

A Cuban Delegation, Led by Minister Of Energy and Mines, Livan Arronte And Deputy Ministers of Foreign Trade and Foreign Investment and Of the Food Industry, Deborah Rivas And Diorgys Hernandez, Are to Arrive in Tehran Today

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **141,216 With **Seven** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

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Rise in Iran's Foreign Currency Revenues

TEHRAN (IFP) - The governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) says the country has witnessed a rise in its foreign currency income over the past months and has thus no problem with allocating foreign currency to the provision of essential goods.

Ali Salehabadi said on state television that the increase in Iran's foreign currency revenues was due to a hike in global oil prices and a growth in the country's crude production capacity.

"The oil production capacity has returned back to the pre-sanctions levels. Our banking relations with friendly and neighboring states are also improving," the official added.

"Therefore, we fortunately face no problem in providing foreign currency for basic goods," he said.

The comments come amid concerns among Iranians over soaring prices of a number of essential goods such as flour-based products in the aftermath of a decision by the government to eliminate the relevant subsidies. The CBI chief also rejected the claims that the failure to join the Financial Action Taskforce (FATF) was hampering Iran's global trade under sanctions, saying this is not posing a "serious obstacle" and cannot hinder the country's exchanges with its partners.

Salehabadi also elaborated on the government's plans to counter the smuggling of foreign currency.

\$160b on Offer in Iran Oil Show for Investment



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has offered a chance to participants in the 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition to channel \$160 billion in investments in the upstream sector of the country's oil industry, said a high-ranking official in Tehran.

Talking to Shana, the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) managing director added that his country enjoys a special status in terms of holding international oil exhibitions, as Iran, thanks to its hydrocarbon reserves, ranks first in the world.

Given its widespread transfer and transit infrastructure, Iran has easy access to underground resources, boasted Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr, continuing, "Sustainable energy supply is of great importance in today's world, and this is exactly one of the main features of the Islamic Republic's sovereignty."

Elaborating on the country's capacities, the NIOC head said Iran can meet a considerable portion of the global energy need or transport it to the four corners of the world.

The 26th edition of the exhibition, aka Iran Oil Show 2022, has focused on the motto of the current Iranian calendar year "Production: Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating" designated by Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, explained Khojasteh-Mehr, adding the initiative has been highly welcomed by its participants.

According to the official, 100 knowledge-based firms and 20 top universities supported by the exhibition organizers have taken part in Iran Oil Show, playing a major role in the international event.

Khojasteh-Mehr said the National Iranian Oil Company will hold numerous rounds of negotiations with the participating companies during the four-day exhibition.

Iran Oil Show, which opens Friday, is hosting 1,200 Iranian and 44 foreign companies or their agents.

The companies and other participants are showcasing their latest achievements and products in 908 pavilions, of which 815 are the stands for companies, 23 for universities as well as scientific and research centers, and 70 for knowledge-based firms, startups, and industrial parks.

Meanwhile on Friday and during the opening of Iran Show Oil, Majlis Speaker said that the legislature, as the facilitator and regulator, will spare no effort to help the country's oil industry develop.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, who made the pledge in his speech during the opening ceremony of the 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition in Tehran, added, "Direct injection of money into a country's economy leads to inflation, as we witness it today."

He said, "We are convinced that underground resources do not belong to governments," underlining that "they belong to present and future generations and therefore it is not a right way to sell crude oil and use its revenues for current expenditures."

Statistics indicate that the demand for oil is on a downward trend while the demand for natural gas is growing, said Qalibaf, calling for the development of the country's gas industry.

Selling crude oil is the main issue facing the country's energy sector, reiterated the top lawmaker, calling for solving the problem by the Legislative, Executive, and Judicial branches.

"Iran's oil industry is one of the driving forces of the Seventh Development Plan and can cause a major development in the country at the shortest time possible," he vowed.

Good Outcome Within Reach in Vienna If U.S. Adheres to Commitments

TEHRAN (PresTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Tehran and the P4+1 group of countries still have the opportunity to reach a "good and reliable" agreement on the revival of the 2015 deal if the United States makes the necessary decision and honors its commitments.

In a post on his Twitter account on Friday, Amir-Abdollahian said his contacts with the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell and his deputy Enrique Mora's talks with senior Iranian negotiator Ali Bagheri Kani in Tehran this week provided "another opportunity to focus on initiatives to resolve the remaining issues."

"A good and reliable outcome is within reach if US makes its decision & adheres to its commitments," the top Iranian diplomat tweeted.

Mora launched his two-day visit to Tehran on Wednesday and met the chief Iranian negotiator to the Vienna talks with the five remaining parties to the 2015 deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), on efforts to salvage the deal, which has been on life support since the US withdrawal in 2018 and its subsequent coercive measures against the Islamic Republic.

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ViewPoint Zionists Silencing True Journalism

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

The Zionists have stepped up their crimes in recent days and they continue killing Palestinians and even they do not spare murdering journalists who try to reveal the true picture of them amid the silence of the international bodies and this time they killed one of the prominent journalist of Qatar's Aljazeera's News channel.

Shireen Abu Akleh, a longtime TV correspondent for Al Jazeera Arabic, was killed on Wednesday after being shot in the head while covering the Israeli army's raids in the city of Jenin in the northern occupied West Bank.

Shatha Hanaysha, another Palestinian journalist who was with Abu Akleh when she was murdered, asserted the incident was a "deliberate attempt" by Israeli forces to kill the journalists.

Of course this is not the first time that the Zionist forces have shown their true nature to the media but this time they have no excuse but trying to silence anyone who wanted to reveal their nature to the world.

Some 230 international rights organizations and networks strongly condemned the killing of veteran Palestinian journalist Shireen Abu Akleh by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank, calling for the regime in Tel Aviv to be held accountable for the brutal crime.

The Palestinian Ma'an news agency said the 229 signatories affirmed in a statement that the Israeli occupation forces' targeting of the Palestinian journalist was a "deliberate and premeditated act and a full-fledged assassination operation."

But so far, Reporters Without Borders has been silent regarding this murder by the Israeli forces and now its independence has been questioned because of this passive attitude.

Reporters Without Borders is an international non-profit and non-governmental organization with the stated aim of safeguarding the right to freedom of information. It describes its advocacy as founded on the belief that everyone requires access to the news and information, in line with Article 19 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that recognizes the right to receive and share information regardless of frontiers, along with other international rights charters.

But it seems someone should awaken this organization to react to this brutal savagery of the Zionists against one of the prominent Palestinian journalists. We have once and again seen that this organization takes stand against suppressing media and journalist in the countries but it seems they just take stand whenever they want and against some certain countries like Russia, China or any other country that this organization is at odd with them.

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Iran to Fix Venezuela's PDVSA El Palito Refinery

TEHRAN (IRNA) - National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company on behalf of the National Iranian Oil and Distribution Company (NIORDC), signed a fundamental repairs contract and the launch of PDVSA El Palito refinery in Venezuela with a sum of 110 million Euros.

"The agreement came after recent negotiations and investigations carried out with the presence of Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji, Deputy minister and ceo of the National Iranian Oil and Distribution Company and managing director of National Iranian Oil Engineering and Construction Company in Venezuela.

The deal aimed at repairs, commissioning and completion of a refinery capacity of 140,000 barrels per day in Venezuela (currently operating with 50% of its capacity), Farhad Ahmadi, managing director of the National Iranian Oil and Distribution Company (NIORDC) said.

The project will be financed by Naftiran Intertrade Company whose financial contract is signed between the NICO and the Venezuelan company, he added.

Ahmadi said that the crude oil feed of the refinery will be provided by the participation of National Iranian Oil Company through NICO company.

Navy Foils Pirate Attack, IRGC Seizes Vessel Smuggling Fuel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Navy says its forces have foiled a pirate attack against a merchant ship sailing in the Gulf of Aden.

The Iranian cargo ship came under attack early on Friday by unidentified pirates, who were later forced to flee following an exchange of fire with forces of the Navy's 80th fleet.

The vessel is now sailing safely to its designated destination thanks to the timely action by the Navy's escort team.

Back in October 2021, an Iranian warship successfully foiled a pirate attack on an Iranian oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden following a heavy exchange of fire.

"The 78th naval fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran, consisting of the Alborz destroyer, was attacked by five pirate boats this morning while escorting two Iranian tankers," Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said in an interview at the time, describing the incident as "maritime terrorism."

Irani also said during a presser last September, the country's maritime strength and reach has grown to such a level that its naval forces can now sail to any point across international waters.

"Iran is the only country that provides for its own naval security," he added.

In line with international efforts against piracy, the Iranian Navy has been conducting patrols in the Gulf of Aden since November 2008, safeguarding merchant containers and oil tankers owned or leased by Iran or other countries.

Iran's Navy has managed to foil several attacks on both Iranian and foreign tankers during its missions in international waters. In a separate incident, the Navy of the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) has seized a vessel and detained its four crews for smuggling thousands of liters of fuel in the Persian Gulf.

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Iran Embassy Reacts to Attack on Syrian Martyrs Funeral

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's embassy in Damascus condemned the terrorist attack on the funeral ceremony of Syrian martyrs and offered condolences to the family of the victims.

News sources on Friday reported that rockets and mortars were fired by US-backed terrorist groups at the funeral ceremony of the martyrs of the Syrian national defense.

A Syrian child was killed and several other Syrian citizens were severely injured during the attacks.

President Emphasizes Completing Citizens' Health Database

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Referring to the significant decrease in the number of deaths and patients of COVID-19 in the country, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi advised the officials of the Ministry of Health to use this opportunity to prepare a health ID and complete the citizens' health database.

Speaking on Saturday at the meeting of the National Task Force Against Coronavirus, Raisi referred to the significant reduction in the number of deaths and patients with COVID-19, thanking the efforts of the country's medical staff to protect the lives of the people.

The President also stressed the importance of continuing public education, as well as strengthening monitoring of health protocols, and advised the Ministry of Health to use this opportunity to prepare a health ID and complete a health database.

Raisi also said, "All hospitals and medical centers in the country and the Red Crescent Society should always be prepared for new and possible variants of coronavirus by equipping facilities and providing medicines".

Meanwhile after hearing the latest reports on the implementation of the national plan for fair subsidies, the President called on the relevant authorities to address the requests of those who have not received subsidies as soon as possible and in a fair and orderly manner.

Raisi described the role of people in accompanying this praiseworthy national plan in a meeting of the Market Regulation Headquarters, which was held with the First Vice-President, ministers and officials of the relevant agencies, before noon on Friday.

President called the fair and disciplined handling of the requests of those who have not received the subsidies one of the most important tasks of the related agencies and



instructed the relevant authorities to identify those who are really entitled to receive the subsidy and to compensate for them as soon as possible.

Raisi stressed the need for fair indicators in determining the brackets for receiving or not receiving subsidies and said, "The whole mission and goal of implementing the plan to distribute subsidies fairly, is to establish economic justice in the country, so the Ministry of Cooperatives, Labor, and Social Welfare and other relevant agencies should determine the rights of individuals and be careful not to violate anyone's rights".

Referring to the sufficient volume of stocks of basic goods in the country, the President instructed the related agencies to take the necessary measures to optimally manage the distribution of goods in all parts of the country to prevent any increase in prices above the approved price.

Raisi pointed out, "Government ministers as well as the media should explain to the people the various aspects of the implementation of this plan, which will lead to justice in the distribution of subsidies and the elimination and eradication of absolute poverty in the country".

The President called on the Minister of Agricultural Jihad to take necessary measures to eliminate some of the problems in the field of shortages and distribution needs of basic items needed by the people, especially the four basic items, namely oil, dairy, chicken and eggs".

Tehran, Beirut Agree Resistance Only Way to Encounter Usurpers



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Culture ministers of Iran and Lebanon issuing a joint communique emphasized that the only way to regain the rights of the Palestinians is continuation of resistance movement.

Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili and the Lebanese Culture Minister Muhammad Wissam Al-Murtada issued the joint message after their meeting and consultations, emphasizing the need to liberated the occupied Holy Quds.

It is said in the joint message that the criminal acts of the usurper Zionist regime in occupied Palestine against freedom of expression and humane values proved once again the nasty nature of that regime to world nations.

They stressed that the Zionists entered Palestine as occupiers and keep taking victims like a killer virus from the people, demolishing their history and identity.

Zionist regime militants on Wednesday morning attacked the Jenin Palestinian Camp and assassinated the Palestinian reporter of Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV Shireen Abu Akle.

The martyred reporter who was shot on her head in the West Bank had been working for that TV network since 1997 and was at the time of her martyrdom preparing a report on the attack of the Zionist forces against Jenin Palestinian Refugee Camp. Palestinian reporter of Qatar's Al-Jazeera TV Shireen Abu Akle.

The martyred reporter who was shot on her head in the West Bank had been working for that TV network since 1997 and was at the time of her martyrdom preparing a report on the attack of the Zionist forces against Jenin Palestinian Refugee Camp.

Muslim Nations Urged to Stop Israeli Crimes Against Palestinians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry has reiterated its full solidarity with the Palestinian cause, calling on world governments and organization to fulfill their human and legal duty and end the Israeli regime's occupation and crimes.

The ministry issued a statement on Friday, on the eve of the Nakba Day (the Day of Catastrophe), when in 1948, hundreds of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly evicted from their homeland and Israel proclaimed its illegal existence.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran, while expressing its full solidarity with the Palestinian cause, ... calls on all governments and international bodies to shoulder their human and legal duties vis-à-vis the oppressed Palestinian people and prevent a continuation of occupation and crimes by the regime occupying al-Quds and the spread of its racist policies in occupied Palestine," the statement read.

It said as history shows, any compromise with the sworn enemies of Muslim nations encourages the apartheid Zionist regime in its inhumane acts and violations of human rights.

"The Muslim nations and their leaders should know the only way to realize the Palestinian people's rights is maintaining unity, and keeping up support from the freedom-seeking governments and Muslim nations for resistance against the occupiers and bullying powers," the ministry said.

"Iran believes that just and lasting peace will not be established in the Middle East unless through the resolution of the fundamental issues in this crisis, including ending the organized occupation of Palestine, securing a return of refugees, deciding Palestine's future establishment via a referendum participated by all of its true owners, and the formation of a unified Palestinian government, with al-Quds as its capital."

The statement said May 14, 1948 is reminiscent of occupation, massacre and displacement of the true owners of the Palestinian land at the hands of the Zionist occupiers and usurpers, and the onset of a trend of systematic violations of the Palestinian nation's basic rights.

The anniversary of Nakba once again reminds the international community of its human and legal duty of defending the Palestinian people's rights and puts on display the failure of international institutions and organizations to resolve one of the longest-running humanitarian and political crises in the world, the statement read.

The Iranian ministry stated that addressing the issue of Palestine should be the first and foremost issue for the Muslim world, saying any attempt by the global Zionism to drive the issue into oblivion would be doomed to failure.

The Nakba Day is set as May 15 every year, but Israelis celebrate what they call their 'Independence Day' in accordance with the Hebrew calendar. Since the Gregorian and Hebrew calendars do not correspond, the two events may fall days apart in any given year.

Vienna "Knot Can Be Untied Only With Adherence of Violator Party"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says negotiations on the revival of the 2015 nuclear agreement can bear fruit if the West has the will to return to the landmark deal.

Ali Shamkhani, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), said on Twitter Friday that the several rounds of negotiations held in the Austrian capital of Vienna over the past year have failed to bring the U.S. back into compliance with the deal, known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"The Vienna talks have reached a stage where the knot can only be untied through the adherence of the

violator party to Iran's logical and principled approaches," Shamkhani said.

"The United States, by breach of promise, and Europe, by inaction, scuttled the opportunity to benefit from Iran's proven goodwill. If they have the will to return, we are ready and an agreement is within

Since April 2021, several rounds of talks between Iran and the five remaining parties to the JCPOA -- Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia -- have been held in the Austrian capital to bring the U.S. back into the Iran deal. The Vienna talks, however, exclude American diplomats due to their country's withdrawal from the deal.

Expansion of NIOC-Gazprom Cooperation on Agenda

TEHRAN (Shana) - Managing Director of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr put great emphasis on the promotion of cooperation between his country and Russia in the energy sector.

According to the NIOC, Khojasteh-Mehr held talks with top officials of Russian energy giant Gazprom on the sidelines of the 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, dubbed Iran Oil Show 2022.

The two sides discussed their cooperation in different areas, agreeing to hold more meetings.

Iran Oil Show 2022 kicked off during an opening ceremony at Tehran's Permanent Fairground on Friday and will run through Monday, May 16.

The four-day exhibition is hosting 1,200 Iranian and 44 foreign companies or their agents.

Apart from domestic participants representing Iran, foreign companies from Italy, Spain, the United Arab Emirates, South Korea, Switzerland, Germany, Ukraine, South Africa, and Belgium have taken part in the international exhibition.

President Condoles Demise of UAE President

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi has condoled demise of Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the President of the United Arab Emirates and ruler of Abu Dhabi.

Raisi expressed his condolences to the UAE Crown Prince Mohamed bin Zayed, government and nation.

"The news of the demise of His Highness Sheikh Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan, President of the United Arab Emirates, caused grief and sorrow," wrote President Raisi in his message.

"I offer my condolences on his passing to Your Excellency, the government and the nation of the United Arab Emirates, and I pray for him and wish you and your house patience."

Khalifa bin Zayed Al Nahyan was the eldest son of Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the founder of the UAE government, who succeeded his father after his demise. The Federal Supreme Council declared Khalifa bin Zayed as the president of the UAE on November 3, 2004.

Khalifa bin Zayed was the second head of state in the UAE since the establishment of the country in December 2, 1971. He was also 16th emir of Abu Dhabi sheikhdom.

Latest COVID-19 Map Has No Red, Orange Zones

TEHRAN (PressTV) - After a spirited fight against the COVID-19 pandemic, lasting more than two years, the new virus map released by Iran's health ministry on Friday has brought a big cheer to people across the country.

In a daily health bulletin on Friday, the ministry announced 385 new infections and 8 fatalities.

However, what is remarkable is how the color of the nationwide coronavirus map has transformed, with no red or orange zones visible anymore.

While no city is currently marked in the "high-risk" red category, the cities in the "moderate-risk" orange category have also dropped from 4 to 0, according to the latest updates.

The number of cities with "low-risk", marked as yellow, has also decreased from 319 to 259 cities on the latest map, as a testament to the successful fight against the pandemic that has wreaked havoc across the globe.

The highly-contagious delta and omicron variants of the pandemic, which fueled the surge in infections and deaths in Iran in recent months, have almost faded, according to health experts, taking the shape of normal flu.

The fight against the cataclysmic virus in Iran, however, has not been an easy one, because the Western powers left no stone unturned in weaponizing it against the Iranian nation.

When the first cases of the virus were detected in Iran in February 2020, the US and its allies, instead of extending a helping hand, tightened the screws of cruel sanctions and created seemingly insurmountable hurdles for the country.

ICCIMA to Hold Iran-Cuba Business Forum on Monday

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) will hold an Iran-Cuba business forum on Monday.

The forum will be held by the ICCIMA's International Affairs Department concurrent with the meeting of Iran-Cuba Joint Economic Committee and trip of a Cuban trade delegation to Iran.

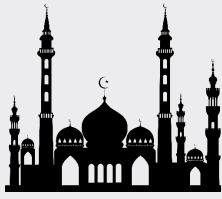
ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie and Cuban Deputy Prime Minister Ricardo Cabrisas Ruiz as well as the representatives of some Cuban companies will participate in the forum to be held at the place of ICCIMA.

The participating Cuban companies are active in the fields of foodstuffs and food

industries, medicine and vaccine, oil and oil products.

In a meeting between ICCIMA head and Cuban Ambassador to Iran Alberto González Casals at the place of ICCIMA on April 19, Shafeie referred to the holding of the Iran-Cuba Joint Economic Committee meeting in Tehran in May, and suggested developing a specific model for promoting economic cooperation between the two countries and noted that the two sides should sign a memorandum of understanding at the Joint Committee meeting for economic cooperation based on the mentioned model.

During the meeting, the two sides also expressed the need for removing transportation barriers as a prerequisite for expanding trade ties.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:22
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:19
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:58

24. The Companions of the Garden will be well, that Day, in their abode, and have the fairest of places for repose.
25. The Day the heaven shall be rent asunder with clouds, and angels shall be sent down, descending (in ranks).-

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (24 - 25)

Tehran, Minsk Explore Ways to Boost Economic Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Belarus in a webinar explored ways to take advantage of opportunities for broadening economic cooperation.

According to reports, the webinar was held by Tehran Chamber of Commerce where some economic activists of Iran and Belarus as well as the ambassadors of the two countries were present.

In the event, Secretary General of Tehran Chamber of Commerce Mr. Bahman Eshqi announced readiness of the chamber for hosting the delegation of Belarusian entrepreneurs in the upcoming months and reminded that Tehran Chamber with sending invitations to this Belarusian association has started plans for gathering and direct talks between the businessmen of the two countries.

He pointed to the West's sanctions as the commonality of Iran and Belarus and said both sides have potentials to provide required products of the other side, adding that since Belarus is unable to send its products to EU due to sanctions, it can transit its goods via the transit route to Afghanistan and India through Iran.

Eshqi then stipulated that Belarus can resolve Iran's restriction for broadening its trade exchange with neighboring states by providing containers and wagons on the Astara, Sarakhs and Inchebron routes.

He also criticized Belarus for reevaluating Iran's agro products in Belarusian custom office which leads to the price rise and it reduces the chance of competition of Iranian



products with other rivals. He recommended Belarus to define a unified mechanism for reevaluating the goods among the Eurasian Economic Union members.

Ambassador of Belarus to Tehran Dmitry Kaslov, for his part, pointed to the interests of the Belarusian companies for joint cooperation with Iranian entrepreneurs in the field of food and agro products, machineries, medicines and apparel and stipulated that his provincial meetings in Iran with officials and economic activists of each province bespeaks of high capacities for cooperation between the two countries.

He also called developing cooperation between provinces of the two states a major stride towards enhancing the economic relations between the two countries and announced readiness of his embassy in Tehran for easing the process for visa issuance for Iranian traders who are introduced by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce.

Meanwhile Iran's Ambassador to Minsk Mr. Saeed Yari, for his part, urged the Belarusian government to take serious action for the launch direct flight between Tehran and Minsk and provincial and regional cooperation between the two states will be a good opportunity for improving ties.

Iran, Pakistan to Open 3 New Border Markets Soon



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak met with Pakistan's Ambassador to Tehran Rahim Hayat Qureshi on Saturday to discuss the expansion of trade ties, the TPO portal reported.

During this meeting, the two sides decided on making the necessary preparations for the opening of three new markets at the border of the two countries.

Reviewing the level of trade between the two countries, the officials expressed satisfaction with the growing trend of economic relations and emphasized increasing the level of trade.

The development of transportation ties, the establishment of joint transportation companies, and the optimal use of the north and south corridors were also emphasized by both sides.

They also underlined the importance of using barter trade and exchange of goods for boosting trade relations between the two countries and emphasized the faster implementation of this mechanism in order to resolve some banking problems in financial exchanges and increase the level of trade between the two countries.

Forming specialized committees for pursuing the issues related to barter trade and transportation cooperation were also among the subjects that the two sides agreed upon during the meeting.

PGSOC Holding Demand-Centered Entrepreneurship Event

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Simultaneously with the start of 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, Iran Oil Show, Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) has held a demand-centered entrepreneurship event aimed at identifying the knowledge-based companies.



According to reports, the CEO of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company Mr. Alireza Jaafarpour said that considering that the year has been named by the leader as Year of Production, Knowledge-Based and Job Creation, the company has taken action to identify knowledge-based companies for protecting and improving the production capacity, and it has held a demand-centered entrepreneurship event.

He said that this event has been held simultaneously with the international exhibition to identify and boost cooperation with knowledge-based companies of the country and taking a major stride for supporting domestic production.

Jaafarpour added that there are several fields for cooperation between these knowledge-based companies with PGSOC and called on all knowledge-based companies to visit the pavilion of the company which is at Hall 5 of Tehran International Permanent Fairground and express their capabilities for cooperation.

KANS Winners Announced

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The winners of 2nd round of Knowledge Application and Notion for Society (KANS) competition were announced during INOTEX 2022 closing ceremony at Pardis Technology Park of Tehran on Friday.

The winners were selected in different six fields of Water, Environment & Energy; Health & MedTech; ICT; Transportation; Economics, Banking & Finance and 2021 Special Field: Mining and Mineral Industries.

Scholars judged the five-minute presentation of 20 finalists on Friday morning and selected the winners.

KANS Science Competition was held on the sideline of the 11th International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2022) from May 10-13 at Pardis Technology Park.

Pike See Chea (Malaysia) and Seyyed Ali Mousavi (Iran) shared the prize in field of Health and Med Tech. The winner in the field of Environment, Water and Energy was Mahdi Maleki (Iran).

The Mining and Mineral Industries has no winner. The winner in the field of ICT was Mohammad Ali Akhvaei. Saeid Bostan Manesh won the prize in the field of Transportation and Saeedeh Montazi won the prize in the field of Economics, Banking & Finance.

They won KANS Medal and a plaque of appreciation, 30-gram Gold Insignia, sabbatical worth \$2000 and

special privileges for benefiting from MSTF networking platforms: STEP & EISA.

During the ceremony, the head of the event Saeid Sohrabpour made speech.

He called KANS as an event which complete the value chain of Mustafa Prize. He said that the 20 finalists are composed of nine faculty members, four researchers, and seven activists of industries.

After one year of efforts, and evaluation of works by 50 evaluators, the winners announced today, he said.

A group of high-ranking delegation from Pakistan headed by the Provincial Minister of Sindh for Health, and Population Welfare Azra Fazal Pechuho attended the awarding ceremony.

The MSTF has established a scientific competition called KANS: Knowledge Application and Notion for Society. This competition has been staged with the aim of bouncing ideas around in academic community to address the problems of the Islamic world in different areas.

Scholars, researchers, innovators, university students, and professors under 45 years of age are encouraged to submit their scientific and technological ideas and achievements in the form of a five-minutes video presentation.



GECF Head Invited to Visit South Pars Gas Field

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran has invited the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) head, Mohamed Hamel to pay a visit to its giant offshore South Pars gas field.

On Friday, managing director of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) Majid Chegeni extended the invitation to GECF Secretary-General Mohamed Hamel during a meeting on the sidelines of the 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition - Iran Oil Show 2022 - in Tehran. Hamel is in Tehran to participate in the event. He delivered his speech early on Friday.

The 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition kicked off during an opening ceremony at Tehran's Permanent Fairground on Friday and will run through Monday, May 16. The four-day exhibition will host 1,200 Iranian and 44 foreign companies or their agents.

Briefing Hamel on the country's achievements, Chegeni said the Iranian knowledge-based firms have a strong presence in the gas sector, having impressive performance in recent years.

Serious Steps for Generating Wealth From Knowledge

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Hasht Bit Information Technology Development Company on the sidelines of International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2022) said that Danial Moj Holding and its subsidiaries are trying to take serious steps on course to generate wealth from knowledge and converting knowledge to product.

Mr. Morteza Sheikhzadeh pointed to the remarks of the Supreme Leader and naming the current year as the Year of Production, Knowledge-Based and Job Creation and said that Danial Moj Holding and its subsidiaries are trying to take serious steps on course to generate wealth from knowledge and turn it to knowledge.

He noted that Hasht Bit Information Technology Development Company is active in different fields and emphasized taking steps as a knowledge-based company to gather some young experts in the company after the Supreme Leader determined the policies. He added that one of the important fields of activities of the company is artificial intelligence and taking advantage of capacity and capability of the youth of Islamic Iran.

Sheikhzadeh also pointed to the talks of this company with traders and businessmen of Kish in line with installing the fire alarming system in the markets of Kish Island, adding that markets of Kish are flag-bearers of using this technology and gradually this technology will be used in hotels, housing complexes and other sectors in Kish.

He then explained about the properties of this technology, adding that introduction of this technology shows one of the innumerable capacities of the knowledge-based which is ready based on the Supreme Leader's recommendations to present it to the society as a knowledge-based product and production of young Iranian talent.

He deplored that today instead of exporting knowledge-based products to the neighboring countries, country's valuable assets, the youths, are attracted by other countries.

He once again reiterated that Hasht Bit Company is trying to prepare the ground for presence of young elites in the company. Sheikhzadeh went on to say that knowledge-based companies are tasked to produce and convert knowledge into product and the market for sales of products should be prepared by officials in the government and private sector.

Hasht Bit Company is a subsidiary of Danial Moj Company and it has eight main sections.



CEO of Arvandan Co. Visits Iran Oil Show



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In the first day of the 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, Iran Oil Show, the CEO of Arvandan Oil and Gas Company along with senior managers and officials of the oil ministry visited the latest achievements of the oil industry.

Eng. Abdullah Azari Ahvazi while visiting the pavilions and latest achievements of the national oil industry got acquainted with productions and the projects which are underway by those companies.

He once again emphasized supporting the knowledge-based companies as an important strategy and said this exhibition will put on display very important achievements of knowledge-based companies as well as the scientific centers and all should take advantage of this opportunity and the domestic capacity in the field of increasing production and protecting oil reserves.

He said that following the Supreme Leader's recommendations, the company will move on course to materialize the slogan of the year and the oil industry in the framework of the 13th government policies are trying to modernize and increase productivity in the production process.

Azari reiterated that knowledge-based production is a focal strategy for this company for implementing its tasks.

He said using the domestic capacities is the priority of Arvandan Oil and Gas Company and oil industry which leads to lowering dependence on overseas companies and to make ineffective the cruel sanctions.

Georgia's Breakaway Region to Hold Referendum on Joining Russia



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The leader of Georgia's breakaway region of South Ossetia on Friday set July 17 as a date for a referendum on joining Russia. "Anatoly Bibilov signed a decree on holding a referendum in the Republic of South Ossetia," his office said in a statement, citing his people's "historic aspiration" to join Russia. South Ossetia was in the center of the Russian-Georgian war in 2008 after which the Kremlin recognized the territory -- along with another separatist region, Abkhazia -- as an independent state and stationed military bases there. The announcement came on the 79th day of Russia's military campaign in Ukraine, with thousands killed and more than six million people fleeing the pro-Western country.

Armenian Protesters Block Gov't Building



TBILISI (Dispatches) - Thousands of demonstrators blocked access to government buildings in the Armenian capital Yerevan on Friday in the latest of a spate of protests demanding the resignation of the prime minister. Pressure against Nikol Pashinyan has increased since he moved closer to normalising relations with Azerbaijan, which defeated Armenia in a six-week war in 2020. The unrest also coincides with Russia's war in Ukraine, which is prompting its former Soviet neighbours to reassess their own security and their relations with Moscow. Protests have simmered in Armenia for weeks since Pashinyan said the international community wanted Yerevan to "lower the bar" on its claims to the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region.

Turkey Opposes NATO Membership for Finland, Sweden



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - President Recep Tayyip Erdogan on Friday said Turkey did not have a "positive opinion" on Finland and Sweden joining NATO, throwing up a potential obstacle for the nations' membership bid. The leader of NATO-member Turkey spoke ahead of expected confirmations from the Nordic nations on Sunday that they will apply to join the Western military alliance. Erdogan accused both countries of harboring "terrorist organizations" in his unfavorable assessment of the membership bids. "We do not have a positive opinion," Erdogan told journalists after Friday prayers in Istanbul. "Scandinavian countries are like a guesthouse for terror organizations," he said. Turkey has long accused Nordic countries, in particular Sweden, which has a strong Turkish immigrant community, of harboring extremist Kurdish groups as well as supporters of Fethullah Gulen, the U.S.-based preacher wanted over the failed 2016 coup. Erdogan cited a "mistake" made by Turkey's former rulers who greenlit Greece's NATO membership in 1952. "We, as Turkey, do not want to make a second mistake on this issue," he said. Moscow's February 24 invasion of Ukraine has swung political and public opinion in Finland and Sweden in favor of membership as a deterrent against Russian aggression. Both countries have long cooperated with NATO, and are expected to be able to join the alliance quickly. NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly said they would be welcomed "with open arms".

Turkey's "not positive" response is the first dissenting voice at the prospect of the two Nordic countries' NATO prospects. Stockholm and Helsinki have cranked up their international contacts to seek support for their potential bids. Once a country has decided to apply for NATO membership, the 30 members of the alliance must agree unanimously to extend a formal invitation, which is followed by membership negotiations. The final approval could then take place at a NATO summit in Madrid at the end of June. The 30 member states would then have to ratify the decision. Turkey, which enjoys good relations with Kyiv and Moscow, has been keen to play a mediating role to end the conflict and has offered to host a leaders' summit. Ankara has supplied Ukraine with combat drones, but has shied away from slapping sanctions on Russia alongside Western allies. Turkey's position on Sweden and Finland's NATO membership risks making it look like the "Hungary of the EU", said Washington Institute fellow Soner Cagaptay. Pro-Russia Hungary often breaks from its EU colleagues on a broad range of issues, including rule of law and human rights. Cagaptay said Ankara should have negotiated its terror-related concerns behind closed doors with the two countries. "The fact that this is done publicly is going to hurt Ankara's image significantly," he said. Erdogan's comments may also raise tensions with France, whose President Emmanuel Macron has said that NATO was undergoing "brain death" partly due to Turkey's behavior.

G7 Allies Vow to Support Ukraine Until Victory



WANGELS (Dispatches) - Leading democracies today pledged unwavering support for Ukraine in its war with Russia while the European Union promised to hike military support for Kyiv by more than half a billion dollars. Foreign ministers of the Group of Seven (G7) met on the second day of a three-day meeting in the German resort of Wangels, joined by their counterparts from Ukraine and Moldova. French Foreign Minister Jean-Yves Le Drian said the G7 were "very strongly united" in their will to "continue in the long term to support Ukraine's fight for its sovereignty until Ukraine's victory". EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell said the bloc was pledging an extra €500 million (US\$520 million) in military aid. The cash will raise the EU's total military aid for Ukraine to two billion euros, he said. "The recipe is clear -- more of the same," Borrell said. "More pressure on Russia, with economic sanctions. Continue working on international isolation of Russia. Countering the disinformation about the consequences of the war... And presenting a united front to continue supporting Ukraine."

Slain Al Jazeera Journalist Shireen Abu Akleh Laid to Rest

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Veteran Al Jazeera journalist Shireen Abu Akleh has been laid to rest in a cemetery in occupied East Jerusalem, three days after she was fatally shot by Israeli forces while reporting on a raid in the occupied West Bank. Thousands of people gathered for Abu Akleh's funeral on Friday, including family, friends, and those who only knew Abu Akleh as a mainstay for 15 years in Al Jazeera's coverage of the occupied Palestinian territories and the lives of everyday Palestinians. Some mourners hoisted Palestinian flags, with many chanting "Palestine, Palestine" as the coffin was moved from St Louis French Hospital in occupied East Jerusalem's Sheikh Jarrah neighbourhood to a funeral service at Jaffa Gate in Jerusalem's Old City and finally to the Mount Zion Cemetery, where Abu Akleh was buried next to her parents. Her niece, Lina Abu Akleh, remembered her aunt's "commitment to making sure that people know the truth, and her love for the people in making sure they know the truth." "She knew how much she was loved, but she was so humble, she never wanted to be at the centre of attention," she said. "I think she would have been proud to see how the Palestinian people supported her and supported our family." Father Fadi Diab, the priest who conducted the funeral, told Al Jazeera that Abu Akleh's killing would "have influence all over the world". "Shireen Abu Akleh was a messenger for Palestinians and for their rights," he said. "Life is sacred and we're not allowed to assassinate life. God created life not to be assassinated, but to be nurtured." "If someone imagined that the influence of Shireen will stop, no," he said. "Now, she will have influence all over the world." Still, constant reminders of the Israeli occupation on which Abu Akleh so often reported loomed over the three days of memorials that preceded the burial. Israeli police entered the Al Jazeera veteran's home on Wednesday, hours after she was killed, removing a Palestinian flag and telling mourners to turn down patriotic music.

British Foreign Secretary Liz Truss also called for further support for Ukraine. "It is very important at this time that we keep up the pressure on Vladimir Putin by supplying more weapons to Ukraine, by increasing the sanctions," she said. Ukrainian Foreign Minister Dmytro Kuleba praised the G7 nations' resolve to help Kyiv but also urged them to go further. "Today I asked G7 countries to adopt legislation and put in place all necessary procedures needed to seize Russian sovereign assets and give them to Ukraine to use this money to rebuild our country," he said. Kuleba also urged the EU to ensure that an embargo is placed on Russian oil, warning that an omission of the ban on the bloc's next package would mean its unity was "broken". The war in Ukraine had led to greater unity among Western allies, Kuleba said.

Sri Lanka Opposition, Protesters Push Anti-Gov't

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's main opposition party joined anti-government protesters on Friday in rejecting the appointment of a new prime minister and insisted the president resign to take responsibility for the country's disastrous economic crisis. President Gotabaya Rajapaksa appointed five-time prime minister Ranil Wickremesinghe to his sixth term late on Thursday, but opposition comments signalled it was not likely to resolve the political and economic disarray in the strategic Indian Ocean island nation. A week of violent clashes between protesters and government supporters across the country has left nine people dead and more than 300 wounded. The president's elder brother, Mahinda Rajapaksa, quit as prime minister on Monday as violence spiralled and is in hiding in a military base. The rest of the cabinet quit earlier. "It is clear the (new) prime minister is remote controlled by the president," said Eran Wickramaratne, a parliamentarian and senior member of the main opposition party, the Samagi Jana Balawegaya. "This country wants the Rajapaksas to go home. We are committed to that goal." Protesters who have camped out at a site near the prime minister's office for over a month also rejected the appointment. "We will stop this struggle when our people get justice," said Chamalage Shivakumar, one of the hundreds of people at the "Gota Go Home" protest site, named after the president. "Whoever they appoint as prime minister, we will not stop this struggle until people get relief." Wickremesinghe, 73, is the only lawmaker from his United National Party in parliament and will be reliant on rival political parties to form a coalition government. An alliance led by the Rajapaksas holds about 100 of parliament's 225 seats, while the opposition has 58 seats. The rest are independent. On Friday, Wickremesinghe held talks with foreign envoys representing India, Japan, the United States and China, his office said. "Discussed continued cooperation for economic recovery and stability in Sri Lanka through democratic processes," the Indian High Commission in Colombo said in a tweet. New Delhi is battling China for influence in Sri Lanka, which lies on key shipping lanes between Asia and Europe and is home to major infrastructure projects financed by both countries. The prime minister also held an emergency meeting with officials from the energy ministry regarding chronic fuel shortages that have blighted the island for months. Protesters said the appointment of Wickremesinghe will do little to ease the anger against the president, who they say is ultimately responsible for the worst economic crisis to hit the nation since it became independent from Britain in 1948.



UAE President and Pro-West Modernizer Khalifa Dies



ABU DHABI (Dispatches) - United Arab Emirates President Sheikh Khalifa Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, a pro-Western moderniser who had aligned the Persian Gulf Arab state closer to the United States and its allies, died on Friday, read more. The Ministry of Presidential Affairs announced the death of Khalifa, who was also ruler of the UAE's richest emirate, Abu Dhabi, but gave no details. Khalifa, born in 1948, had rarely been seen in public since suffering a stroke in 2014. He was buried and funeral prayers were held on Friday, state news agency WAM said. "The UAE has lost its righteous son and leader of the 'empowerment phase' and guardian of its blessed journey," his half-brother and Abu Dhabi Crown Prince Sheikh Mohammed bin Zayed said on Twitter, praising Khalifa's wisdom and generosity. Mohammed, known as MbZ, has for years been the de facto ruler of the UAE, an OPEC oil producer and a major trade and tourism hub which has moved to build its political influence in the region and abroad. UAE state media on Friday started referring to MBZ as the new ruler of Abu Dhabi, which holds most of the UAE's oil wealth and has held the presidency since the founding of the UAE federation by Khalifa's father, the late Sheikh Zayed bin Sultan al-Nahyan, in 1971. Under the constitution, vice-president and premier Sheikh Mohammed bin Rashid al-Maktoum, ruler of Dubai, would act as president until the federal supreme council which groups the rulers of the seven emirates meets within 30 days to elect a new president. Diplomats and analysts expect MbZ to become new president, further consolidating Abu Dhabi's power which had already grown under Khalifa, who came to power in 2004. Khalifa's death comes at a time when Abu Dhabi's ties with Washington have been visibly strained over perceived U.S. disengagement from its Gulf allies' security concerns. "Not much will change in UAE foreign & domestic policies, except MbZ will have even less reason to seek consensus w/Dubai & other Emirates," tweeted Cinzia Bianco, research fellow at European Council on Foreign Relations. MbZ led a realignment of the Middle East that created a new anti-Iran axis with Israel and fought a rising tide of political Islam around the region.

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Parsian

Elahieh Apt (\$2300)

230sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Mahmoodieh (\$10000) bldg

5storey bldg
20bdrs, S/p
green yard
enough pkgs

(\$1700)

Gheitarieh Apt
2bdrs, S/p, S, J, & F.F

(\$6000)

Vali-e-Asr bldg
4storey, 15bdrs, pkgs

Farmanieh (\$2000)

200sq.m, 3bdrs

S/p, Sauna, J
balcony, pkg
Fully Furn

Elahieh bldg (\$6000)

4storey, 13bdrs, yard
enough pkgs, renovated

Jordan Apt (\$1900)
200sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, Sauna, J
balcony, & Nicely Furn

3bdrs Apt

Zaferanieh (\$2500) 220sq.m, S/p, F.F
Mirdamad (\$1600) 170sq.m, S/p, F.F

Available Villas

Niavaran (\$6000) 2000sq.m, 6bdrs, yard, & S/p
Zaferanieh (\$5000) 1000sq.m, 5bdrs, yard, & S/p



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Musk Puts \$44b Twitter Deal on Hold

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Elon Musk put his \$44 billion deal for Twitter "temporarily on hold" on Friday while he awaits data on the proportion of its fake accounts, sending the shares in the social media platform plunging.

In a tweet, the Tesla billionaire linked to a Reuters story from May 2 citing a financial filing from Twitter that estimated false or spam accounts made up fewer than 5% of the company's "monetizable daily active users" in the first quarter.

"Twitter deal temporarily on hold pending details supporting calculation that spam/fake accounts do indeed represent less than 5% of users," Musk wrote on Twitter.



OPEC Cuts 2022 World Oil Demand Forecast Again on Ukraine War

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC cut its forecast for growth in world oil demand in 2022 for a second straight month, citing the impact of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, rising inflation and the resurgence of the Omicron coronavirus variant in China.

In a monthly report, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) said world demand would rise by 3.36 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2022, down 310,000 bpd from its previous forecast.

The Ukraine war sent oil prices briefly above \$139 a barrel in March, the highest since 2008, worsening inflationary pressures.

OPEC has cited suggestions that China, with strict COVID lockdowns, is facing its biggest demand shock since 2020 when oil use plunged.

"Demand in 2022 is expected to be impacted by ongoing geopolitical developments in Eastern Europe, as well as COVID-19 pandemic restrictions," OPEC said in the report.

Nonetheless, OPEC still expects world consumption to surpass the 100 million bpd mark in the third quarter, and for the 2022 annual average to just exceed the pre-pandemic 2019 rate.

OPEC cited rising inflation and continued monetary tightening, and lowered this year's economic growth forecast to 3.5% from 3.9%, adding upside potential was "quite limited".

"It may come from a solution to the Russia and Ukraine situation, fiscal stimulus where possible, and a fading pandemic, in combination with a strong rise in service sector activity," OPEC said.

Oil extended an earlier decline after the report was released, trading further below \$106.

OPEC and its allies which include Russia, known as OPEC+, are unwinding record output cuts put in place during the worst of the pandemic in 2020 and have rebuffed Western pressure to raise output at a faster pace.

At its last meeting, OPEC+ swerved the Ukraine crisis and stuck to a previously agreed plan to boost its monthly output target by 432,000 bpd in June.

OPEC+ has been undershooting the increases due to underinvestment in oilfields in some OPEC members and, more recently, losses in Russian output as a result of sanctions and buyer avoidance.

The report showed OPEC output in April rose by 153,000 bpd to 28.65 million bpd, lagging the 254,000 bpd rise that OPEC is allowed under the OPEC+ deal.

The growth forecast for non-OPEC supply in 2022 was reduced by 300,000 bpd to 2.4 million bpd. OPEC cut its forecast for Russian output by 360,000 bpd and left its U.S. output growth estimate largely unchanged.

OPEC expects U.S. tight oil supply to rise by 880,000 bpd in 2022, unchanged from last month, although it said there was potential for further expansion later in the year.

China Denies Suspending Passports, Invalidating Foreign Residency Cards

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's immigration authority is still providing services for necessary trips outside the country, it said on Friday, denying rumors that passport issuances were halted and that residency cards for living in foreign countries were being invalidated.

Officials have promptly processed certificates for people who need to travel abroad for necessary and urgent matters such as study, scientific research, trade and businesses and medical issues, the National Immigration Administration (NIA) said in a statement.

The NIA was responding to what it said were "foreign media reports" that falsely said the agency had suspended passport issuances and had invalidated residency cards issued by foreign countries to Chinese citizens eligible to live overseas by cutting off the corners. The NIA statement did not include examples of the reports.

The statement followed the NIA's announcement on Thursday that it would "strictly limit" unnecessary overseas travels by Chinese citizens to minimize the risks of a resurgence in COVID-19 cases caused by infections among international travelers.

"There remain great uncertainties in the development of the pandemic and a big risk of getting infected during trips overseas," the NIA said in the statement on Friday, which was published on social media.

"People in the country should continue not to travel abroad for unnecessary, non urgent purposes."

Overseas travel from China has become more difficult with frequent flight cancellations and travel curbs in areas with domestic COVID outbreaks, as the country insists on stringent moves including citywide lockdowns to curb a wave of infections this year.

The country has suspended issuing common passports for trips considered unnecessary. In February, the NIA said it has not resumed issuing or renewing passports for leisure tours.

Trips in or out of the country made by mainland citizens in 2021 plunged nearly 80% compared with the level in 2019, NIA data showed.



EU Readies 195b Euro Plan to Quit Russian Fossil Fuels

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Commission plans to unveil a 195 billion euro plan to stop importing Russian fossil fuels by 2027, combining a faster rollout of renewable energy and energy savings with a switch to alternative gas supplies, draft documents show.

The draft measures, which could change before they are due to be published next week, include a mix of EU laws, non-binding schemes, and recommendations national governments could take up, including by revising their plans to spend the EU's huge COVID-19 recovery fund to free up more funding for the energy transition.

The Commission expects the measures to require 195 billion euros in investments, on top of those already needed to meet the bloc's 2030 climate target, which would help slash Europe's bill for fossil fuel imports.

To spearhead the plans, Brussels is considering proposing higher targets for renewable energy and energy efficiency, according to the draft proposals and EU officials.

Goals under discussion include a target for a 45% share of renewable energy by 2030, replacing the current 40% proposal, and a 13% cut in EU-wide energy consumption by 2030 compared with expected use, replacing the Commission's current 9% proposal. Among other proposals would be tweaks to EU law to fast-track permitting deadlines for some renewable energy projects, and new EU schemes to jumpstart a large-scale rollout of solar energy and rebuild Europe's solar manufacturing industry.

Brussels will also outline plans to produce 10 million tons of renewable hydrogen by 2030 and import another 10 million tons, supported by legislation defining which types of hydrogen can count as renewable.

Emirates Airline Announces Significantly Lower \$1.1b Annual Loss

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Emirates airline announced a "significantly reduced" annual loss of \$1.1 billion dollars on Friday, five times lower than a year before, as pandemic travel restrictions ease.

Losses came in at 3.9 billion dirhams (\$1.1 billion) in the 2021-2022 financial year to March, with revenues up 91 percent, as the airline expanded its global capacity and reinstated flights, Emirates said in a statement.

The Middle East's largest carrier said it received a capital injection of \$954 million from its owner, the government of Dubai, to help it survive the crisis.

"This year, we focused on restoring our operations quickly and safely wherever pandemic-related restrictions eased across our markets," said its chairman and chief executive, Sheikh Ahmed bin Saeed Al-Maktoum.

"Business recovery picked up pace particularly in the second half of the year. Robust customer demand drove a huge improvement in our financial performance compared to our unprecedented losses of last year and we built up our strong cash balance."

In Friday's statement, it said the Emirates Group -- which includes ground-handling firm Dnata -- recorded an annual loss of 3.8 billion dirhams (\$1.0 billion), but with revenues up by 86 percent and "strong customer demand".

Over the fiscal year, Emirates carried 19.6 million passengers, up from 6.6 million in the same period of the previous year.

"2021-22 was also a significant year as the UAE marked its 50th anniversary and hosted the world at Expo 2020 Dubai which generated increased global engagement and visitation to the UAE," Sheikh Ahmed said.

In the previous year, Emirates posted a \$5.5 billion annual loss, its first in more than three decades, after the pandemic devastated the aviation industry.

Like many other major airlines, it announced heavy layoffs when its fleet was grounded.

In Friday's statement, it said that as operations ramped up, "employees previously on furlough or made redundant were recalled and rehired, and new recruitment drives were held".

The group's total workforce increased by 13 percent to 85,219 employees, it added.

Emirates specialises in long-haul flights, with its fleet solely composed of large Airbus A380 and Boeing 777 aircraft, dozens of which it grounded amid a lack of passenger traffic.

It added that the group invested \$2.2 billion in new aircraft and facilities and received its final five new A380 plane during the financial year.

Emirates is currently flying to 140 destinations, almost its full travel network of 158 destinations in 85 countries before the pandemic.

Philippines Economy in Solid Shape in Q1

MANILA (Dispatches) - Newly-elected Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. will inherit an economy that has strongly bounced back from the COVID-19 pandemic when he takes office in June, but soaring food and fuel costs will need to be addressed quickly.

The Southeast Asian nation's economy grew a better-than-expected 8.3% in the first quarter, the government said on Thursday. It was the fastest annual growth since the June quarter of 2021 and exceeded a 6.6% forecast in a Reuters poll.

On a seasonally adjusted basis, the economy grew 1.9% in January-March from the previous quarter, with the easing of COVID-19 curbs and election-related spending underpinning domestic demand.

The Philippines thus was the fastest growing economy in the East Asia Region for the period, officials said.

That gives the Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) scope to raise interest rates to tackle rising inflation, which threatens to dampen consumer sentiment and derail the economic recovery.

"The BSP stands ready to adjust our monetary policy settings, should we see material risk of these supply-side pressures spilling over to the demand side," BSP Governor Benjamin Diokno said following the data release.

The BSP holds its next policy meeting on May 19, with some analysts seeing higher chances for an interest rate hike as early as its May 19 meeting.

"With GDP now back to pre-COVID levels and with inflation accelerating, we fully expect BSP to hike policy rates at the May 19 meeting," said ING senior economist Nicholas Mapa.

Diokno, however, has flagged a possible hike in June, and he said the BSP was looking at raising rates two to three times to bring down inflation by next year.

Economists have raised concerns the BSP, which has kept benchmark interest rates steady since November 2020 at record lows, could fall behind the curve as central banks around the world step up monetary tightening to fight inflation.

"Since we are doing relatively well on the economic opening as evidenced by the Q1 data, the immediate priority is to address inflation, especially those that affected people the most, food prices," Economic Planning Secretary Karl Kendrick Chua told a news conference.

To sustain the growth momentum, Chua also urged the next administration to pursue further tax reforms, continue fiscal prudence and boost tax revenues needed to finance infrastructure projects and human capital development.



Turkish Industrial Output Beats Forecasts to Expand by 9.6%



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's industrial production exceeded forecasts by expanding 9.6% year-over-year in March, official data showed Friday, rising for a 21st consecutive month as factory activity remains strong despite high inflation.

Year-over-year growth has remained positive and sustained a solid trend in economic activity since the lifting of measures to combat the coronavirus pandemic in 2020.

On a monthly basis, the index shrank 2.4% in January due to electricity and natural gas cuts at industrial facilities stemming from a technical failure in Iran.

The median estimate in a Reuters poll of seven institutions this week had forecast a year-over-year growth of 6.5% in the calendar-adjusted industrial production index.

Month-on-month, industrial output shrank 1.8% in March on a calendar and seasonally adjusted basis, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said.

Economists expect the pace of growth in the index to slow in the coming months and approach a neutral level around summer. A potential drop in external demand or a supply chain disruption due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine could also impact industrial production.

In April of 2020, output dropped more than 30% in the face of the initial coronavirus wave. It has since made a strong recovery because subsequent measures largely skirted the manufacturing sector and most remaining restrictions were lifted in July of last year.

Turkey's economy grew 11% last year, up sharply from a year earlier, but a sharp decline in the lira in December affected the company and household budgets and increased inflation via import prices.

Iran Reacts to Discovery of Mass Graves of Native Americans

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Islamic Republic of Iran Human Rights Headquarters reacted to discovery of mass graves of Native Americans in United States, and criticized U.S. finding faults with others despite its own broad violations of the same.

"Poor Native American children were separated from their families, prohibited from speaking their languages, abused, raped, and finally dumped in mass graves," wrote Kazem Gharibabadi in a tweet.

"The U.S. yet still dares to lecture on human rights," he added.



U.S. Nears 1m Covid Dead

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United States is about to cross the threshold of one million deaths from Covid-19, a grim milestone that comes as cities like New York try to turn the page on the pandemic despite threats of another surge.

"It's unfathomable," Diana Berrent, one of the first people in New York state to catch coronavirus, said of the toll that far exceeds epidemiologists' worst predictions made at the outbreak of the crisis in spring 2020.

Then, New York City was the virus epicenter. Hospitals and morgues overflowed and empty streets rang to the sound of ambulance sirens as then-president Donald Trump responded chaotically in Washington.

Two years on, and life in the Big Apple is largely back to normal as residents attempt to put the collective trauma of the virus that has killed 40,000 New Yorkers behind them.

Broadway stage lights are once again illuminated, tourists are back riding in horse carriage in Central Park, yellow taxis clog main avenues and bars in business districts hum with post-work chatter.

"Without a doubt you feel the energy of the people that are on the streets. It's been a long time coming," Alfred Cerullo, president of a business improvement group in Midtown Manhattan, told AFP.

New York's rebound has been aided by its high vaccination numbers -- some 88 percent of adults are fully vaccinated, a rate that was boosted by mandates, including for indoor activities like dining.

Some U.S. hospitals became overwhelmed with patients during infection surges in the Covid-19 pandemic

Jeffrey Bank, owner of Carmine's restaurant near Times Square, says sales at the Italian eatery are better than they were in 2019, as residents and tourists make up for lost time.

"People have been sitting at home for two years. They want to celebrate and they're entitled to," he told AFP.

But the city has a long way to go. Many stores remain empty and only 38 percent of Manhattan office workers are in the office on an average weekday, according to Kastle Systems, a security firm that tracks building occupancy.

The Big Apple's tourism board also doesn't expect visitor numbers to get back to the 67 million of 2019 people for a few years.

And business owners fear another wave of infections.

"Obviously we are worried," Frank Tedesco, who is unsure how he could keep his jewelry business afloat if another shutdown occurred, told AFP.

A vigil was held in January 2022 in Lafayette Park, Washington DC, for nurses who died during the pandemic

The rise has coincided with the lifting of mask mandates.

"I think we are in a place where psychologically and socially and economically, people are largely done with the pandemic," said Celine Gounder, an infectious disease expert at New York University.

"(But) the pandemic is not over. So you have a disconnect between what is happening epidemiologically and what's happening in terms of how people are responding," she told AFP.

Among the most at-risk are the unvaccinated, lower-income populations, uninsured people and communities of color, she says.



America recorded its first coronavirus death, on the West Coast, in early February 2020. By the next month, the virus was ravaging New York and the White House was predicting up to 240,000 deaths nationwide.

But those projections were way off.

Trump was late to back social distancing, repeatedly undermined top scientist Anthony Fauci, peddled unproven medical treatments, and politicized mask-wearing -- before eventually being hospitalized with the virus himself.

In New York and other northeastern urban centers, hospitals become overwhelmed and morgues failed keep up with the dead.

"There were nurses that said if they closed their eyes at night they could hear the patients struggling to breathe and they couldn't get it out of their heads," recalled Boston nurse Janice Maloof-Tomaso.

Ideological clashes over curfews and mask and vaccine mandates ensued as America racked up the world's highest death toll.

Trump did pump billions of dollars into vaccine research, however, and by mid-December 2020, the first vaccines were available for health care workers.

But deaths kept soaring amid a slow take-up of shots in conservative areas of the country, and in February 2021 America counted 500,000 dead.

New President Joe Biden and many Democratic governors enforced mandates but Republican-led states like Florida and Texas outright banned them, highlighting America's patchwork of rules that made forming a unified response to the pandemic difficult.

"We went from 'stay home and save lives' to let it rip," recalled 47-year-old Berrent, who, after her illness in 2020, founded the group Survivor Corps for people looking for information about long-haul Covid or a current Covid-19 infection.

"The question is no longer, 'Have you had Covid?' It's, 'How many times have you had Covid, and what symptoms do you still have?'"

Zionists Silencing...

FROM PAGE 1

This murder once again revealed the true nature of Israeli regime and showed the world it should not pity this criminal regime in case its forces are attacked. Some Western countries have tried to condemn this murder but they have not shown any courage to directly point their fingers at Israel as the main culprit. Of course it is not strange because everybody knows it well that Israel is supported by the big powers especially by the West and due to this support and sometimes shedding crocodile tears, the killer regime continues bloodshed. Normalization of ties has emboldened the Zionists to continue their atrocities under indirect support of those Arab governments.



The secretary-general of the Lebanese resistance movement Hezbollah has strongly condemned the brutal murder of veteran Palestinian journalist Abu Akleh by Israeli forces in the occupied West Bank city of Jenin, saying those who seek normalization of ties with the occupying regime should be ashamed of this heinous crime.

If the international bodies and nations once and for all take a tough stand against the Israeli regime, it will be unable to continue such merciless acts against the innocent and committed people or else this story will be repeated every day and one can witness killing of people in Palestine and the Occupied Lands.

Reporters Without Borders and other international journalist bodies need to prove their real independence by condemning the Israeli regime and they should also join martyr Abu Akleh in revealing the real nature of this fake and killer regime.

By the way, Muslim state governments should be united in taking a firm stand against the Zionist regime's brutality to show their real consolidation to the Palestinians and now it is the right time for the world to take a tough stand against Israel because this regime shows no pity to anyone because the nature of this regime relies on blood sucking and occupation.

As the Islamic Republic of Iran has repeatedly reiterated, a united Muslim world can bring the Zionist regime down and as long as rift is seen in Muslim world, this fake regime will callously continue their crimes but as we believe, tyranny does not last and it will be eradicated in its due time.

Now journalism in the world should show their responsibility in exposing Zionists' crimes because today Abu Akleh has been murdered and any time in the future the Zionist may kill more journalists to silence them and any passiveness by the journalist in exposing the Zionists will be a treason to this profession which is aimed at flow of truth and correct information as well as exposing criminals..

Good Outcome...

FROM PAGE 1

Several rounds of negotiations between Iran and the P4+1 group of countries -- Britain, France, Germany, China and Russia -- have been held in the Austrian capital since April 2021 to bring Washington back into the deal. The Vienna talks, however, exclude American diplomats due to their country's withdrawal.

The Joe Biden administration disagrees, even though it has admitted on countless occasions that Trump's maximum pressure policy has been a disastrous failure. It has retained the IRGC's designation and the economic sanctions as leverage in the talks.

The Iranian foreign minister said last month that the United States' current administration should have the courage to correct its predecessor's mistakes concerning re-imposition of oppressive sanctions against Iran.

The European Union's foreign policy chief also on Friday expressed hope that the stalled talks over the JCPOA revival and the removal of sanctions against Iran can lead to a final agreement, saying that he believed there had been enough progress during Mora's consultations with Iranian officials in Tehran this week to re-launch the talks after two months of deadlock.

Speaking to reporters at a G7 foreign ministers' meeting in northern Germany, Borrell added that Iran's response had been "positive enough" after Mora had delivered a message that things could not continue as they were.

"These kind of things cannot be solved overnight, but let's say the negotiations were blocked and they have been deblocked," he said, emphasizing that "there is a perspective of reaching agreement."

"It has gone better than expected - the negotiations were stalled, and now they have been reopened."

Renewable Energy to Grow To New Record in 2022



PARIS (Dispatches) - The world will set a new record for renewable power capacity this year led by solar energy in China and Europe, but growth could lose steam in 2023, the International Energy Agency said.

A record 295 gigawatts of new renewable power capacity was added in 2021 despite supply chain bottlenecks, construction delays and high prices of raw materials, the IEA said in a report.

An additional 320 gigawatts is expected to be installed this year, equivalent to the entire electricity demand of Germany or the European Union's total electricity generation from natural gas.

Solar energy will account for 60 per cent of renewable power growth in 2022, ahead of wind and hydropower, according to the agency, which advises developed nations on energy policy.

"The additional renewables capacity commissioned for 2022 and 2023 has the potential to significantly reduce the European Union's dependence on Russian gas in the power sector," the IEA said.

"However, the actual contribution will depend on the success of parallel energy efficiency measures to keep the region's energy demand in check."

The EU set a goal of slashing its heavy reliance on Russian natural gas by two thirds this year following Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

"Energy market developments in recent months -- especially in Europe -- have proven once again the essential role of renewables in improving energy security, in addition to their well-established effectiveness at reducing emissions," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a statement.

He urged governments to cut red tape, accelerate the deliveries of permits and provide the right incentives for a faster deployment of renewables.

Tourism Recovering, But Not Back to Pre-Pandemic Levels

PARIS (Dispatches) - Global tourism is roaring back to life despite Covid travel headaches and the effects of the war in Ukraine, but it has yet to return to its pre-pandemic health.

International tourist arrivals worldwide have more than doubled, up 130 percent in January 2022 on the same period last year, according to the latest UN World Tourism Organization figures.

Travellers are regaining confidence, and Europe and the Americas are leading the resurgence.

Worldwide, there have been 18 million additional visitors, the UNWTO said, "equivalent to the total increase recorded over the whole of 2021".

In 2019, global tourism revenues reached \$1.48 trillion. That figure dropped by almost two thirds due to the pandemic the following year.

While January confirms the recovery trend that began in 2021, the UNWTO highlighted how the Omicron Covid variant recently put the brakes on the rise. International arrivals in January 2022 were still 67 percent lower than before the pandemic.

Most regions have seen travellers return and rebound from the low levels of early 2021, with Europe faring three times better and the Americas twice as well.

That's still some way off pre-pandemic numbers, but Larry Cuculic, general manager of the Best Western hotel company, is optimistic.

"I travelled earlier this week and I can tell you that the airports, the international terminals in the US are very crowded and there is a demand or an interest in travelling to Europe, because for several years we couldn't do that," he told AFP.

"We miss going to Paris, Rome and Berlin."

The Middle East is also experiencing a boom, with arrivals up 89 percent on 2021, and so is Africa, with numbers up 51 percent -- but these two regions are still very far from their 2019 totals, according to the UNWTO.

Perhaps unsurprisingly, the number of travellers is falling in the Asia-Pacific region, where several destinations remain closed. In January, international tourist arrivals were down 93 percent from pre-pandemic levels.

Travel by Chinese tourists, the world's biggest spenders before the pandemic, is also severely affected by China's zero-Covid policy.

According to travel analyst ForwardKeys, the second quarter of 2022 still looks "more promising for international travel in the world than the first quarter".

The Caribbean and South America are drawing tourists looking for sea and sunshine in the northern hemisphere summer. Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Aruba and Jamaica are among the 20 most popular destinations, even exceeding pre-pandemic levels. In Europe, tourists are flocking to France, Spain, Portugal, Greece and Iceland, but not in the same numbers as before Covid.

France is doing well enough, though. In February, international tourism revenues in the country "came close to those of 2019", according to France's tourism minister Jean-Baptiste Lemoyne.

Navy Foils...

FROM PAGE 1

Mojtaba Ghahramani, head of the Justice Department of Iran's southern province of Hormozgan, said Saturday that the IRGC Navy forces have identified and confiscated a vessel carrying more than 42 thousand liters of fuel.

"All four crew members will remain in custody during the investigation process and the ensuing legal procedure," he added, but did not provide any details on the nationality of the confiscated vessel.

"Such criminal acts by fuel smugglers will not go

unpunished by the judiciary system, and the perpetrators of such crimes will be penalized heavily and without clemency," Ghahramani said.

IRGC seizes ship smuggling 250K liters of fuel in Persian Gulf

Vessels carrying smuggled fuel are subject to seizure and forfeiture according to the law, he said adding, the smugglers are punished by jail sentence and paying fines.

The IRGC Navy has foiled several attacks on Iranian and foreign tankers alike.

Amir Khan

Announces Retirement

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's former light-welterweight world champion Amir Khan announced his retirement from boxing on Friday after defeat to compatriot Kell Brook in February. Khan, Olympic lightweight silver medallist at the 2004 Athens Games when he was 17 years old, won the WBA light-welter belt from Ukrainian Andriy Kotelnik in 2009 and added the IBF title in 2011 when he beat American Zab Judah. He bows out with a record of 34 wins from 40 fights, with six defeats.

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Benzema Equals Raul as Real

Madrid's Second-Highest Goalscorer

MADRID (Dispatches) - Karim Benzema drew level with Real Madrid great Raul as the Spanish giants' second-highest goalscorer by netting his 323rd goal for the club in a 6-0 thrashing of Levante on Thursday. The France striker headed in Real's second goal against Levante at the Santiago Bernabeu to reach the mark. Cristiano Ronaldo remains well clear at the top of Madrid's all-time goalscoring charts with 451.

Nadal Falls in Italian Open to Shapovalov

ROME (Dispatches) - Defending champion Rafael Nadal crashed out of the Italian Open in the third round with the record 10-time Rome winner complaining of a recurring foot problem after a shock 1-6, 7-5, 6-2 defeat by Canadian Denis Shapovalov. Defeat in Rome for 'King of Clay' Nadal casts doubt over his prospects at the upcoming French Open, where he has been crowned champion 13 times but faces a threat from teenage phenomenon Carlos Alcaraz.

The 35-year-old, who had reached at least the quarter-finals every year in Rome since 2008, had been out for six weeks with a rib injury before returning for last week's tournament in Madrid.

Nadal began limping in the third set, later telling reporters that a foot problem had flared up during the second set but couldn't say whether he would be able to take part at Roland Garros. "I'm not injured, I am a player living with an injury. That's it," Nadal told reporters.

"It's something that is there unfortunately and my day by day is difficult. I am trying hard but of course it is difficult for me. A lot of days I can't practice.

"I don't want to take anything away from Denis... today is for him so well done to him." Nadal has won an all-time record 21 Grand Slam titles in a glittering two-decade career which may now finally be reaching its downturn.

World number 16 Shapovalov, who had pushed Nadal all the way when knocked out at this stage of the tournament last year, will now face Casper Ruud in the quarter-finals.

"It definitely sucked to see him in pain at the end... He brings so much to our sport so hopefully he's fit and ready to go for the French," said Shapovalov.

"It's super satisfying to beat the best player on clay of all time."

Last year's Rome runner-up Novak Djokovic swept past Swiss veteran Stan Wawrinka 6-2, 6-2 in one hour, 16 minutes to reach the quarter-finals as he bids for a sixth Italian Open title.

Djokovic is in his record-extending 369th week as the world number one and must reach at least the semis to avoid losing his top ranking spot to Daniil Medvedev.

Wawrinka, whose first-round victory over Reilly Opelka was his first win in 15 months, was no match for top seed



Djokovic and beyond a few classic passing shots he offered little resistance. "It's great to see Stan back... You can see that physically he's still not there where he wants to be but nevertheless he's Stan Wawrinka. He can hurt you if you give time," Djokovic said after the match.

World number three Alexander Zverev saw off Alex de Minaur 6-3, 7-6 (7/5) in the early match on center court to set up a last-eight clash with Cristian Garin, who beat Marin Cilic 6-3, 4-6, 6-4.

Monte Carlo Masters champion Stefanos Tsitsipas was forced to work harder for his 4-6, 6-0, 6-3 win over former Paris Masters winner Karen Khachanov which sets him up with home hope Jannick Sinner.

Women's world number one Iga Swiatek claimed her 25th straight victory, defeating Victoria Azarenka 6-4, 6-1 despite a rocky start.

Swiatek, 20, is the favourite for the French Open which starts later this month and showed why in an impressive performance against Azarenka, herself a former top-ranked player and the two-time Australian Open winner.

However she had to come back from losing the first three games of the match and then battled through a series of long games before finally breaking Azarenka's resolve early in the decisive second set.

"I'm happy that I could kind of win ugly in the first set, then improve in the second," Swiatek told reporters.

"It gives me confidence that even when my game is not hundred percent good, I can still win matches. So it works both ways."

Swiatek will be expected to beat her quarter-final opponent Bianca Andreescu after the world number 90 came through against Petra Martic 6-4, 6-4.



Lewandowski Turns Down Bayern Extension

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski has opened the door to a high-profile transfer after telling Bayern Munich that he will not be extending his contract beyond June 2023 when it expires, German media reported on Friday.

The 33-year-old Poland international forward has scored 343 goals for Bayern and twice picked up FIFA's Player of the Year Award since joining from Dortmund in 2014.

"Goal machine Robert Lewandowski will leave the club no later than the summer of 2023," claimed the daily Sport Bild.

"In recent weeks, FIFA's 2021 Player of the Year told his bosses at Bayern that he would not extend his contract, which is still valid for one year."

The Sport1 site, citing its own sources, confirmed this information.

Until now, Bayern has maintained they would not part with Lewandowski but, as the German media points out, not selling him now would mean the Pole would leave for free next summer.

According to several reports, Lewandowski has recently been in contact with Barcelona.

Barcelona coach Xavi, however, felt that this transfer would be "complicated" because of the club's financial situation.

Nike Ends Sponsorship Deal With Spartak Moscow

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Nike has terminated its sponsorship deal with Russian Premier League club Spartak Moscow because they will not be taking part in European competitions next season, the company and the club said.

UEFA, the governing body of European soccer, decided Russia would have no affiliated teams participating in its club competitions in the 2022-23 season due to Moscow's military campaign in Ukraine.

Spartak, who had been sponsored by Nike since 2005, said on Thursday they were looking for a new equipment supplier after Nike told them it would no longer be sponsoring the club.

In an emailed statement to Reuters on Friday, Nike said it had informed Spartak that it would no longer be the club's kit sponsor "given UEFA's decision to suspend all Russian clubs from UEFA competition."

The Europa League last-16 matches between Spartak and RB Leipzig were called off in February after UEFA suspended all Russian clubs from its competitions.

Russia sent tens of thousands of troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 in what it called a special operation to degrade its southern neighbor's military capabilities and root out people it called dangerous nationalists.

The West has imposed sweeping sanctions on Russia and provided Ukraine with military support in response.

Vettel Says Climate Change Makes Him Question His F1 Job

LONDON (Dispatches) - Four times Formula One world champion Sebastian Vettel said that climate change had made him question his job as a driver travelling the world to race cars.

Speaking on BBC Question Time, a television panel show mixing politicians and celebrity guests, the German was asked whether his position on the environment made him a hypocrite considering he was part of a "gas-guzzling" sport.

"It does, it does, and you're right when you laugh," the 34-year-old father-of-three replied. "There's questions I ask myself every day and I'm not a saint."

Man City Unveil Aguero Statue on 10th Anniversary of "93:20"



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City unveiled a statue of former striker Sergio Aguero outside the Etihad Stadium on Friday to mark the 10th anniversary of his winning goal that gave them their first league title in 44 years.

Aguero netted a dramatic 94th-minute winner against Queens Park Rangers on the final day of the 2011-12 season to beat cross-town rivals Manchester United to the title.

Often dubbed the "93:20" goal in reference to the time it was scored, Aguero's strike set City on their way to domestic dominance in the years that followed.

"Truthfully, it is a very beautiful thing for me, to see myself 10 years ago is very moving," said Aguero, who scored a club-record 260 goals before moving to Barcelona and retiring last year at the age of 33 due to a heart condition.

"In those 10 years I was able to win a lot of trophies and was able to help the club become one of the most important in the world... it is something very special."

The former Argentina international won five league titles, an FA Cup and six League Cups over a 10-year period at City.

The statue, created by sculptor Andy Scott, joins those of Aguero's former team mates Vincent Kompany and David Silva that were unveiled at the Etihad last year.

"Sergio Aguero's contribution to Manchester City in a defining era for the club cannot be overstated," added City chairman Khaldoon Al Mubarak.

"When our fans think of Sergio, they are immediately drawn to the iconic moment of 93:20... it is only fitting that Sergio has been recognised with a statue of his own."

Arteta Says Referee's Decisions Destroyed Game

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta rounded on the referee Paul Tierney after his side's hopes of wrapping up fourth spot were wrecked by a 3-0 defeat at rivals Tottenham Hotspur on Thursday.

Arsenal, who would have guaranteed a first top-four finish since 2016 with victory, looked comfortable early on.

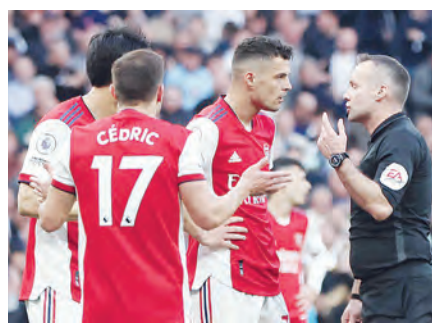
But their night fell apart after Harry Kane gave the hosts the lead from the penalty spot in the 22nd minute after Cedric Soares was adjudged to have pushed Son Heung-min.

Ten minutes later Rob Holding was shown a second yellow card for a crude block on Son, having already been booked for wrestling the South Korean earlier.

"I have two options I can lie to you, or I can be suspended, and I really want to be on the touchline against Newcastle," Arteta told reporters when asked about the first-half decisions that left his side in disarray.

"If I say what I think I'm suspended six months. I'm allowed to give my interpretation of what happened but I don't know how to lie. Ask the referee to come in front of the camera to explain his decision. It's a shame because such a beautiful game was destroyed today."

Despite the defeat, Arsenal remain in pole position in the race with Tottenham for fourth place and qualification for next year's Champions League. With two games remaining they have one more point than their arch-rivals. "This game is history. Now it's Newcastle. This is gone. It went out of our hands and we have to accept it," Arteta said.



Heat Surge in 3rd Quarter to Eliminate Sixers

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Sixers were eliminated by the Miami Heat in six games, losing Game 6 of the second-round series 99-90 in a game that slipped away quickly in a catastrophic third quarter.

The Heat will advance to face the winner of the Boston Celtics-Milwaukee Bucks series, which the Bucks currently lead 3-2.

The game started inauspiciously, with Danny Green's significant knee injury and Matisse Thybulle's early foul trouble. Philadelphia battled enough to trail by only one point at halftime, but then the Heat got going.

Miami opened the second half on a 19-4 run and the Sixers never came close to making it a game again. By the middle of the fourth quarter, ESPN's commentators were eulogizing the team, Sixers fans were leaving and the players were allowing some embarrassing offensive rebounds.

Old friend Jimmy Butler wound up leading the Heat in the series-clincher, finishing with 32 points, eight rebounds and four assists. Max Strus also continued a breakout campaign with a 20-point, 11-rebound, five-assist effort.

Meanwhile, Joel Embiid shouldered a massive load and didn't do much with it, posting 20 points on a ghastly 7-of-24 shooting and 12 rebounds, while James Harden was far quieter than the team hoped with 11 points on 4-of-9 shooting, nine assists and four rebounds.

Harden went scoreless in the second half.

Even with Embiid's MVP runner-up performance, it seems safe to say this season never went according to plan for Philadelphia.

