important supporter of that usurping regime, the United States of America, has suffered consecutive defeats. It has been defeated in the war in Afghanistan, defeated in its maximum pressure policy against the Islamic Republic of Iran, defeated in the face of Asian powers, defeated in trying to control the economy of the world, and defeated in the internal management of its own country and managing the phenomenon of the deep rift that has come about in the U.S. establishment."

Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized, "Polls show that almost 70% of the Palestinians in the 1948 and 1967 lands and the surrounding camps encouraged the Palestinian leaders to attack the Zionist regime. This is an important phenomenon because it signifies the complete preparedness of the Palestinians to confront the usurping regime, and it provides the mujahid organizations with the freedom to take action whenever they deem necessary."

He stated, "Even though the Zionist regime is out of breath, it continues to commit crimes and kill innocent people with its weapons. It murders unarmed women, children, the elderly, and the youth. It imprisons and tortures them, destroys houses, and demolishes farms and property. The liars in Europe and the US who make extravagant claims about human rights and who created a commotion on the issue of Ukraine keep silent in the face of all these crimes in Palestine. They do not defend the innocent people, but they also help that bloodthirsty wolf."

This is an important lesson. Regarding the issues of the world of Islam—at the top of which stands the issue of Palestine—we cannot and must not rely on these racist, hostile powers. Only with the power that comes from resistance, which originates in the teachings of the Qur'an and which arises from the religious rulings of dear Islam, can one resolve the issues of the world of Islam and the issue of Palestine, which stands at the top of all Islamic issues, he added.

"The formation of the Resistance in West Asia has been the most blessed phenomenon in this region in recent decades. The magnificence of the Resistance was able to cleanse the occupied territories of Lebanon of the pollution of the Zionists, pull Iraq out from the clutches of the U.S., save Iraq from the maliciousness of the Daesh and assist Syrian defenders in the face of the U.S. schemes. The Resistance fights against international terrorism, helps the resistant people of Yemen in the war that has been imposed on them, wrestles with the Zionist usurpers in Palestine, and will bring them to their knees with God's grace. It also highlights the issue of Quds and Palestine more and more for the people of the world to see daily", the Leader added.

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4 INTERNATIONAL

UN Chief Condemns Absurdity of War in Ukraine Visit



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8 SPORT

Warriors, Bucks Advance in NBA Playoffs



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Iran Highlights U.S., Canada's Shameful Record in Harassing Indigenous People

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Iranian deputy ambassador to the United Nations lashed out at Canada and the United States for human rights violations, attempted cultural genocide of indigenous people, and structural racism in their law enforcement and judiciary system.

Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi delivered a speech to the 21st Session of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on Thursday.

"Indigenous peoples around the world continue to gravely suffer from the consequences of the historical legacies of colonization in their territories. They face discrimination due to their distinct cultures, identities as well as ways of life and are disproportionately affected by poverty and marginalization. The biggest threat to human rights comes from hypocrisy, politicization and double standards.

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Iran, EAEU Bloc Continue Free Trade Deal Talks in Russia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) have held a fresh round of talks aimed at finalizing a free trade agreement that could lead to a major expansion in economic exchanges between the two sides.

A report by the IRIB News said that talks between representatives from Iran and the EAEU were held for a second day in Moscow on Wednesday as the two sides discussed the list of goods that could enjoy zero tariffs under a future free trade agreement.

Iran and the EAEU, which comprises of Russia, Armenia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Belarus, have been in preferential trade arrangement since November 2019.

Mirhadi Seyyedi, a senior official from Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), said that the two sides have been negotiating zero tariffs for at least 80% of their export goods and low tariffs for the remaining 20% on their lists.

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IAEA Chief Calls For Cooperation In Reviving Iran Deal

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The head of the United Nations nuclear body has said "political circumstance" must be overcome if UN monitoring of the Iran nuclear program is to be effective.

In an interview Wednesday with Associated Press (AP), Rafael Mariano Grossi, head of the International Atomic Energy Agency, stressed the agency's continuing work both in inspecting Iranian atomic facilities and in pursuing answers over its past nuclear work.

"There are certain things they need to explain that are not very clear to us," Grossi said, referring to work carried out by Iran before 2003 in sites where the IAEA later detected traces of uranium. Tehran is due to satisfy the agency's concerns by June 21.

Grossi referred to Iran's recent transfer of nuclear manufacturing from Karaj, west of Tehran, to Natanz as a shift to "a place where they feel they are more protected." The Karaj workshop, which made parts for centrifuges used to enrich uranium, was sabotaged in June 2021 in an attack widely attributed to Israel.

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منطقه ویژه اقتصادی لامرد
LAMERD
Special Economic Zone
سرآمد صنایع معدنی و تولید آلومینیوم کشور

A memorandum of understanding was signed for financing between the Persian Gulf Capital Financing Company and Lamerd Special Economic Zone

On the sidelines of the third exhibition of supporting domestic manufacturing in the petrochemical industry, which was held in March of last year, joint meetings were held between the managers of Lamerd Special Economic Zone and the Persian Gulf Capital Financing Company regarding joint cooperation to finance the special zone. The memorandum was signed and implemented.



According to the public relations of Lamerd Special Economic Zone, following the expansion of investments and welcoming investors, especially in the field of petrochemicals, from the capacities of the special zone of this industrial center in order to provide capital with Persian Gulf Capital Company as the first industrial capital company in the country. Is the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Holding, signed a memorandum of cooperation. With the conclusion of this memorandum, we will see the growth and development of investments and the industrialization of the special zone. According to this memorandum, reviewing the fields of cooperation in various areas of the capital market, using the legal and financial capacities of the financing company to facilitate and develop and financing the projects and investment plans of companies located in Lamerd Special Economic Zone and carrying out legal steps Obtaining the necessary permits in this regard, preparation and validation of all types of technical, financial and economic justification reports required by the region or natural and legal persons introduced by the region, as well as financial and investment advice, will be done with the agreement of the parties. It should be noted that currently the special zone has concluded 3 investment contracts in the petrochemical industry with an investment volume of 239 million dollars and 14500 billion rials, and will soon conclude 2 more investment contracts in the petrochemical field.

Komala Terrorist Group Leaders Arrested

TEHRAN (IP) - Intelligence forces in the province of Kurdistan (western Iran) arrested the organizational core of the Komala terrorist group.

The General Intelligence Office of Kurdistan Province of Iran announced in a statement: On the eve of the International Day of Quds, the intelligence forces identified and arrested the organizational core of the Komala terrorist group.

According to the statement, the Komala group, which has a history of terrorist acts and assassinations of citizens, has in recent years been led by foreign intelligence services to deviate from the path of social demands; in addition to covert activities, it has organized propaganda against Islam and blackmails against the country in an organized manner.

Resistance Preventing Zionists From Devouring Region Like Takfiris

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi hails the regional resistance axis for keeping the occupying Zionist regime of Israel's aggression at bay.

"Had it not been for the resistance of the devoted youths of the Muslim nation, Zionists would have devoured the regional countries like Takfiri terrorists," the president said, addressing a gathering of Muslim countries' ambassadors and representatives in the Islamic Republic on Thursday.

"The usurping Zionist regime is a serious threat against the [international] Muslim Ummah (Nation)," he added.

However, provision of support for the oppressed Palestinian nation serves as a "unifying" element among the peoples of the worldwide nation, noted the chief executive.

The remarks came on the eve of the last Friday of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, which has been named by the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini, as the International Quds Day.

Thousands of people take to the streets across the world each year during the occasion in support of the Palestinian cause of liberation from Israeli aggression and occupation.



The Iranian president also called on Muslims across the world to participate in the International Quds day rallies on Friday.

Raisi, meanwhile, warned strongly against "ignorance and naivety" in the face of the Israeli regime's "sinister and expansionist intentions," which threaten the entire regional countries and "the Islamic world's identity."

He, therefore, denounced any sort of "normalization" with the regime, saying fraternizing the occupying entity "will undoubtedly incur the ire of [around] two million Muslims around the world."

"The countries normalizing their relations with the bloodthirsty Zionist regime" are in fact "nourishing a viper in their bosom," Raisi stated.

The Iranian president reminded the participants of the Islamic Republic's proposal for resolution of the crisis that surrounds Palestine.

Tehran, Beijing Agree to Develop Cooperation in Holding Military Drills

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and China agreed to develop and expand cooperation in the field of holding joint military drills.

Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri and visiting Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe on Wednesday agreed to develop cooperation in the field of organizing military drills as well as exchanging experiences in the relevant field.

During the meeting, the two sides emphasized the need for the development of educational, military and security cooperation between armed forces of the two countries.

Relations between the armed forces of Iran and China have been developing in recent years, so that the two countries have so far held joint military drills in the Sea of Oman, General Bagheri said.

In meeting with Chinese Defense Minister, it was agreed to develop bilateral cooperation in the field of holding military exercises, exchange of experiences, training issues and other common fields between the two countries' armed forces in order to provide better security for sovereignty of the two countries' territories, he added.

All Countries Should Confront U.S. Dominance of World

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Defense Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani in a meeting with his Chinese counterpart Wei Fenghe stressed that all countries should confront the U.S. domineering role in the world.

Iranian and Chinese defense ministers in a meeting underlined the need for developing bilateral relations in order to forge regional security.

Chinese Defense Minister Wei Fenghe arrived in Tehran on Wednesday.

During the meeting, the two sides addressed various international developments as well as US' unilateral moves and hegemony.

Pointing to the policy of Iran in developing relations with neighboring and Asian countries, the Iranian defense minister said that holding such bilateral meetings will help to deepen relations between Iran and China and ultimately to maintain peace and security in the region and the world.

Brigadier General Ashtiani, meantime, expressed concern over the escalation of security crises in the world, saying that these crises are rooted in the hegemonic policies of the West and the U.S.

Chinese Defense Minister, for his part, lauded the historical background of Iran-China relations, and underlined that the main purpose of his visit to Iran is upgrading the level of strategic defense cooperation between the two countries.

Wei Fenghe said that many of the world's wars and insecurities are rooted in US hegemonic and unilateral actions, adding, "Cooperation of the Armed Forces of Iran and China will play an important role in thwarting such moves."

Iranian Parliamentary Delegation To Visit Azerbaijan Republic

TEHRAN (MNA) - A senior Iranian lawmaker said that a high-ranking parliamentary delegation from Iran will visit the Azerbaijan Republic to discuss strengthening bilateral relations between the two countries.

Gholamreza Marhaba, spokesman for the Economic Commission at the Iranian parliament referred to the recent trip of the Ambassador of the Republic of Azerbaijan along with the Azeri Consul General to Astara of Iran in the north and said that during the trip, the Azeri delegation visited joint projects between Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan in that city in Gilan Province located on the border with Azerbaijan.

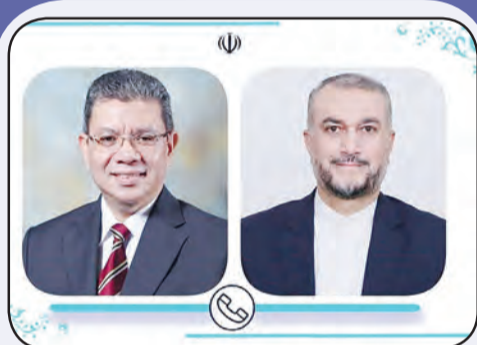
Marhaba said that the delegation visited the railway dock, the construction site of the joint Astarachai border bridge over the Astrachai river, and the shared land border bridge. The senior Iranian lawmaker said that large projects are underway in the city of Astara, adding, "Unfortunately, we are behind the schedule."

Referring to the issues being discussed by the two delegations in Astara, Marhaba said, "the travel of trucks and citizens of the two countries, visa issues and problems of Iranian drivers in the customs of the Republic of Azerbaijan were issues that the two delegations discussed."

Strengthening parliamentary relations between the two countries was another issue discussed at the bilateral meeting, according to him. Referring to the continuation of bilateral meetings between the officials of the two countries, he continued that in the near future a high-level parliamentary delegation from the Islamic Republic of Iran will travel to Baku to discuss bilateral issues at a higher level.

Marhaba added that "It is expected that with the ongoing measures, the implementation of the projects will be accelerated and the projects will be put into operation as soon as possible, and the people will also benefit from these projects."

Iran, Malaysia Call for Strengthening Bilateral ties



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a phone talk with his Malaysian counterpart Saifuddin Abdullah on Wednesday called for strengthening bilateral ties.

Amirabdollahian and his Malaysian counterpart discussed the Palestinian matter, regional and international developments, as well as bilateral issues.

Referring to Al-Quds Day and the sacrilege of al-Aqsa Mosque and Al-Quds during the holy month of Ramadan by the Zionist regime, Amirabdollahian thanked Saifuddin Abdullah for condemning the actions of the usurper Zionist regime and Malaysia's reactions in support of the oppressed people of Palestine.

Welcoming the meeting of the special committee of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation on Palestine at the ministerial level, he stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran believes that given the importance of this issue, it should be investigated at the council of ministers level.

Calling on Malaysia to use its membership capacity in the Human Rights Council to condemn the Zionist regime and lift the blockade of Gaza, he noted that Iran strongly opposes the normalization of relations between some states and the fake Israeli regime.

Stressing finalizing the memorandum of understanding between the two sides on consular and judicial issues, Amirabdollahian thanked the amnesty order for some Iranian nationals imprisoned in Malaysia.

The two sides emphasized the importance of further developing relations.

Abdullah, for his part, stressed the synergy of joint efforts by Iran and Malaysia in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation to pursue the Palestinian cause, adding that his country has good relations with all different Palestinian groups.

Pointing to his country's determination to enhance bilateral relations and focus on new areas of relations between the two states, Malaysia's Foreign Minister called the ongoing consultations and developments between the two states important.

Resistance Sole Way to Liberation of Palestine

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Chief Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami says negotiations and accords brokered by the United States only aim to buy time for Israel, and weaken the Palestinian resistance front.

The senior commander made the remarks in a televised address to a ceremony in Gaza City on Thursday, on the eve of International Quds Day.

"The so-called peace treaties like the Camp David Accords, the Oslo Accords, the Sharm El Sheikh Memorandum etc. have never been and will never be able to result in the liberation of Palestine.

"All such accords, which former U.S. presidents, [former Israeli prime ministers Ehud] Olmert, [Benjamin] Netanyahu, Yitzhak Shamir and Yitzhak Rabin tried to seal, as well as the deal of century are nothing but deception and a conspiracy to marginalize jihad, weaken the resistance front, buy time and obliterate the awareness of the nations," he stated.

He underscored that Palestinian people have come to realize that they will not achieve their goals except through resistance and struggle in the path of God (jihad).

Salami described the recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories as a sign of the Israeli regime's brutality and the strength of resistance groups, stressing that Palestinian resistance fighters have reinforced the Muslim Ummah and changed the balance of power in the region.

The IRGC chief hailed International Quds Day as a gift from Imam Khomeini, the late founder of the Islamic Republic in Iran, stating that the designation of the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan for the event put Palestine a top priority for the entire Muslim world.

"Palestinian people are close to victory as the Zionist enemy is growing weaker. Weakness inside the Zionist entity is evident in its politics, economy and security apparatus, he said.

"All Muslims around the world are united with Palestinians in the struggle against the Israeli regime. Al-Quds and al-Aqsa Mosque are symbols of unity among Muslims in support of Palestinians," Salami pointed out.

Earlier, the IRGC said current developments in the occupied Palestinian territories show that the demise of Israel is imminent and the regime is doomed to end very soon.

"Recent developments, particularly the fact that the flames of Intifada (uprising) have passed through the inner walls of the regime, suggest that the Tel Aviv regime's days are numbered and occupiers of holy al-Quds are quickly nearing their end," the force said in a statement released on the eve of International Quds Day.

It lauded the decision by Imam Khomeini to designate the last Friday of the holy month of Ramadan as International Quds Day, describing the prudent initiative and historic move as a novel phenomenon and a source of pride for the Iranian nation to play an effective role in supporting the oppressed Palestinian nation.

Iran Will Decisively Respond to Any Threat

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official has warned that the Islamic Republic is closely monitoring all the "interventionist activities" of the Israeli regime and the United States and will "swiftly and decisively" respond to any national security threat.

In a meeting with Iraq's new Parliament Speaker Mohammed al-Halbousi in Tehran, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani slammed certain "unacceptable" moves made from Iraqi soil against Iran's security.

"By adopting an intelligent approach against threats, the Islamic Republic of Iran fully monitors meddlesome activities of the Zionist regime, the US and their affiliated currents and will react swiftly and decisively to any action meant to harm the security of Iran and the region," Shamkhani added.

He said Iraq's return to its real position in the Muslim and Arab world would play a determining role in promoting stability and security in the region.

"Comprehensive cooperation to create a strong, prosperous, developed and stable Iraq in Iran's neighborhood is the permanent and unchangeable policy of the Islamic Republic," the SNSC secretary said.

Pointing to strong cultural, political and security bonds between the two nations, Shamkhani said Iran considers "political stability and lasting security in Iraq as a national and regional necessity" and is ready to make use of its utmost capacities to enable the Iraqi people to exercise their will.

The senior Iranian official emphasized that Iraq's constitution and legal procedures are a proper basis for overcoming the ongoing political challenges in the country.

Shamkhani added that Iranian firms are ready to participate in Iraq's economic and technical projects in an effort to enhance cooperation between the two countries.

Halbousi, for his part, said the Iraqi parliament is preparing a plan to criminalize cooperation and relations with Israel in a bid to prevent any possible move to normalize ties with the regime.

The parliament chief added that Iran can play a leading role in promoting political coherence in his country and stressed the importance of strengthening mutual relations.

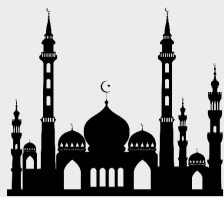
Halbousi, who has been the speaker of the Iraqi parliament since September 2018, arrived in Tehran on Wednesday for talks with high-ranking officials of the Islamic Republic.

Tehran, Islamabad Stress Strengthening Bilateral Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Pakistan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs reviewed the latest developments related to bilateral relations and stressed the need to expand comprehensive cooperation, especially in the field of trade.

Mohammad Ali Hosseini met Hina Rabbani Khar in Islamabad on Thursday to congratulate her on her appointment as Pakistan's State Minister for Foreign Affairs.

Recalling the strong commonalities of the two friendly countries of Iran and Pakistan, the ambassador said exploiting historical, religious, social and geographical commonalities is a good opportunity to further strengthen bilateral relations.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:09
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:39
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:12

11. Nay they deny the hour (of the judgment to come):
but We have prepared a blazing fire for such as deny the hour:
12. When it sees them from a place far off, they will hear its fury and its ranging sigh.

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (11 - 12)

Netherlands Urged To Resume Tehran-Amsterdam Flights

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran urged the Netherlands not to tie improving its relation with Iran to the Vienna talks and called for practical action from the Dutch for the launch of direct flights between Tehran and Amsterdam.

Dutch Ambassador to Tehran Mr. Frank Mollen met Head of Commission of National-Security and Foreign-Policy of Majlis Mr. Vahid Jalalzadeh and during the meeting both sides explored ways for boosting the relation between the two states.

In the meeting, Jalalzadeh pointed to the existing economic and industrial capabilities in Iran and the Netherlands, adding that the current economic relation is not in the expected level and development of ties between the two states should not hinge on the nuclear talks.

He also pointed to the almost 400-year relation between the two countries, adding that there has been always a positive view regarding the Netherlands and this is a good opportunity to broaden the ties between the two countries by using this attitude. He reiterated that the approach of the new government in Tehran is to continue and deepen this relation.

Jalalzadeh who is representative of the city of Urmia to Majlis further emphasized improving the level of ties between the parliaments of the two countries especially among the specialized commissions to identify capacities or likely to remove the existing barriers and also to share experiences in field of legislative.

He then pointed to the cruel U.S. sanctions against Iran and its impact on slump in the level of economic cooperation between Tehran and The Hague, adding that economic relation of the two countries despite current economic and industrial capabilities has not been satisfactory and broadening ties should not be tied to the nuclear talks.



Jalalzadeh added that today the direct flights between Tehran and Amsterdam has come to a halt after 27 years due to lack of refueling services and Tehran expects the Dutch officials to take a practical action in this regard.

He also pointed to the war between Ukraine and Russia and said that nations worldwide are opposed to the double standard policy of the White House, reiterating that Iran is opposed to war in any part of the world. He then called for expansion of bilateral cooperation between Iran and the Netherlands in all fields.

The Dutch Ambassador Mollen, for his part, pointed to the 400-year diplomatic ties between Iran and the Netherlands, adding that there has always been a constructive cooperation between the two countries which is sign of mutual respect between the two nations in different eras.

He also pointed to the decrease in the trade relations between the two states, adding that the U.S. unilateral exit of the JCPOA led to the exit of Dutch companies from Iran's market which is by itself the main factor in decrease of economic cooperation between the two countries, expressing hope that the Vienna talks bear fruits and with removal of sanctions, Iran and the Netherlands can boost their trade.

Mollen then pointed to the regional developments and hailed Iran as a big and influential country in the region for hosting Afghan nationals and expressed gratitude for all-out efforts of Tehran regarding the Afghan nationals.

240% Surge in Export Tonnage of NICICO Products

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) says the amount of the domestic (on IME) and international sales of the company in the first month of the Iranian calendar of Farvardin hit 72,888b rials which shows 212% growth comparing to the same period in the preceding year.

Dr Ali Rostami announced the news and said that export tonnage of company's cathode in Farvardin of last year was 2286 tons and with endeavors of the staff in the sales and marketing office of the company, this sale tonnage was increased to 7774 tons in the first month of the current year which shows 240% surge.

He stipulated that the value of the foreign sales of the products of NICICO in last Farvardin was \$21m while the figure increased to \$79m in Farvardin of this year which bespeaks 275% growth.

Rostami went on to say that in line with the policies of the government, the company in the first month of this year offered larger amount of its products on mercantile exchange like sales of 13560 tons of cathode while the company had offered 6160 tons in the same period in the preceding year which shows 120% growth in terms of tonnage and sales of cathode on mercantile exchange.

He stated that currently NICICO is the main supplier of sulfuric acid for the downstream industries in the country, adding that the company produced 92647 tons of sulfuric acid in Farvardin of this year which shows 78% growth comparing to the same period last year.



Iran Exports to Africa Surge 107% to \$1.1b

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's exports to Africa surged 107% to \$1.1 billion in the last Persian year which ended on March 20, Director General of the Arab and African Office of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran Farzad Piltan says.

"In recent years, many efforts were made to expand exports to African countries by the private sector and government agencies but the capacities of this vast market were not well used because the African continent was not a priority," he said. Sanctions and the outbreak of the coronavirus made it even more difficult to use the capacity of this large market until last year when Iran was able to turn things around and create a new level of trade relations with African countries.

"Accordingly, our exports to the African continent reached \$1.1 billion in 1400 from \$579 million the year before, which is a record in its own right compared to previous years," Piltan said.

For instance, exports to South Africa, as one of the most important countries in Africa, significantly grew last year when Iran exported about 553,000 tons of goods worth \$254 million to the country, up 570% from the year before.

South Africa ranked 18th among Iran's export destinations and the second largest market for Iranian goods in Africa after Ghana, he added.

The exports mainly included hot-rolled iron and steel rods, liquid butane and propane gas, sulfur, and flooring.

Iran's imports from South Africa in the period stood at about \$6 million, down 25% from \$8 million a year before. The rise is thanks to the efforts of the private sector, the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and other government institutions as well as increasing production in Iran's petrochemical, iron and steel sectors and improvement of export conditions in the second half of the last Iranian year.

Piltan said there is a capacity to increase Iran's exports to Africa up to five-fold in the long run and twice in the short and medium term.

"There is hope that with the priority that the new government gives to the development of trade relations with African countries and the better attention which it shows to strengthening the commercial infrastructure such as transportation, banking, standards and customs, and especially in view of the approaches and new programs undertaken by the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs with regard to trade diplomacy and development of trade events and business promotion activities, we will achieve an appropriate level of exports according to existing medium- and long-term capacities."

Authorities say the lucrative African market has been neglected for decades, and it is time to interact more with the resource-rich continent. The Trade Promotion Organization of Iran and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs have taken a series of measures to achieve the goals of developing trade cooperation between Iran and African countries.

Steel Exports Reached 59 Countries in Year to March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian steel exports reached 59 countries around the world over the calendar year to March 20, says a report which indicate that China bought nearly a third of all shipments.

The report by the official IRNA news agency said that exports of Iranian steel products had reached a total of 11.687 million metric tons (mt) over the past calendar year.

It said steel ingot shipments had accounted for 7.678 million mt of all exports over the period, an increase of more than 24% compared to the year to March 2021.

Exports of other steel products rose by more than 20% in volume terms year on year in March to stand at 3.406 million mt, the report said, adding that sponge iron shipments had increased 25% over the same period to reach 1.055 million mt.

Figures in the report showed that China had been responsible for 27.3% of all steel purchases from Iran over the year to late March.

They showed that Iraq, Indonesia, Thailand and the United Arab Emirates had bought nearly half of all Iranian steel shipments over the same period.

Iran has seen a major surge in activity in its mining and metals sector since the United States imposed sanctions on the country's exports of crude oil nearly four years ago.

Metals exports have accounted for a major part of Iran's foreign exchange revenues since 2019 when oil shipments started to decrease because of U.S. sanctions.

Iran, Pakistan, Iran Agree to Set Up Border Businesses

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Pakistan and Iran governments have agreed to establish border businesses to enhance bilateral trade between the two neighboring countries.

The current bilateral trade volumes between the two brotherly countries is over \$1.2 billion which can easily be increased to \$5 billion annually in next few years, the Consul General of Iran at Karachi Hassan Nouian told reporters at Iftar-dinner hosted by Iranian Consulate in honor of journalists.

"We have 1000 km long border and we can easily establish border trade for the people living both sides that will help to enhance trade activities between the two countries", he said.

He said Pakistan and Iran have friendly and well satisfied relations and fortunately these ties are developing comprehensively during the history. Recently, the new Prime Minister of Pakistan, in response to the congratulatory message of the President of Iran, emphasized the continuation of this approach to boost bilateral relations.

He said that lack of banking channel is major hurdle and both the government are looking to resolve this crucial issue.

He strongly condemned the recent terrorist attacks at the University of Karachi, in the some mosques in Peshawar and different cities of Afghanistan and expressed his condolences to the families of the victims of these sadness incidents.

Call for Avoiding Non-Expert Opinions on Isfahan Wastewater Network

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – Director general of the crisis management of Isfahan Province Governor General urged social activists, Isfahanthropists and media to avoid expressing their non-expert opinions on the collapse of the worn-out wastewater network of the city of Isfahan.

Mr. Mansour Shishehforoush stated that these non-expert opinions cause concerns in the public opinion and called for setting up an expert group for studying precisely the reasons behind the collapse of the worn-out wastewater network of Isfahan.

Meanwhile Head of exploitation and development of the wastewater of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (ABFA of Isfahan) in the meeting highlighted the main reasons behind recent incidents in the wastewater network and blamed the oldness and fatigue of the pipes for incidents, adding that since 61 years ago over 3,900 kilometers of wastewater network has been implemented in the city of Isfahan and longevity of some parts of the network is more than 55 years.

Mr. Amir Hossein Hekmatian then pointed to the collapse of the wastewater network at Moshtaq Street which happened 26 years ago, adding that that year despite the flow of the Zayandehroud, the city witnessed the collapse of the wastewater network at Moshtaq Street and therefore subsidence resulted by the drought cannot be considered as the main reason behind such incidents in the wastewater network.

He termed the fatigue of the network as the main reason behind the incidents in the network, adding that the main solution to avoid further incident is to renovate and reconstruct the worn-out wastewater network.

MSC Sees Considerable Rise In Production of Slab



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – Brave and hardworking staff at the steelmaking and continuous casting unit of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) with production of 751,100 tons of slab in the first month of the Iranian calendar Farvardin improved their record of monthly production of slab from 712,361 tons to 751,100 tons and they proved sign of self-esteem.

Director of Steelmaking and Continuous Casting of Mobarakeh Steel Mr. Ghasem Khoshdelpour touching upon this valuable record said that efforts of the personnel of this unit and with God's blessing and using smart techniques in preparing the equipment succeeded in producing 751,100 tons of slab in a month with a collective work.

He hailed the staff of the unit and their empathy in achieving such success by reducing time of halts for equipment and making most out of the equipment to materialize such record.

He reiterated that definitely the idea of collective work and avoiding individualism in different sections of the unit has been very effective in setting the new record. He said that the previous record for monthly production of slab in the company was 712,361 tons which was set in month of Mehr (Mid-September to Mid-October) of last year.

Khoshdelpour then noted that in Farvardin of this year, some 4,140 melts have been produced which shows 6% growth comparing to the same period last year, adding that in this month most of the electric arc furnaces produced over 500 melts and the furnace No. 8 of steelmaking and continuous casting unit with monthly production of 545 melts is a record-holder in this regard. He noted that this while in the same period last year one of the electric arc furnaces by itself produced 501 melts.

He went on to say that the unload-to-unload time in each furnace has been reduced to 83 minutes which shows 7 minutes decrease comparing to the same period last year.

German Parliament Approves Petition to Deliver Arms to Ukraine

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's Bundestag lower house of parliament overwhelmingly approved a petition on support for Ukraine backing the delivery of weapons including heavy arms to the country to help it fend off Russian attacks.

"Alongside the broad economic isolation and decoupling of Russia from international markets, the most important and effective means to stop the Russian invasion is to intensify and speed up the delivery of effective weapons and complex systems including heavy arms," the petition read.

The petition was backed by both the three parties in the ruling coalition as well as the opposition conservatives, passing with 586 votes in favor, 100 against and seven abstentions, according to Bundestag Vice President Wolfgang Kubicki.



Indonesian President's Approval Ratings Buoyed

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - The Indonesian president's drastic measures to control food prices by banning palm oil exports have helped lift his sagging approval ratings, an independent pollster said.

President Joko Widodo has in the last week imposed an export ban that covers nearly all palm products, which are used in staples like cooking oil, saying people's need for affordable food trumped revenue.

The move boosted his rating four points to 64.1% in an independent survey of about 1,200 people conducted from April 20-25 - recovering slightly from when it slumped to 59.9% earlier this week but still lower than the record high 75.3% he enjoyed in January.



UN Chief Condemns Absurdity of War in Ukraine Visit



BUCHA (Dispatches) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres visited sites of alleged Russian war crimes in Ukraine, decrying war as "an absurdity in the 21st century" and urging Russia to cooperate with an international investigation into atrocities.

Making his first visit to Ukraine since Russia launched a full-scale invasion on February 24, Guterres toured several towns and villages outside Kyiv where Russian forces are accused of killing civilians.

"I imagine my family in one of those houses that is now destroyed and black. I see my granddaughters running away in panic," the UN chief said in Borodianka, a ruined town north-east of the Ukrainian capital.

"The war is an absurdity in the 21st century. The war is evil," he added.

In neighboring Bucha, where dozens of bodies in civilian clothes, some with their hands tied behind their backs, were discovered this month after a Russian withdrawal, Guterres backed an International Criminal Court investigation into possible war crimes in Ukraine.

"I appeal to the Russian Federation to accept, to cooperate with the ICC," he implored the Kremlin.

The UN head will later meet Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky. On Tuesday, he met Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow, repeating calls for both Moscow and Kyiv to work together to set up "safe and effective" humanitarian corridors in war-torn Ukraine.

A UN representative to Ukraine said Thursday she was preparing for a "hopeful" evacuation from the encircled port city in south-eastern Ukraine, where Kyiv says civilians and injured fighters are trapped.

"The UN is fully mobilized to help save Ukrainian lives and to assist those in need," UN in Ukraine Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator Osnat Lubrani wrote on Twitter.

With the war, now into a third month and claiming thousands of lives, Kyiv has admitted that Russian forces are making gains in the east, capturing a string of villages in the Donbas region.

The first phase of Russia's invasion failed to reach Kyiv or overthrow Zelensky's government after encountering stiff Ukrainian resistance reinforced with Western weapons.

The campaign has since refocused on seizing the east and south of the country while increasingly using long-range missiles against west and central Ukraine.

Ukraine's Defence Minister Oleksiy Reznikov conceded the country faces "extremely difficult weeks" as Moscow tries "to inflict as much pain as possible".

Russia's defense ministry said Thursday its forces had destroyed two arms and ammunition depots in eastern and southern Ukraine overnight with "high-precision missiles".

Its air force targeted 67 Ukrainian military sites while air defense systems destroyed a Ukrainian fighter jet in the Lugansk region, the ministry added.

Erdogan Meets Saudi King Salman, Crown Prince

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan met with Saudi King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud and Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman (MBS) on Thursday as the Turkish president is visiting the kingdom to restore the ties between Ankara and Riyadh.

Erdogan was welcomed by King Salman at the Al-Salam Royal Palace in Jeddah, and the two leaders held a closed-door meeting.

The Turkish president later met with Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman.

Erdogan had arrived in Saudi Arabia earlier in the day for a two-day working visit. His plane landed at King Abdulaziz International Airport in Jeddah where he was welcomed by Khalid Al-Faisal, the emir of Mecca region. Turkish Ambassador in Riyadh Fatih Ulusoy and Turkiye's permanent representative to the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) Mehmet Metin Eker were also present.

The Turkish president is accompanied by first lady Emine Erdogan, Interior Minister Süleyman Soylu, Defense

Minister Hulusi Akar, Justice Minister Bekir Bozdağ, Health Minister Fahrettin Koca, and Treasury and Finance Minister Nurettin Nebati.

Culture and Tourism Minister Mehmet Nuri Ersoy, Commerce Minister Mehmet Muş, Deputy Chairman of the ruling Justice and Development Party (AK Party) Binali Yildirim, head of National Intelligence Organization (MİT) Hakan Fidan, and Communications Director Fahrettin Altun are also part of the delegation.

Turkiye and Saudi Arabia will start a "new era" to boost bilateral ties, Erdoğan said on Thursday before his departure to Saudi Arabia.

"My visit (to Saudi Arabia) is the manifestation of our common will to start a new era of cooperation as two brotherly countries," Erdogan told reporters at Istanbul's Ataturk Airport.

"It is in our common interest to increase our cooperation with Saudi Arabia in fields such as health, energy, food security, agricultural technologies, defense industry, and finance," he said.



At Least Nine Killed by Bomb Blasts in Afghan City

KABUL (Dispatches) - Two bomb blasts aboard separate minibuses killed at least nine people Thursday in Afghanistan's Mazar-i-Sharif, police said, a week after a deadly explosion rocked a Shiite mosque in the northern city.

The number of violent public attacks across Afghanistan has fallen since the Taliban returned to power last August, but the Sunni Islamic State group has continued to target Shiites, whom they view as heretics.

A string of deadly bombings targeting members of the minority communities has convulsed the country in the past two weeks of the fasting month of Ramadan, killing and wounding dozens.

Thursday's blasts occurred within minutes of each other in different districts of Mazar-i-Sharif as commuters were heading home to break their dawn-to-dusk Ramadan fast, Balkh provincial police spokesman Asif Waziri told AFP.

"The targets appear to be Shiite passengers," he said, adding 13 people were wounded in the blasts.

"The enemies of Afghanistan are creating tension and division among our people."

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the bombings.

Images posted on social media showed one minibus engulfed in fire, while the other was mangled with Taliban fighters transporting victims from the vehicle to hospitals.

The blasts came a week after a deadly bomb attack at a Shiite mosque in Mazar-i-Sharif killed at least 12 worshippers and wounded scores more.

That explosion was followed a day later by a separate bomb attack at another mosque in the northern city of Kunduz targeting the minority Sufi community. It killed at least 36 people during Friday prayers.

In another attack, also targeting Shiites, two bombs detonated at a school in Kabul, killing six students.

The jihadist IS claimed the mosque attack in Mazar-i-Sharif, but no group has so far taken responsibility for the bombing in Kunduz and at the Kabul school.

South Asia Wilts in Heat as Delhi Rubbish Dump Burns

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Millions sweltered in an early summer heatwave across India and Pakistan on Thursday, leading to power and water shortages as annual furnace-like temperatures hit South Asia.

In New Delhi, a burning rubbish dump choked residents for a third day with temperatures crossing 45 Celsius (113 Fahrenheit) in parts of South Asia on Thursday -- several degrees higher than normal -- and forecasters warning that it will get even hotter this weekend.

Heatwaves have killed over 6,500 people in India since 2010, and scientists say climate change is making them harsher and more frequent across the region.

"This is the first time I've seen such horrible weather in April. Usually, we're prepared for this in May and onwards," said 30-year-old Delhi housewife Somya Mehra, as she and her family thirstily searched for a cold drink.

"Today we stepped out because of our anniversary but otherwise I'm not stepping out at all. I've stopped sending my kid out to play".

The Indian states of Rajasthan, Gujarat and Andhra Pradesh imposed power cuts on factories as consumption for air conditioning and fans skyrocketed.

Media reports said that power stations were also facing shortages of coal -- the main source of electricity in the nation of 1.4 billion people.

Many regions also reported falling water supplies

that will only worsen until the annual monsoon rains in June and July.

Water shortages will hit farmers hardest, including those growing wheat as India aims to boost exports to help ease a global shortage due to the war in Ukraine.

Temperatures are expected to be up to eight degrees higher than usual in parts of Pakistan, with the mercury peaking at 48 degrees in parts of rural Sindh on Wednesday, Pakistan's Meteorological Society warned.

Farmers have to use water sparingly in a country where agriculture is the mainstay of the economy and accounts for around 40 percent of the workforce.

"Public health and agriculture in the country will face serious threats due to the extreme temperature this year," climate change minister Sherry Rehman said.

Last month was the hottest March on record since 1961, the Pakistani Met office said.

Coming during the month of Ramadan, the heat makes fasting in both India and Pakistan even tougher for Muslims -- who shun even water during daylight hours.

"Temperatures are rising rapidly in the country, and rising much earlier than usual," Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi said Wednesday, adding that India has seen "increasing incidents of fires in various places -- in forests, important buildings and in hospitals -- in the past few days."



Finland, Sweden Could Join NATO Quickly

HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Finland and Sweden will be able to join NATO quickly should they decide to ask for membership in the Western military alliance, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said.

Stoltenberg's remarks came as public support in Finland and Sweden for NATO membership mounts in response to Russia's war in Ukraine. Media speculation in the two countries suggest the two might apply in mid-May.

"If they decide to apply, Finland and Sweden will be warmly welcomed and I expect the process to go quickly," Stoltenberg told reporters in Brussels, adding he planned to speak with the Finnish president later in the day.

He gave no precise time frame, but did say that the two could expect some protection should Russia try to intimidate them from the time their membership applications are made until they formally join.

He said he was sure arrangements could be found for the interim period between an application by the two Scandinavian countries and the formal ratification in the parliaments of all 30 NATO members.

"I am confident that there are ways to bridge that interim period in a way which is good enough and works for both Finland and Sweden," Stoltenberg said.

NATO's collective security guarantee ensures that all member countries must come to the aid of any ally under attack. Stoltenberg added that many NATO allies have now pledged and provided a total of at least \$8 billion in military support to Ukraine.

Both countries put an end to traditional neutrality by joining the European Union in 1995 and deepening cooperation with NATO. However, a majority of people in both countries remained firmly against full membership in the alliance - until now.

Despite tightening cooperation with the military alliance since Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, the Nordic countries have since opted to stay out. Russia's invasion of Ukraine, which it calls a "special operation," has forced Sweden and Finland to examine whether their longstanding military neutrality is still the best means of ensuring national security.



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Japan Unveils \$103b Relief Package To Combat Rising Prices

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan has prepared an emergency relief package worth \$103 billion to cushion the economic blow from rising raw material costs, and plans further steps later this year to promote long-term reforms, Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said.

Japan out of sync with many Western economies that are gradually phasing out crisis-mode stimulus measures. The 13.2-trillion-yen (\$103 billion) relief package, to be funded mostly by reserves set aside under the current fiscal year's budget, will consist of steps to deal with the immediate hit from rising prices such as subsidies to gasoline wholesalers and cash payouts to low-income households with children.



Climate Change Could Sweep 4% of Global GDP by 2050

LONDON (Dispatches) - Climate change could see 4% of global annual economic output lost by 2050 and hit many poorer parts of the world disproportionately hard, a new study of 135 countries has estimated.

Ratings firm S&P Global, which gives countries credit scores based on the health of their economies, published a report on Tuesday looking at the likely impact of rising sea levels, and more regular heat waves, droughts and storms.

In a baseline scenario where governments largely shy away from major new climate change policies - known as 'RCP 4.5' by scientists - lower- and lower-middle income countries are likely to see 3.6 times greater gross domestic product (GDP) losses on average than richer ones.

Bangladesh, India, Pakistan and Sri Lanka's exposure to wildfires, floods, major storms and also water shortages mean South Asia has 10%-18% of GDP at risk, roughly treble that of North America and 10 times more than the least-affected region, Europe.

Central Asia, the Middle East and North Africa and Sub-Saharan Africa regions all face sizable losses too. East Asia and Pacific countries face similar levels of exposure as Sub-Saharan Africa, but mainly because of storms and floods rather than heat waves and drought.

"To different degrees, this is an issue for the world," said S&P's top government credit analyst, Roberto Sifon-Arevalo. "One thing that really jumps out is the need for international support for many of these (poorer) parts of the world."

Countries around the equator or small islands tend to be more at risk, while economies more reliant on sectors such as agriculture are likely to be more affected than those with large services sectors.

For most countries, exposure to, and costs from climate change are already increasing. Over the past 10 years, storms, wildfires and floods alone have caused losses of around 0.3% of GDP per year globally according insurance firm Swiss Re.

The World Meteorological Organization (WMO) also calculates that, on average, a weather, climate or water related disaster has occurred somewhere in the world every day for the last 50 years, causing 115 daily deaths and over \$202 million in daily losses.

S&P's Sifon-Arevalo said that some countries have already suffered credit ratings downgrades due to extreme weather, such as some Caribbean islands after major hurricanes.

But he said the new data was not about to be plugged into the firm's sovereign ratings models, as there were still too many uncertainties such as how countries might adapt to the changes.

A study last year by a group of U.K. universities looking at a more extreme rise in global temperatures, predicted that over 60 countries could see their ratings cut because of global warming by 2030.

Some experts have also suggested a sliding scale for ratings, where highly-exposed countries would have one credit score for the next 10 years or so and another one for further in the future when problems are likely to be biting.

"We strive to tell what is relevant and where," Sifon-Arevalo said. "But we don't rate to a worst-case scenario, we rate to a base-case scenario."

Europe Vows Response as Russia Shuts Off Gas to Poland, Bulgaria

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union said it was mapping out a "coordinated" response after Russian energy firm Gazprom abruptly announced it was halting gas supplies to Poland and Bulgaria, a dramatic escalation and Kremlin's toughest retaliation yet to international sanctions over the war in Ukraine.

One day after the United States and other Western allies vowed to send more and better military supplies to Ukraine, Moscow upped the ante, using its most essential export as leverage. European gas prices shot up on the news, which European leaders denounced as "blackmail."

Poland confirmed that supplies had been cut, while Bulgaria said it would find out soon. Both accused Gazprom of breaching longstanding supply contracts.

Both countries' leaders accused Moscow of using natural gas to blackmail their countries. Gazprom said in a statement it had "completely suspended gas supplies to Bulgargaz and PGNiG due to absence of payments in rubles," referring to the Polish and Bulgarian gas companies.

Russian President Vladimir Putin demanded that buyers from "unfriendly" countries pay for gas in rubles or be cut off, starting from the date payments are due for April. The European Union has rejected this demand as rewriting contracts that called for payment in euros.

Poland, a historical rival of Russia, has been a major gateway for the delivery of weapons to Ukraine and confirmed this week that it is sending the country tanks. It said it was well prepared for Wednesday's gas cutoff.

It receives its gas through the Yamal-Europe pipeline from Russia's huge gas fields in the Arctic far north, which continues west to supply Germany and other European countries. Bulgaria is supplied through pipes over Turkey.

Polish state-owned PGNiG confirmed its supplies from Gazprom had been cut but said it was still supplying its own clients as needed.

"Cutting gas supplies is a breach of contract and PGNiG reserves the right to seek compensation and will use all available contractual and legal means to do so," the company said.

Bulgaria said that it also was informed by Gazprom that the country's gas supplies would end at the same time, but officials in Sofia said Wednesday morning that they were still seeing gas arrive.



Turkey, UAE Aim To Double Trade

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have officially launched talks on a Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which is expected to significantly lift their trade, officials said.

The announcement comes as the two countries seek to build economic bridges after a yearslong rift. The agreement will enable Turkey and the UAE to develop their commercial and economic relations more comprehensively and deeply, Trade Minister Mehmet Muş told a joint press meeting with Emirati Minister of State for Foreign Trade Thani al-Zeyoudi.

The UAE is seeking broad free trade agreements, known as CEPAs, with several countries and has signed such pacts this year with India and Israel.

The agreement looks to remove trade barriers and promote the free movement of goods by cutting tariffs.

The deal will enable Turkey and the UAE to achieve a bilateral trade volume of nearly \$15 billion, Muş said, referring to the highest level ever recorded back in 2017, before declining as relations strained.

Al-Zeyoudi said the CEPA is expected to double trade between the two nations. "By cutting tariffs, promoting free movement of goods, facilitating capital flows and reducing trade barriers, we will make it easier than ever to do business. It will also underpin a new era of cooperation," he noted.

Turkey and the UAE have moved to put years of tense relations behind them, opening the doors to a new phase in bilateral relations marked by deeper economic cooperation after a yearslong dispute, during which the sides maintained economic ties.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan paid a return visit to the UAE in mid-February, after a trip by the UAE's de facto ruler Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed Al Nahyan (MBZ) to Ankara in late November that marked a significant move toward overcoming disputes.

The visit, which was Erdoğan's first to the Gulf country since 2013, was marked by a score of agreements, including on trade, industry, defense, health and medical sciences, land and sea transportation and climate action.



German Gov't Cuts Economic Forecast, Sees 2.2% Growth

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German government forecast Wednesday that the country's economy, Europe's biggest, will grow by only 2.2% this year as Russia's war in Ukraine weighs on prospects.

The Economy Ministry chopped the outlook for gross domestic product from the 3.6% growth it forecast in January. It sees only slightly faster growth of 2.5% in 2023.

The government's revised outlook was gloomier than a recent assessment by leading economic think tanks that expected the economy to expand by 2.7% this year.

But the government outlook was more optimistic than a prediction of 1.8% growth by its own panel of independent economic advisers. Last year, Germany's GDP grew by 2.9%.

Economy Minister Robert Habeck said the government was making a "conservative" estimate, pointing to still-fragile supply chains, the effect of sanctions against Russia on the availability of raw materials and the ongoing effects of the coronavirus pandemic.

The 2.2% growth prediction assumes no energy embargo or blockade of gas deliveries, Habeck said. "If this came on top, we would have a recession in Germany," he said.

Russian imports account for a significant, though declining, proportion of Germany's gas supplies. Habeck said that proportion has declined from 55% before the war to 35% now.

Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Cabinet on Wednesday approved a package of measures designed to ease the strain on consumers of higher energy prices. It includes lowering the tax on gasoline, cheap tickets for public transportation and one-off payments of several hundred euros to each taxpayer.

The cost to the public purse was estimated at "significantly more" than 30 billion euros (\$32 billion), government spokesman Steffen Hebestreit told reporters.

Russia Sees Its Oil Output Falling by Up to 17% in 2022

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia may see its oil production fall by as much as 17% in 2022, an economy ministry's document seen by Reuters showed, as the country struggles with Western sanctions.

The United States has banned Russian oil imports, while Western sanctions against Russian banks and vessels had crippled the oil trade, one of Moscow's key sources of revenue. The European Union is also considering fully banning Russian oil.

The scale of the production decline would be the most significant since the 1990s when the oil industry suffered from underinvestment.

Russian oil output started to decline in March and had fallen by around 7.5% by mid-April.

Oil production in Russia recovered last year following a decline in 2021, its first annual fall since 2008, due to fallout from the pandemic.

The International Energy Agency has said the impact of sanctions and buyers' aversion to Russian oil would take full effect from May onwards.

According to the document, Russian oil output may decline to between 433.8 million and 475.3 million tons (between 8.68 million and 9.5 million barrels per day) in 2022 from 524 million tons in 2021.

That would be the lowest since 2003, when Russian oil output stood at 421 million tons.

The ministry did not reply to a request for comment.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered the government to forge closer energy ties with Asia and diversify energy supplies away from Europe.

Exports of oil and gas are also expected to fall this year, the document showed.

Oil exports are seen declining to between 213.3 million and 228.3 million tons (4.27 million to 4.57 million bpd) from 231 million tons in 2021.

Pakistan's Economy Slumps To Catastrophic Low



ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - While Pakistan's miserable economic condition was shrouded by the political upheaval in the country over the past few months, the newly-elected Shehbaz Sharif government is now staring at an economic catastrophe not seen for decades, said a media report.

As everyone was fixated on a political war between the former Prime Minister Imran Khan-led government and the then Opposition aided by the army, the economy continued to slip out of hands of policymakers quietly. Now, the new government is bestowed with an economy which is dwindling on almost all parameters.

Pakistan Finance Minister Miftah Ismail, who earlier served as the Federal Advisor on Finance, Chairman of the Pakistan Board of Investment and as an economist with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), has been put to a great test with too many daunting problems facing the country's economy, reported Islam Khabar.

The major development lenders have slashed Pakistan's economic growth forecast to 4 per cent, significantly lower than the 4.8 per cent set in the budget 2021-22. Moreover, the IMF in its recent World Economic Outlook (WEO) 2022 has projected the inflation in the country to touch 11.2 per cent against last year's 8.9 per cent, demonstrating how the economy continues to deteriorate.

According to Pakistani-American economist Atif Mian, the Imran Khan-led government inherited a bad economy, however, he left it in a worse shape with skyrocketing yawning fiscal deficit and current account deficit and zero increase in average income.

Recently, Moody's projected a current account deficit of USD 12 billion between July 2021 and February 2022, against a USD 1 billion surplus in the same period a year earlier. The agency also highlighted risks for Pakistan's economy in a fluid political situation and predicted further deterioration in its external position, including widening of the current account deficit and erosion of foreign exchange reserves, according to the media outlet.

Iran's Latest Ballistic Missiles Unveiled on Quds Day

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's latest ballistic missiles "Kheiber-Shekan" and "Emad-3" were unveiled on Friday during the Quds Day march. 'Kheiber-Shekan' is the world's longest-range tactical ballistic missile with a range of 1,450 km. The 'Kheiber-Shekan' strategic missile is one of the long-range missiles of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), which has unique features.

The missile has solid fuel and in the landing phase, it has maneuverability to pass through the missile shield. Its weight has been reduced by one-third compared to similar models and its preparation and firing time has been reduced to one-sixth due to optimal design. Extreme agility and speed in hitting targets within a range of 1,450 km are other capabilities of this missile.



Russian Gas Stoppages Spur Europe's Race for New Energy Supplies

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - As the war in Ukraine rages, an energy battle is spreading across Europe, with countries racing to replace Russian fossil fuels while Moscow cuts off gas supplies to some nations and threatens others with the same.

The European Union vowed on Wednesday to continue to phase out purchases of Russian gas, support countries affected by Russian countermeasures and speed up the switch to renewable energy in response to Russia's decision to halt gas flows to Poland and Bulgaria.

Russian energy giant Gazprom PJSC said it had not received payment in rubles for gas sales to Poland and Bulgaria, as required by a new decree by President Vladimir Putin. EU officials accused Moscow of using energy as a political weapon. The speaker of Russia's State Duma, Vyacheslav Volodin, said on Wednesday that Moscow should expand the measures against other nations that it deems unfriendly.

Two months into Russia's war on Ukraine, EU countries are accelerating their efforts to replace Russian oil and gas. Steps by Germany and other national governments to switch suppliers are now proceeding rapidly, threatening to diminish Russia's hitherto most lucrative source of foreign earnings.

Germany and the EU have faced much criticism in recent weeks, including from Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky, for their continued purchases of Russian oil and gas, which help fund Russia's budget and its war effort.

The EU is debating potential sanctions on Russian oil, including a full but phased-in embargo, but national measures by European countries are creating new facts on the ground faster than the negotiations in Brussels.

Germany, Europe's biggest economy, said on Tuesday it has all but overcome its need to import oil from Russia, thanks in part to an agreement with Poland over the use of ports and pipelines. Berlin said that phasing out Russian gas would take longer but that it is working on it.

For Moscow, the decision to throttle gas flows to Poland and Bulgaria is a high-risk gamble that could undermine one of its main supports of Russia's embattled economy. Oil and gas sales provide around 40% of the Russian government's revenues. The EU is Russia's main gas market.

"Gazprom's announcement is another attempt by Russia to blackmail us with gas," European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said on Wednesday. She said that Bulgaria and Poland are already receiving gas from EU neighbors and that discussions are ongoing on how to prevent significant disruptions.

Analysts at energy consulting firm Rystad said that "Russia has fired the first shot back at the West," wielding energy as a weapon.

"Russia is trying to shatter the unity of our allies," Mr. Zelensky's chief of staff, Andriy Yermak, said on Telegram.

The Kremlin on Wednesday denied it was using energy as a weapon and said it remains a reliable energy supplier.

Many European countries have been scrambling to line up alternative gas supplies for next winter's heating season, mainly liquefied natural gas imported from the U.S. and the Middle East, and gas piped in from Norway and North Africa. The EU aims to head into next winter with its gas storage facilities 80% full and to slash its purchases of Russian gas by two-thirds by the end of this year.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, is likely to make proposals next week for a sixth round of economic sanctions against Russia for its invasion of Ukraine, including an embargo on oil or other measures to cut Moscow's revenues from oil sales. Several member states including Germany and Hungary have so far resisted a full embargo. But European demand for Russian oil is plummeting anyway.

Iran Posts Monthly Trade Surplus of \$875m

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian customs office (IRICA) show that the country had a trade surplus of \$875 million in the month to April 20.

IRICA's deputy for technical affairs Foroud Asgari said on Thursday that Iranian non-oil exports had reached a total of \$3.699 billion in value terms in the first month of the current calendar year, an increase of 25% compared to the same month in 2021.

Asgari said that imports into Iran over the same period had totaled \$2.824 billion, adding that shipments had declined by one percentage point year on year in April. The official reiterated that April export had decreased by 10% in volume terms year on year despite the surge reported in the value of the shipments.

However, he said that the volume of imports into Iran had increased by 10% compared to the month to April 2021.

The figures come as Iran continues to report consecutive periods of growth in exports despite being subject to an inclusive regime of American sanctions that seeks to hamper the country's trade with the rest of the world.

Experts say growth in trade is a byproduct of US sanctions on Iran's direct sales of crude as the country has moved to diversify its economy away from oil revenues by encouraging more activity in manufacturing, agriculture and metals sectors.

Annual figures released by IRICA earlier this month showed that Iran's foreign trade had reached a total value of \$101.6 billion for the year to late March, an increase of 38% compared to the previous calendar year. The figures showed that Iranian non-oil exports had increased 40% over the year to March to reach a total value of \$48.6 billion.

Chadormalu Seeking Production Increase, Low Energy Consumption

TEHRAN – Manager of Chadormalu Industrial Complex

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

He emphasized the link between the industry's body to the scientific, research and knowledge-based centers as well as domestic machine manufacturers and said that in line with these co-operations, the company has indigenized some 30,000 of its required industrial parts.



Eng. Vahid Khalili said that last year despite 150,000 tons of steel production decrease due to the power outage, the company produced 1.050m tons of steel ingot and 1.5m tons of sponge iron and the surplus ingots from the domestic sales were exported to those countries which were seeking global grade quality.

He went on to say that companies like Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company are driving force of the national economy, adding that as the company passed a very good year in the stock market, wherever in the country there was an opportunity for development, the company was ready for participation and investment.

Pointing to desalination and transfer of water from the Persian Gulf to the Central Plateau and Yazd Province, Khalili said with taking this initiative and action by three gigantic industrial and mining companies, future crisis for drinking water shortages were prevented.

Khalili then pointed to the issues of gas, water and electricity infrastructures in this industrial company and said that steel industry is of those industries needs certain requirements when it is set up in any place. He noted that fortunately with the project for transfer of the water, the problem of the company has been resolved in water issue, and at the same time by employing modern technologies, the company is trying to save energy and currently in Chadormalu Industrial Complex, the amount of water being used for producing one ton of steel is less than one cubic meter, and this is the lowest amount of water consumption in the steel industry which is because of employing the modern technology and new methods of returning the consumed water to the production cycle. He added that because of having a 500-megawatt power station, the annual consumption of electricity in this complex is 180 megawatts.

Quds Day...

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The Islamic Republic of Iran advocates and supports the camp of Resistance. It advocates and supports the Palestinian Resistance. We have always said this, we have always acted on this, and we have stood by it. We condemn the risky move to normalize relations [with the Zionist regime]. We denounce the policy of a normalization of relations. Some Arab governments have asked the US to accelerate the matter of solving the Palestinian issue. If they mean that before the U.S. leaves the region, it should remove any obstacle standing in the way of the Zionist regime, they have behaved treacherously and have brought disgrace to the Arab world. Secondly, they have been naïve since this is a case of the blind leading the blind," Ayatollah Khamenei emphasized.

Meanwhile millions of people took to the streets for Quds Day rallies around the world to show solidarity with the Palestinians and condemn Israeli atrocities against them.

In Iran, demonstrations started in Tehran and some 900 other cities and towns across the country.

People taking part in the rallies seek to communicate to the world the deplorable conditions inflicted by Israel upon the Palestinians and press the Israeli regime to respect their rights.

They also used the opportunity to highlight Israel's decades-long occupation of Palestine and the regime's atrocities against the Palestinians.

At the end of the rallies, a statement was issued that described the liberation of the holy city of Quds, freedom of the oppressed and defenseless Palestinian nation from the clutches of the occupying Zionist regime, and annihilation of the Israel regime as the lofty ideals of the Muslim world.

It denounced concessions and normalization of diplomatic relations with the usurping Tel Aviv regime as an act of unforgivable treason and a fiendish plot aimed at weakening the anti-Israel resistance front and liquidation of the Palestinian cause.

It also referred to the International Quds Day and support of Palestinians as the guarantor of Iran's national security and the key to the unity of the Muslim Ummah against the conspiracies of colonial and arrogant powers.

The statement went on to stress the need for beefing up the anti-Israel resistance front, calling on regional and international organizations to adopt decisive and practical positions, back the sole solution to the Palestinian issue, which is based on the return of Palestinian refugees and a comprehensive and free referendum, and oppose any alternative, oppressive and sham initiative in its place.

It noted that the successive defeats of the United States, the Israeli regime, and Saudi Arabia in the strategic West Asia region have dispelled the invincibility myth of the Israeli army and the regime's security apparatus and indicated that colonialism and Zionism are in decline in the region.

The statement also decried the deadly silence of the international community and human rights organizations vis-à-vis the racist practices, genocide, and inhumane crimes of the bogus Israeli regime.

It highlighted that the Tel Aviv regime has perpetrated evil crimes against various nations, especially Palestinians, and has been involved in criminal acts against the Iranian people and the assassination of the Islamic Republic's nuclear scientists.

IAEA Chief...

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Grossi noted that the new manufacturing plant at Natanz also reflected growth in Iran's nuclear program. "The activity is not new, but the production lines, the production capacities, are being expanded," he said.

While the IAEA is not directly involved in Vienna talks to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear agreement, the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action), Grossi has made clear the agreement's demise – following United States 2018 withdrawal and Iran's 2019

decision to reduce IAEA access and break JCPOA limits – has undermined the agency's monitoring role.

Grossi told AP that the real value of a temporary access arrangement in place since February 2021 would be realized only if the JCPOA were back in place, when the agency would be able to retrieve all data in its monitoring equipment, including cameras, in Iran's nuclear sites.

"Well, you know, that access to information is part of an understanding I have with Iran that has it, that once the

JCPOA is back in application, then they are going to be releasing this material to us," Grossi said. "So, if JCPOA negotiations were to fail and I don't want to imagine that, but it's a possibility. Then I have to sit down with my Iranian counterparts and look into this again."

The IAEA chief, whose time since taking office December 2019, has been dominated by Iran, conceded that "putting every effort into making this process a success...is not easy."

Iran Definitely...

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"Despite the claim by the Guardian paper, the sum of £390 million has been definitely and fully collected by the CBI and there is no problem in using these foreign exchange resources," Ghamari Vafa said in a post on his Persian Twitter account.

The payment by the UK in mid-March included the interests that had accrued on the debt for more than four decades.

British authorities had claimed upon releasing the disputed funds that the move was in compliance with sanctions on Iran and that the money will only be used for humanitarian purposes.

The Iranian government rejected those statements and insisted the country will have "full authority and freedom on how to spend its financial resources".

Both countries have denied speculations that the debt settlement was linked to Iran's decision last month to release two Iranian-British nationals held in Iran for espionage charges for more than five years.

Iran Highlights U.S...

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It is very ironic that those whose human rights records are in shambles, are yet to lose face and are covering up each other's crimes. Canada and the United States are the usual suspects whenever there is news circulating in the media about human rights violations, especially the rights of indigenous and people of African descent," she said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its concern regarding the history of discrimination by Canadian authorities against the indigenous peoples in Canada wherein they were killed and buried secretly, robbed of their land and eradicated of their culture. These facts have been well documented in the study of the Expert Mechanism on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples presented to the 48th session of Human Rights Council last September," the Iranian envoy added.

"The international community as a whole expressed utter shock regarding the revealing discovery of hundreds of indigenous peoples' bodies, including children, at the sites of several former residential schools in Canada which clearly and explicitly reflects Canada's past role in the attempted cultural genocide of its indigenous people. Furthermore, most recently, according to the report of the Permanent Forum on Indigenous Issues on violence against indigenous children, poverty among indigenous children in Canada stands at 69 percent compared with 13 percent for children in general," she deplored.

"It is unfortunate that the world we are living in today is disrupted by rogue actors who exert maximum pressure not only on sovereign governments through implying unilateral coercive measures, but also on their OWN Native-American and African-American citizens by depriving them of their inalienable rights. Structural racism in law enforcement and the judiciary system in the United States has left the global community concerned for the fate of indigenous communities. In this Country, indigenous children were forced to move to residential schools far from their families where they were made to feel that their way of life was 'primitive' or 'sinful'," Ershadi added.

"In conclusion, the Islamic Republic of Iran reaffirms that the rights of indigenous peoples must be respected in line with the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples, particularly amid the COVID-19 pandemic, and reiterates that such atrocities regarding the indigenous peoples and responsibility of their perpetrators should never be forgotten, nor shall the realization of justice be ignored," she concluded.

Iran, EAEU...

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"Currently, the text of the agreement has been mostly finalized and there are few issues which need more deliberation from the two sides," Seyedi was quoted as saying.

The official said free trade deal talks between Iran and the EAEU will continue over the upcoming months as the two sides hope to clinch an agreement before the end of 2022.

Iran and the EAEU have held four rounds of face to face talks as well as 15 virtual meetings since the second half of 2020 to discuss the free trade agreement.

Iranian customs office figures show that bilateral trade with the EAEU rose 66% in value terms in the year to late March to stand at \$5.634 billion.

The figures show that Iranian exports to the EAEU rose 12% year on year to reach \$1.17 billion over the calendar year.

Thiem Tumbles out In Estoril First Round

ESTORIL (Dispatches) - Dominic Thiem suffered another first-round exit at the Estoril Open, losing in straight sets to France's Benjamin Bonzi as he continues his comeback from a long injury lay-off.

The Austrian former world number three lost 6-3, 7-6 (11/9) to the 58th-ranked Bonzi on the clay in Portugal.

Thiem, the 2020 US Open champion, was beaten in the first round of the Serbia Open last week in his first four-level match in 10 months.

Im, Kim Go for Asiad Gold And Military Exemption

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Multiple PGA Tour winners Im Sung-jae and Kim Si-woo will tee up for South Korea at this year's Asian Games in China, where gold medals could potentially spare the pair from compulsory military service.

Im and Kim, respectively ranked 19th and 51st in the world, have been selected in the four-man squad for team and individual competitions at the Asiad in September, the Korea Golf Association said.

Warriors, Bucks Advance In NBA Playoffs

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The defending champion Milwaukee Bucks and resurgent Golden State Warriors completed 4-1 series victories to advance to the second round of the NBA playoffs.

In Milwaukee, Giannis Antetokounmpo scored 33 points as the Bucks brushed aside the Chicago Bulls 116-100 to clinch a comfortable series win and advance to an Eastern Conference showdown with the Boston Celtics.

In San Francisco, Golden State relied on Stephen Curry and a crucial late 15-point cameo from Gary Payton II to seal a pulsating 102-98 victory over reigning MVP Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets.

The Warriors will now face either the Memphis Grizzlies or Minnesota Timberwolves in the Western Conference semi-finals.

The Warriors, who had led the series 3-0 before dropping game four in Colorado on Sunday, dug deep in the fourth quarter to clinch victory at the Chase Center.

The Nuggets, buoyed by a towering 30-point display from Jokic, had led by eight points at the end of the third period.

But Golden State outscored the visitors 32-20 in the fourth quarter — with Payton contributing 10 points — to claim a dramatic win.

The victory was Golden State's first playoff series win since 2019 after two consecutive seasons where they missed the postseason.

"I think you could see those first three quarters we'd forgotten what it felt like to try and close out a game," Curry said.

"The nerves, the energy, the pressure in the building. It's been a long time since we've felt this. We still know how to do it but we had to grind it out. It's a good feeling to go through and get the win."

In Milwaukee, Antetokounmpo was in dominant form, shooting 11-of-15 from the field and finishing with nine rebounds as the defending NBA champion Bucks romped to victory at the Fiserv Forum.

"I just wanted to set the tone, come out and play hard," Antetokounmpo said.



"Sometimes when you're up 15 or 20 points you start being sloppy with the ball or not playing as hard."

"I think our team kept their composure, kept playing hard, kept making shots." Antetokounmpo received scoring support from Pat Connaughton with 20 points while Bobby Portis had a double-double with 14 points and 17 rebounds.

It was another emphatic win for Milwaukee after victories by hefty double-digit margins in games three and four of the best-of-seven series. Milwaukee now advance to an Eastern Conference semi-final series against the in-form Boston Celtics, starting on Sunday.

"It's big," Antetokounmpo said of the task in front of his team. "We've got to get some rest, go back and practise, watch some film, take care of our body and get ready for Boston."

On Thursday's evidence, Milwaukee will approach that series brimming with confidence after swatting aside sixth-seeded Chicago with ease.

The Bucks blazed into an early 20-7 lead in the first quarter and remained comfortably ahead of Chicago for the remainder of a one-sided contest.

Milwaukee's lead stretched to 29 points in the second quarter and although Chicago closed the gap to 11 points early in the third, another burst of scoring saw the Bucks surge into a 91-68 lead heading into the final quarter.

Chicago star DeMar DeRozan was restricted to just 11 points while Patrick Williams led the Bulls scorers with 23 points.



Rune Knocks Out Top-Seed Zverev

PARIS (Dispatches) - Top-seeded Alexander Zverev was overwhelmed in his first match in the Munich ATP tournament by 18-year-old Dane Holger Rune 6-3, 6-2.

The German, ranked third in the world had been given a bye in the first round of a tournament he won in 2017, 2018, but only lasted in 1 hour 39 minutes in his second-round match against the 70th-ranked Rune.

Rune broke in the second game to lead 3-0. At 5-3 he had six set points. He squandered four set points on unforced errors in the ninth game. Then Zverev saved the fifth with a winner, before Rune converted the sixth by putting away a volley.

Rune again broke at once in the second set and broke again to lead 5-1.

While Rune had won the opening match in each of his last for tournaments, this was the first time this year he had won two matches in a row at an ATP event.

It was also the first time he had beaten a Top 10 player.

Rune, who turned 19 on Friday, will meet either Finn Emil Ruusuvuori, ranked 63rd in the world, or American Maxime Cressy, ranked 65th, in the quarter-finals.

Black Coaches All Too Rare in Brazilian Football

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Pele, Ronaldo, Ronaldinho, Neymar: Brazil has a long list of legendary black and mixed-race football stars. But the coach's bench remains a largely white domain.

More than six decades after Pele led the Selecao to the first of their five World Cup titles, in 1958, prejudice and discrimination still divide Brazilian football, a reflection of structural racism in the last country in the Americas to abolish slavery, experts say.

Of the 20 teams in Brazil's top-flight league, just one, Goias, currently has a black coach: Jair Ventura, son of 1970 World Cup-winning talisman Jairzinho.

Most seasons, there are none.

"The most striking thing about that isn't that there are no black coaches... it's that the debate doesn't even exist in Brazilian football," says Marcelo Carvalho, executive director of the Observatory on Racial Discrimination in Football.

In the United States and Europe, the lack of black coaches in professional sports has long drawn criticism. In Brazil, the issue has barely registered, Carvalho told AFP.

"It's seen as normal in Brazilian society not to have black people in these spaces. Why? Because in Brazil it's not common to have black people in any positions of power. Football just reflects... our racist society," he says.

Black and mixed-race Brazilians make up 55.8 percent of the country's 213 million people. But they occupy just 24.4 percent of seats in Congress, and 29.9 percent of management positions, according to the national statistics institute, IBGE.

From the Selecao to the domestic league, Brazil's beloved football teams typically reflect the country's racial diversity.

But coaching jobs are another matter. Just a handful of black men have coached in the first division in recent years: Andrade, Cristovao Borges, Marcao and Roger Machado, in addition to Ventura.

The national team has had two black coaches: Gentil Cardoso (1959) and Vanderlei Luxemburgo (1998-2000) -- though in a sign of how messy the issue of race can be, the relatively light-skinned Luxemburgo, who went on to coach Real Madrid, publicly self-identified as black only later in life.

Swiatek Wants United Front in Russian, Belarusian Ban



MADRID (Dispatches) - Iga Swiatek called for the governing bodies of tennis to unite in their decisions regarding the involvement of Russian and Belarusian players at tournaments, to avoid the "chaos" created by Wimbledon's unilateral move to ban them from this summer's Championships.

The world number one has been vocal in her support for Ukraine and has been wearing a ribbon with the country's colors during her matches.

Last week, Wimbledon announced Russian and Belarusian players were banned from this year's tournament due to the invasion of Ukraine.

"The situation is getting like more and more chaotic, I would say," Swiatek told reporters at the Madrid Open after announcing her withdrawal from the tournament due to a right shoulder injury.

"But I feel like it would be nice to have all these bodies making the proper decision so that we're not going to have that kind of chaos."

"I feel like people are expecting us players to make the decision, but it's pretty hard for us to make one because we know these people. We know each other. We are spending so much time on tour that it feels like we're family."

"For sure it's a tough situation and that's why I think the actual people who are responsible for making this decision, they should make one decision that is going to last."

Women's tour organizers the WTA and its men's counterpart, the ATP, criticized the move from the All England Club.

Swiatek did not state whether she believes Wimbledon's decision is correct or not and feels she is not qualified enough to weigh in on the matter in a definitive way.

Liverpool Roll Over Villarreal

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool are on the brink of a third Champions League final in five seasons after breaking Villarreal's resistance to win the first leg of their semi-final 2-0 at Anfield.

Two goals in two minutes undid Villarreal boss Unai Emery's defensive game plan as Pervis Estupinan deflected Jordan Henderson's cross into his own net before Sadio Mane slotted in a second.

The Reds remain on course for an unprecedented quadruple of Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup.

And barring a huge upset when the sides meet again in southern Spain in six days' time, Liverpool's season will finish in Paris on May 28.

The population of Villarreal would fit inside Anfield but the 3,000 travelling support did their best to match the noise of the home support early on.

In stark contrast to the free-flowing thrills of Manchester City's 4-3 win over Real Madrid in the other semi-final on Tuesday, Emery's men followed the same tactic that saw them past Juventus and Bayern Munich by retreating behind the ball.

However, the Yellow Submarine could barely lay a glove on Jurgen Klopp's men as Liverpool just had to bide their time to make their dominance count.

The Reds have now scored 135 goals this season, but were held scoreless in a frustrating first 45 minutes. The English giants had to settle for a two-goal advantage, but they are yet to lose by a two-goal margin in 55 matches this season.



UEFA Teams Up With Europol to Combat Match-Fixing

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - European football's governing body UEFA and European police agency Europol will work together to identify new ways to fight corruption and match-fixing in the game, they announced.

More than 100 representatives across law enforcement, judicial authorities and national football associations from 49 countries attended a joint conference in The Hague to discuss how to protect the integrity of the sport.

"Organized crime quickly understood that a lot of football clubs were suffering financially as a consequence of Covid-19," said Burkhard Muehl, a senior Europol official.

"And where there is less money, players, coaches, officials and even club executives are increasingly vulnerable to being corrupted by fixers."

UEFA published a report in February which showed the coronavirus pandemic had cost clubs in Europe €7 billion (RM32.2 billion) over the past two seasons.

"With the huge profits associated with 'making the unpredictable predictable', we are seeing more and more cases of match-fixing and suspicious results," added Muehl.

"Cooperation between law enforcement and sports organizations is vital to not only detect and investigate suspected corruption in football, but also to stop such fraudulent activities before they can even begin." Muehl is head of Europol's European Financial and Economic Crime Centre (EFECC), which works with law enforcement across the EU and identifies links between suspicious matches and suspects.

UEFA's team of anti-match-fixing experts focuses on education, intelligence, investigation and cooperation with its network of specialists, placing strong emphasis on preventing problems linked to match-fixing and irregular betting.

