

Health Ministry Announced on Saturday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **141,271** With **9** More Iranians Killed by the Deadly Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Heading a High-Ranking Delegation, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi Is Scheduled to Pay a Visit to Muscat, Oman, on Monday to Meet Omani Officials and Discuss Ways of Broadening Ties

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Iran-EU Trade Grows Significantly in Q1 2022

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The European Union's statistics center, Eurostat, reported in its latest report the significant growth in trade with Iran.

According to the EU's official body, the 27 members of the EU had about 277 million euros in imports from Iran during the first quarter of 2022, an increase of about 40 percent from the same period last year.

European Union exports to Iran have grown by more than 18 percent to 1.54 million euros.

Germany has a share of more than 30 percent of Iran's total trade with the European Union.

The country exported 416 million euros to Iran in the first quarter of this year and carried out 87 million imports from Iran. The other main partners are Italy, Spain and Romania respectively.

Despite the significant growth in EU trade with Iran in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period last year, Iran's trade with its 27 members is still much lower than it was before the U.S. sanctions.

Iran had more than 2.3 billion euros in imports and 2.9 billion euros in exports to the European Union in the first quarter of 2018, when U.S. sanctions against Iran had not yet been implemented.

Tehran Determined to Reach Strong, Lasting Agreement in Vienna Talks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says Tehran is determined to reach a strong and lasting agreement in Vienna talks that aim to revive the 2015 nuclear deal with world powers.

In his telephonic conversation with the European Union's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell on Friday night, the top Iranian diplomat reaffirmed Iran's seriousness and goodwill to reach a deal in Vienna.

"Tehran has the goodwill and seriousness required for reaching an agreement," Amir-Abdollahian told Borrell, calling for reciprocal measures from other parties to resume the stalled talks.

The foreign minister referred to an earlier visit to Tehran by Borrell's deputy, Enrique Mora, saying the visit featured discussions of some initiatives between the two sides.

Mora was in Tehran last week for talks with Iran's chief nuclear negotiator Ali Baqeri-Kani on efforts to salvage the deal that is officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

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U.S. Suffers Heavy Defeat Against Iran In Its Costliest Wargame



TEHRAN (PressTV) - The U.S. was heavily defeated in a wargame the Pentagon designed two decades ago to simulate what a war with Iran would be like, online international affairs website 19FortyFive, a bipartisan US defense, national security, and military-focused publication, has reported.

The wargame, dubbed Millennium Challenge 2002, was a congressionally-mandated exercise that pitted the Blue Force, the U.S. military, against the Red Force, the Iranian Army, in a time frame set five years in the future.

The warfare involved both live exercises and computer simulations, which cost approximately \$250 million, and was comprised of 13,500 service members participating from 17 different simulation locations across several training sites.

The drills were conducted in the months following the 9/11 terrorist attacks when the administration of former U.S. President George W. Bush was implementing its doctrine of preemption, meaning the U.S. could launch an offensive on an enemy before being attacked.

With this in mind, the Red Force's leader Lt. Gen. Paul Van Riper decided to begin the wargame by "preempting the preempter" as the US suspected his military forces would wait to be attacked first before it responded with a counterattack.

Once U.S. forces were within range, Van Riper's forces were reported to have unleashed a barrage of missiles from ground-based launchers, commercial ships, and planes flying low and without radio communications to reduce their radar signature.

Simultaneously, swarms of speedboats loaded with explosives launched kamikaze attacks. The US carrier battle group's Aegis radar system—which tracks and attempts to intercept incoming missiles—was quickly overwhelmed, and 19 US ships were sunk, including the carrier, several cruisers, and five amphibious ships.

"The whole thing was over in five, maybe ten minutes," Van Riper said.

The Red Force also used unconventional communication methods that could not be detected and intercepted by the Blue team's advanced technology.

Van Riper's Force, as The Guardian described, "gave a signal—not in a radio transmission that might have been intercepted, but in a coded message broadcast from the minarets of mosques at the call to prayer. The seemingly harmless pleasure craft and propeller planes suddenly turned deadly, ramming into Blue boats and airfields along the Persian Gulf."

The commander also used motorcycle runners to pass orders to subordinates, whose messages could not be intercepted by U.S. aircraft.

The Blue Force assumed "Iran" would use the modes of communication that would allow them to listen and ambush their enemy, but Van Riper's asymmetric assault made this tactic impossible.

Commenting on the drills, war experts said the costliest wargame in America's history did not play out exactly how the Pentagon had hoped, adding, while obtaining advanced technology and sophisticated weaponry is a crucial component in war, it won't necessarily guarantee a win.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S. Unilateral Sanction an Acid Test for UN Sincerity

In recent days, Tehran had been hosting a top U.N. rapporteur who was in Tehran to review the impacts of the U.S. cruel and unilateral sanctions on the Iranian people and this will be an acid test for verifying the sincerity of the United Nations regarding the report of its official.

On Wednesday and during her last day in Tehran, the top UN human rights official slammed the United States for its brutal sanctions regime against the Islamic Republic of Iran, asserting that harsh economic sanctions have had a damaging impact on human rights in the country.

Alena Douhan, the United Nations Special Rapporteur on the Negative Impact of Unilateral Coercive Measures on the Enjoyment of Human Rights, who was on an official visit to Iran, convened a press conference in Tehran on Wednesday afternoon.

Speaking to reporters, Douhan noted that decades of sanctions have wholly affected Iranian people's lives and have particularly hit the low-income section of the society.

While presenting her assessment of the unilateral coercive measures (UCM) against Iran, the UN official who works under a mandate from the United Nations Human Rights Council, called on Washington to abandon its hard-nosed policy of maximum pressure against Iran and other countries.

Following her meetings with many civil society members and representatives of financial centers, the UN official in her press conference reacted to the U.S. cruel sanctions.

She said she will address her concerns about the legality of U.S. sanctions in her final report, which will be released at a later date.

Douhan's mission from May 7 to 18 was the first to Iran by a UN special rapporteur.

Before embarking on the trip, the UN official said she hoped to "gather first-hand information on the impact of unilateral coercive measures on the full realization of all human rights" in Iran.

"My visit will aim at covering all walks of life and sectors affected by such measures," she noted, dismissing speculation in the Western media that she was heading to Iran with a specific agenda.

She told reporters on Wednesday that the U.S. has since the 1970s imposed crippling economic and trade sanctions on Iran and significantly expanded them since the early 2000s.

According to the UN special rapporteur, the U.S. continues to illegally ban trade and investment in Iran, forcing foreign companies to leave the country for the fear of sanctions.

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Qatar Emir Optimistic On Iran Deal

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani expressed optimism that an agreement between the United States and Iran could be achieved, voicing readiness to help in the matter.

Talks to revive a 2015 accord restraining Iran's nuclear program with world powers have been on hold since March, chiefly over Tehran's insistence that Washington remove the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps from the U.S. list of designated terrorist organizations.

"We hope there will be an agreement between the parties to the nuclear agreement, and Qatar is ready to participate in resolving this conflict," the emir told a joint news conference in Berlin with German Chancellor Olaf Scholz.

On Thursday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian said an agreement in the Vienna talks on the revival of the nuclear deal will be within reach if the United States acts "logically". Amir Abdollahian made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Russian counterpart, Sergei Lavrov, calling on the other sides in the Vienna talks to put forward their initiatives to this end, according to the Iranian Foreign Ministry's website. He said Tehran is willing to reach a "good," "strong," and "lasting" agreement while observing the Islamic Republic's red lines.

Using Sanctions to Starve Syrians "Immoral, Illegal"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's envoy to the United Nations has censured the Western countries for continuing their unilateral sanctions against Syria, which he asserts have taken a heavy toll on people in the Arab country.

Speaking during a UN Security Council session on 'The Situation in the Middle East: (Syria)', Majid Takht Ravanchi said the conflict, foreign intervention, terrorism, and occupation have wreaked havoc on Syria.

Takht Ravanchi said the unilateral sanctions have exacerbated economic and humanitarian crises in the country in recent years, calling it "irresponsible, immoral, and illegal" under international law "to use unilateral sanctions to starve Syrian civilians."

Syria has been in the throes of foreign-backed militancy since March 2011. While the Daesh takfiri terrorist group was crushed by the Syrian government, the militant groups continue to hold sway in some parts of the country under the patronage of Western powers.

Numerous reports have pointed to the US' role in transferring Daesh terrorists to the war-ravaged country and even airlifting supplies to the group.

"Under the current circumstances, the provision of humanitarian aid is critical, and political circumstances should not be allowed to stymie humanitarian aid," Takht Ravanchi asserted.

"Furthermore, these illegal measures have also hampered the Syrian government's ability to achieve economic and social stability and improve the living conditions of Syrians," the veteran diplomat said.

Takht Ravanchi pointed out that the sanctions were also coming in the way of enactment of the Security Council Resolution 2585, which has mandated the transfer of humanitarian assistance into Syria via the country's Bab al-Hawa border crossing with Turkey.

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Oil Minister Meet Omani Energy Minister in Muscat

TEHRAN (MNA)- Oil Minister Javad Owji held talks with Omani Minister of Energy and Minerals Mohammed bin Hamad Al Rumhi in the country's capital of Muscat on Saturday.

Owji who has traveled to Oman at the head of a delegation on Friday met with the country's Energy Minister Al Rumhi to discuss the two countries' cooperation in various energy sectors.

His visit is in line with the Iranian president, who is scheduled to travel to Muscat on Monday at the official invitation of Haitham bin Tarik, Sultan of Oman.

Iran Emphasizes Need to Int'l Cooperation In Immigration

TEHRAN (IP) - Since the beginning of the eight-year imposed war, Iran has faced many hostilities, including coercive unilateral measures and sanctions, and this is while Millions of refugees have been accepted as illegal immigrants, said the First Counselor of the Permanent Mission of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Ali Hajilari told on Friday evening.

The first International Migration Review Forum (IMRF) was held at the United Nations Headquarters in New York on 17-20 May 2022.

In a statement, Iran's diplomat stressed the need to enhance international cooperation in immigration.

The full text of Ali Hajilari's statement is as follows:

The fact that I saw noticed some countries that have not experienced any war, sanctions, or conflicts, complain about the presence of a few thousands of displaced persons, refugees, and migrants forced me to tell you a little bit about the situation in Iran as the host of more than 4 million refugees and migrants population.

All of you know that my country has suffered from a devastating 8-year imposed war ... Iran has also suffered and still is suffering from different hostilities, including illegal unilateral coercive measures and sanctions for more than four decades, and at the same time is hosting more than 4 million refugees, migrants, displaced persons as well as illegal and undocumented aliens.

We heard from different delegations about the negative impacts of wars and conflicts on the refugee crisis and migratory flows. We fully understand because we have been experiencing the same for more than four decades without international support and under grave situations caused by war and unilateral measures, economic blockade, and illegal unilateral sanctions.



Two days ago in Tehran, the UN special rapporteur reiterated that half a million Afghan children lived in Iran during her visit to my country. UN agencies cannot fulfill their commitments toward these vulnerable people due to illegal unilateral measures and sanctions.

My country has generously hosted millions of refugees, displaced persons, migrants, and aliens, documented or undocumented, without international support and simultaneous with the harshest unilateral sanctions ever imposed on a country.

With the recent challenges and situations in Afghanistan, we face a new wave of displaced persons. But it seems that some countries addicted to the double-standard approach, which is not a unique experience in Iran, have forgotten this reality and turned a blind eye to that.

Having said that, I would like to remind you that as responsible members of the International community, you are accountable for taking effective capacity-building measures and sharing this heavy burden left on the shoulders of my country.

If Iran had not hosted this vast population, you certainly faced them within your borders and wouldn't know what to do with them.

So the least you can do even for them is to effectively eliminate illegal sanctions on a country generously hosting millions of refugees, migrants, and displaced persons for more than four decades and providing them - irrespective of their legal status-with the same services provided for its citizens.

FDI Growth in Industrial Sector Hits 52% Last Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - The total volume of foreign investment within the framework of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) in mineral and industrial sector last year in 1400 (ended March 20, 2022) registered a 52.2 percent growth.

According to statistics, more than \$3.7 billion worth of foreign investment was attracted in the country in the mining and mineral sector, showing a 52.2 percent hike as compared to the sale period of last year.

A number of 154 cases of foreign investment, valued at \$3.758 billion, were approved in various mining, mineral and industrial sectors last year in 1400.

The statistics added that this volume of foreign investment in the industrial sector showed a 2.5 percent decline in terms of quantity as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

According to this report, a number of 158 cases of foreign investment, valued at \$2.469 billion, were approved in the industrial and mineral sectors of the country in 1399.

South Pars Phase 11 Gas Output To hit 12mcm by Winter

TEHRAN (Shana) - The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company announced production of 12 million cubic meters/day of gas from South Pars Phase 11 by winter.

Mohammad Meshkinfam talked about the increase in production of the South Pars joint field in the calendar year of 1401 which began on March 21, saying: "According to the gas production plan of this field, this year, output will increase by 40 million cubic meters per day."

He also touched on the latest condition of the South Pars refinery phase 14: "One train of the refinery of this phase entered the production circuit late last calendar year and the other three trains will be operational this year."

The CEO of Pars Oil and Gas Company also talked about Farzad gas field: "Development plans for this field are being pursued, the details of which will be announced after finalization."

Farzad "B" joint gas field is located in the Persian block on the Iran-Saudi border and at a distance of about 20 km from the Persian Gulf coasts. According to the Pars Oil and Gas Company, the amount of in-situ gas of the field is estimated at 23,000 billion cubic feet. Its gas condensate is estimated at about 5,000 barrels per billion cubic feet of gas.

Iran to Use Legal Channels to Secure Water Rights From Helmand

MASHHAD (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran will pursue its rights for water supply from Helmand River through legal channels, an Iranian diplomat said.

Saeed Khatibzadeh, Spokesman of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, told IRNA on sidelines of his visit to Doharoun border crossing on Saturday.

The spokesman went on to say that Iran's water rights have not been met by Afghanistan so far, adding that high commissioners of both sides discussed the supply of Iran's water rights from Helmand on different occasions in Sistan and Baluchestan province.

Helmand River Water Treaty was signed between Kabul and Tehran on March 13, 1973. According to the agreement, Iran must receive 820 million cubic meters of water from the Helmand River.

Iran, Syria Seek Cooperation In Renewable Energy Area

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - The managing director of the Iranian Electrical Power Equipment Manufacturing and Provision Company (SATKAB) and Syria's Minister of Electricity stressed the expansion of energy cooperation.

Meeting with the SATKAB Managing-Director Mojtaba Akbari, Syrian Minister of Electricity Ghassan al-Zamel said the country's need for energy, especially electricity, has fostered the conditions for the Iranian public and private companies to fulfill the Syrians' needs in this regard.

Al-Zamel pointed to the presence of the Iranian companies such as MAPNA in Syria to rebuild the country's power plants and said: "Syria's need for wind and solar energy and Iran's capabilities in these areas have prepared the grounds for Iran to address Syria's fuel shortage."

Iran, Russia Sign Business Deal



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iran Chamber of Cooperatives and Russia's Fund RC-Investments -the investment platform of the Roscongress Foundation- signed a trade cooperation agreement in Moscow.

The agreement was signed by President of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives Bahman Abdollahi and Director of Fund RC-Investments Alexander Shatirov.

It is aimed at intensifying collaboration and economic cooperation between representatives of the business communities of Iran and Russia.

In the meeting, Abdollahi pointed to the capacities and capabilities of cooperatives sector in Iran and said cooperatives has a special place in the national economy and according to the law it is expected to account for 25% of the national economy.

He added that Iran is one of the most important producers of agro products in the region and 50% of agro products are produced in the cooperatives sector and cooperatives has active presence in Iran's economic sections and it provides a broad ground for developing cooperation and providing required goods for the economic activists of the two countries.

"The active participation of the Iranian business community both in international events and in joint Russian-Iranian projects indicates the interest in the development of practical bilateral cooperation. We should improve the mechanisms of economic interaction between our countries and strengthen business ties," Shatirov said after signing the deal.

Iran's ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali, who was also attending the event, said, "We want the relations between our countries to be stable and comprehensive in the areas of economy, trade, politics, culture, and others.

"We want to strengthen the bilateral ties in all areas that are beneficial for our two countries and our two peoples. I am confident that the SPIEF 2022 will help maintain and improve the positive development dynamics between our countries," the Iranian ambassador added, referring to the 25th edition of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), due to be held on June 15-18.

The Iranian and Russian officials also exchanged views on the current state of trade, economic and investment cooperation between the two countries and discussed ways to expand interaction.

The Roscongress Foundation is a socially oriented non-financial development institution and an organizer of nationwide and international conventions, exhibitions, and business events. It was established in 2007 with the aim of facilitating the development of Russia's economic potential and promoting its national interests, according to its website.

No Right to Trial and Error

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The most important priorities of West Azerbaijan Province, development plans on the government's agenda for the development and progress of the province and the needs and challenges ahead in the development of the province were discussed at the meeting of the Administrative Council of West Azerbaijan chaired by the President.

Speaking on Friday evening at the meeting of the Administrative Council of West Azerbaijan, President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi said, "In our religious culture, serving the people is means loving God and we believe that closeness to God happens through serving the people".

He described serving the people as one of the central teachings of the Islamic Revolution and pointed out that in the past 40 years, remarkable work has been done in the country, noting, "In these 40 years, the face of our cities and villages has changed and it is unfair to say that nothing has been done, but people's expectations of work and effort were different and higher than what was done".

Raisi said, "In the next 40 years of the Islamic Revolution, which is called the second step, we must have a fair look at what has been done so far. In the first 40 years of the revolution, we had many achievements in some areas, such as security, defense and military, but in some areas, we also have backwardness".

The President said that this backwardness cannot be overcome by ordinary work and requires redoubled efforts and jihadist work, adding, "All managers of the province and the country should know that in order to progress and compensate for backwardness, we need sincere and motivated jihadist work, along with thought and reason".

The President said that at this stage we have no right to trial and error and things must be done carefully and wisely, saying, "We must use all the experiences inside and outside the country. We will not act based on other people's prescriptions without expert review, but we must pay attention to the experiences of others and use them if necessary".

Referring to the border situation of West Azerbaijan and its proximity to three neighboring countries, the President instructed the governor-general of the province to coordinate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, to take steps to facilitate contacts and interactions with neighboring cities in neighboring countries".

In this regard, Raisi stressed that the formation of a joint committee between Iran and the three countries could further facilitate border communications.

He added, "The governor-general of West Azerbaijan should review the necessary incentives to strengthen investment in the province and present them to the government so that the necessary measures can be taken to provide these incentives in the government".

The President said, "The government considers border not as a threat but as an opportunity. Cross-border trade is linked to the livelihood of some of the country's border residents and therefore cannot be shut down".

"Cross-border trade should be organized according to the country's trade regulations. The regulation of cross-border trade will be announced by the government in the near future, but some of its clauses need to be proposed in the parliament, which I hope will be approved soon".

Impact of Sanctions on Iran's Economy Waning

TEHRAN (MNA) - Referring to the Iranian administration's effective measures taken in foreign policy, a lawmaker said that the impact of sanctions on Iran's economy will be definitely decreased gradually.

The chairman of the Iranian Parliament's Foreign Relations Committee Abbas Golroo made the remarks, saying that so far, President Raisi's administration has taken great steps to reduce tensions and normalize the political and security atmosphere in the region, as well as to develop economic relations, both with neighbors and other states.

Since some neighboring countries in the region possess a high position and mostly have good relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, the administration should take measures in order to strengthen relations with them, he added. "Many neighboring countries have good capacities, and some of these countries are significant players in the regional and even international arenas."

He also pointed to the effective measures taken in foreign policy by Raisi's administration and added that the impact of sanctions on Iran's economy will be definitely decreased gradually.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:28
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:12
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:53

36. And We command: "Go ye both, to the people who have rejected our Signs:"
And those (people) We destroyed with utter destruction.
37. And the people of Noah,- when they rejected the apostles, We drowned them, and We made them as a Sign for mankind; and We have prepared for (all) wrong-doers a grievous Penalty;-

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (36 - 37)

Russian Investors Prefer the UAE to Iran For Investment

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A member of presiding board of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce Jalil Jalalifar in an interview explained why the Russian investors have preferred investment in the UAE to investment in Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, Jalalifar pointed to the current level of trade between Iran and Russia and said that although the trade between Iran and Russia has been accelerated, there is no access to the precise statistics and likely this year this trade volume will face a one-hundred percent rise and if the figure is not more, it will not be definitely lower."

He said that the most important point is that after the Russia-Ukraine war, Iran has had diversity in exports of its goods to Russia and this diversity is very important because in the past agro products and foodstuff were the major exporting items to Russia but now products from other categories like construction materials, chemical and petrochemical products and even industrial machineries have been added to the list of Iran's exports.

Jalalifar went on to say that the trade volume between Iran and Russia has increased and it can even increase more, and most ships are loaded easily and now the exporters in Iran have to stand in line for loading of their exports on the ships and it bespeaks of considerable rise in Iran's exports to Russia. He admitted that for a market (Russia) which imports some \$294b annually, even 100 percent increase in Iran's exports to this market is insignificant figure.

He said that the country has some essential problems for exports to Russia, adding



that as long as these problems are not resolved, Iran will be unable to have considerable share of Russian market. He said that one of the problems is that the type of services which are provided to the traders. He said that in the world that all services are e-services at the customs and the ports, Iranians see the worst services and usually in northern customs these problems are seen more.

Jalalifar went on to say that if the Maritime and Ports Organization expects rise in the volume of exports and imports, it should increase the number of operators at the customs and remove hurdles. He noted that Russia has currently exports worth of \$550b and it is now interested in exporting some of its products via Iran but the infrastructure for it are not ready.

He also criticized the administrative process and bureaucracy regarding trade, imports and exports, reiterating that because of these problems, the trade with Russia face challenges. He also criticized recent communiques of the Central Bank and said such decisions cause hinders in way of attracting investors especially the Russian ones.

Jalilifar noted that the arrival of a Russian investor will have great impact on the country's economy but so far Iranians have been unable to attract Russian investors because they are away of the problems for investment in the country and therefore they decide to change their direction and go for investments in the UAE and currently 40 to 50 applications per day from Russians for launching companies are registered in the UAE. He said that even currently Russians' investment in Armenia has been on the rise and it is because of the overnight decisions and laws, reiterating that all should work for attracting more Russian investors which will lead to the economic boom in the country.

ICCIMA to Dispatch a Trade Delegation to Kazakhstan in Late May

TEHRAN (MNA)- Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) will dispatch a trade delegation to Kazakhstan in late May.

The delegates are active in foodstuffs, transportation, pharmaceutical, and weaving industries, knowledge-based and technology fields, as well as cleaning materials, furniture, containers, and tourism.

Also as previously announced by the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), Kazakhstan's city of Almaty is going to host an exclusive exhibition of Iranian products during July 1-3.

Alireza Peyman-Pak has said that buildings and new technologies in the construction industry, agricultural machinery, technical and engineering services, oil, gas and petrochemical, industrial machinery, food industry, educational products and services, mining machinery, medicine and medical equipment, home appliances, furniture, and wooden products, and health tourism are some of the areas in which Iranian companies will showcase their products and achievements in the exhibit.

Kazakhstan is one of the major export destinations of Iranian products in Central Asia. Iran and Kazakhstan's positive political relations, as well as easy access to each other's markets through road, rail, air and sea, have created a very high potential for the expansion of trade ties between the two countries.

"Kazakhstan has a high potential in importing goods and export products from our country; Therefore, this exhibition is a good opportunity for the country's businessmen and exporters," Peyman-Pak said.

Iran Among 10 Top Producers of Satellite



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Minister of Information and Communications Technology Isa Zarepour said that Iran is among the top 10 producers and launchers of satellite in the world.

Zarepour said that a space station will be established in West Azarbaijan Province.

He stressed that countries such as the UK are now dependent on Russia to launch satellites, which did not allow this country to do so.

This is while, Iran is proudly one of the countries that has indigenized this knowledge, he noted.

Earlier, Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced that Iran is the first Muslim country that launches satellite into orbit.

He noted that putting a satellite into orbit is a characteristic of a developed country.

He went on to say that the Islamic Republic of managed to achieve such a great success after a round-the-clock endeavor despite mass international sanctions.

On Friday, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi unveiled the country's new satellite dubbed OrumSat in the northwestern city of Orumia.

The unveiling happened upon Raisi's arrival at Shahid Babasaee Aerospace Exhibition in West Azarbaijan Province.

Authorities say OrumSat produces high resolution images and can be put in orbit at a cost of 600 thousand dollars that is much lower than compared to foreign items.

The president also visited other technological achievements at the exhibition including light and heavy aircraft, drones and other satellites made by Orumia's innovators.

The exhibition was held at the Shahid Bakeri Airport. Iran has made long strides in various technological and scientific fields despite being under heavy sanctions from its adversaries, most notably the United States.

Tehran, Musca Seek Forming Roadmap to Expand Trade Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peyman-Pak and Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammed Al Yousef met on Saturday to discuss ways of expanding economic ties between the two countries.

During the meeting, the officials agreed on creating a roadmap for the expansion of trade relations and also discussed the establishment of an Iranian trade center in Muscat, the TPO portal reported.

Addressing this meeting, Peyman-Pak voiced the readiness of his organization and the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade for providing the necessary infrastructure for expanding trade exchanges between the two countries.

Referring to the recent visit of an Iranian delegation to Oman for attending a business forum hosted by Muscat Chamber of Commerce, and also holding Iran's pavilion at Oman's International Construction Technology, Infrastructure and Building Materials Exhibition (Project Oman 2022), Peyman-Pak proposed that a joint committee would be formed at the deputy level to pursue the development of mutual economic and trade relations.

He also proposed signing a roadmap for trade cooperation between Iran and Oman, which was welcomed by the Omani minister.

Mentioning some of the challenges in the way of developing economic cooperation between Tehran and Muscat, Peyman-Pak said that talks were underway between the ministries and private institutions of the two countries to resolve the problems related to transportation and banking relations.

Yousef for his part referred to the upcoming visit of President Ebrahim Raisi to Oman and considered this visit as an opportunity for developing economic and trade relations between the two countries.

He expressed hope that during the visit of President Raisi to Oman new agreements will be signed to pave the way for the development of economic relations between the two neighbors.

Meanwhile Iran's foreign trade with Oman has increased significantly in 2021 and there is room for it to grow even further if the capacities are identified, according to an Iranian trade official.

Shahla Amouri, deputy of Iran-Oman joint commerce chamber, told IRNA on Saturday that the trade between the two countries amounted to 1.336 billion dollars in 2021, while it was about 221 million dollars in 2013.

Iran's exports to Oman increased from 146 million dollars in 2013 to 716 million dollars in 2021, according to Amouri.

She also said that Iran imported 75 million dollars of goods from Oman in 2013, but the number raised to 620 million dollars in 2021.

The figures are indicative of a 53-percent growth in business transaction between Iran and Oman in 2021 compared to 2020.

Mexican Envoy Astounded by Spanish Translation of Shahnameh

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Mexican Ambassador to Iran Guillermo Alejandro Puente Ordorica has said that a Spanish translation of renowned Iranian Poet Ferdowsi's Shahnameh has astonished him, hoping that other Spanish language people can read the book.

The Mexican ambassador made the remarks when he visited IRNA's pavilion in the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair on Friday, noting that the cultural event is of great importance for him because after about two years of COVID-19 pandemic, he can take part in Iranian gatherings, where he witnesses Iranians' eagerness to learn Spanish.

The ambassador referred to his desired books, saying that he likes numerous books and his most interesting book from Iranian culture is Ferdowsi's Shahnameh.

Since he does not know Persian, he started reading a Spanish translation, the diplomat noted, expressing



hope that other Spanish speaking people around the world can read the translation of Shahnameh.

There are several digital devices like computers, laptops, and tablets to read books on, but he prefers reading paper books, he said, adding that Mexican people enjoy reading books because they are interested in learning different cultures.

As to Mexico's stall in the book fair, he said that representatives of his country are keen on introducing Mexican history, writers, literature, and poems, and that the pavilion is a sort of vitrine to make Iranians acquainted with Mexico and its culture.

Mexico's book fair is of great importance, because there are several writers who are prominent at national and international levels, he said, noting that Mexican publishers attach importance to the presence of Iranian writers in Mexican book fairs.

Chabahar, an Irreplaceable Opportunity For Kazakhstan Trade and Transit



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Caretaker of Sistan and Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Organization Mr. Naser Ravanbakhsh says Chabahar is an irreplaceable opportunity for trade and transit of CIS countries like Kazakhstan that they can have suitable access to the free waters via this strategic port.

On Wednesday and during meeting with Director General of Aktau Port of Kazakhstan, Ravanbakhsh said that due to significance of Aktau and Kuryk ports in the trade exchanges between Iran and Kazakhstan and the strategic location of Chabahar Port, both countries can take advantage of this capacity for developing transportation and transit cooperation. Then Director General of Aktau Port Mr. Abay Turikpenbaev pointed to the interests of Kazakh traders and businessmen for using Iran's route for transit. He said, "We have inspected capacities of Iranian ports in the north-south corridor and now we have come to visit Chabahar and get acquainted with infrastructures of this region." He added, "To activate this corridor, we need to increase co-ordinations between all sectors related to the transit and to have plans. Chabahar is a great capacity for reinforcing the ties between the Central Asia with India and South Asia."

During this meeting, deputy on ports affairs of Sistan and Baluchestan Ports and Maritime Mr. Hossein Shahdadi briefed the Kazakh delegation of the potentials of Chabahar Port and said, "The Shahid Beheshti wharf of Chabahar is able to have docking of ocean liners and it is one of Iran's free economic zones." He added that Chabahar Port due to its strategic position is the shortest access to the free waters of the land-locked countries of the Central Asia, like Afghanistan, Turkmenistan, Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan and Kazakhstan and it is of great importance.

He noted that huge construction and investments in Chabahar Port are done and construction of wharf and increasing the capacity of loading of ocean liners as well as construction of the Central Asia-bound railways and port parks in this port has made the north-south corridor as one of the biggest global routes.

The Kazakh delegation before the meeting had visited Shahid Beheshti and Shahid Kalantari ports of Chabahar and had gotten acquainted with the facilities and activities of ports in Chabahar.

Bolsonaro to Meet Elon Musk in Brazil

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro is set to meet with billionaire Elon Musk on Friday, according to a government source.

The meeting will be held in Sao Paulo, a source with the Brazilian president's office told AFP, without giving any details on what will be on the agenda.

Earlier, Bolsonaro said that he had planned a private meeting in Sao Paulo "with a very important person who is recognized throughout the world."

"He is coming to offer his help for our Amazon," the president said in his weekly social media broadcast, without naming Musk.



UN Rights Chief Begins Landmark China Trip

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The UN rights chief will travel to China's Xinjiang region next week for a visit under intense international scrutiny after demands for her to call out abuses against its Uyghur minority.

After years of requesting "meaningful and unfettered" access to far-western Xinjiang, Michelle Bachelet will finally stage a six-day mission to China starting Monday, her office said.

The visit, at the invitation of Beijing, has been widely anticipated and marks the first trip to China by a UN rights chief since Louise Arbour went there in 2005.

Bachelet herself has been demanding access to all regions of China since she took office in 2018.



Russia Ramps Up Assault Aiming To Seize Ukrainian Province



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian troops bombarded a riverside city in what appeared to herald a major assault to seize the last remaining Ukrainian-held territory in a province it claims on behalf of separatists.

Ukrainian officials said Russian forces had launched massive artillery bombardment against Sievierodonetsk, one of the last Ukrainian-held bastions in Luhansk, one of two southeastern provinces Moscow and its proxies proclaim as independent states.

The city, and its twin Lysychansk on the opposite bank of the Siverskiy Donets river, form the eastern part of a Ukrainian-held pocket that Russia has been trying to overrun since mid-April after failing to capture the capital Kyiv. Ukraine's general staff said Moscow had launched an offensive on Sievierodonetsk but had taken losses and was forced to retreat, part of what it described as major Russian offensive operations along a stretch of the frontline.

Despite losing ground elsewhere in recent weeks, Russian forces have advanced on the Luhansk front, in what some military analysts view as a major push to achieve scaled-down war aims of capturing all territory claimed by pro-Russian rebels.

"The Russian army has started very intensive destruction of the town of Sievierodonetsk, the intensity of shelling doubled, they are shelling residential quarters, destroying house by house," Luhansk governor Serhiy Gaidai said via his Telegram channel.

"We do not know how many people died, because it is simply impossible to go through and look at every apartment," he said.

In Moscow, Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu said the "liberation of the Luhansk People's Republic" would be completed soon.

In an overnight address, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy described the conditions in the Donbas, which includes Luhansk and neighbouring Donetsk province, as "hell" and said the region had been "completely destroyed" by Russia's invasion.

Capturing Luhansk and Donetsk would allow Moscow to claim victory after it announced last month that this was now its objective. It achieved a major step towards that goal this week, when Ukraine ordered its garrison in the main Donbas port, Mariupol, to stand down after a near three-month siege.

Russia's Shoigu said around 2,000 Ukrainian fighters had surrendered in the past four days.

Kyiv has not confirmed how many fighters have surrendered, but Britain gave the first official Western confirmation that a large force had indeed laid down arms, saying around 1,700 had surrendered. An unknown number of others were still believed to be inside, it said.

In a video, the commander of the Azov Battalion, a Ukrainian unit that had defended the plant, confirmed the order to stop fighting was being carried out, and said all civilians and wounded fighters were now out.

Biden Touts South Korean Role In Securing Global Supply Chains

PYEONGTAEK (Dispatches) - Joe Biden's first stop on his inaugural trip to Asia as U.S. president on Friday was a massive Samsung Electronics semiconductor plant, underscoring a message of economic security with an eye on China and the war in Ukraine.

Biden landed at the U.S. military's Osan Air Base in Pyeongtaek, south of Seoul, and immediately drove to Samsung's nearby factory, the largest semiconductor plant in the world. There he greeted South Korean President Yoon Suk-yeol, a relative newcomer to politics, for the first time in person.

Advanced chips for functions such as mobile, 5G, high-performance computing and artificial intelligence, have become a focal point of competition with China and concerns over global supply chain disruptions caused by the pandemic.

Economic shockwaves from Russia's war in Ukraine have further spotlighted the need to secure critical supply chains so that the U.S. economy and national security are not dependent on countries "that don't share our values," Biden said in remarks at the plant.

U.N. Cutting Refugee Rations in Africa's Sahel Amid Alarming Food Insecurity

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Food rations for refugees and displaced people are being cut by up to half in parts of the Sahel due to a massive funding shortfall with millions set to go hungry as prices rise and climate shocks hit yields, U.N. agencies said.



The U.N. humanitarian office (OCHA) estimates that some 18 million people face severe food insecurity in the next three months across the arid belt that stretching across Africa beneath the Sahara. Its \$3.8 billion appeal for the region is less than 12% funded, OCHA spokesperson Jens Laerke said.

"The situation has reached alarming levels in Burkina Faso, Chad, Mali and Niger, where people will experience emergency levels of food insecurity during the lean season between June and August," he told a media briefing, saying that the levels of food insecurity were the worst since 2014.

In Burkina Faso, rations are currently at 75% in areas that are hard-to-reach and the most food insecure, and 50% at other sites, the World Food Programme said.

Rations have already been cut by half for displaced people and refugees in Chad, it said. The WFP will be forced to reduce them further from July if more funding is not received.

In Mauritania, the food component of the food-cash ration is being cut by 50% at Mbera camp, it said.

The conflict between major grains producers Russia and Ukraine is one factor that has driven up food prices in Africa. That crisis has also diverted aid from other areas.

"Why is it as bad now? We have conflict in the West African region, you have COVID still raging, you climate-induced shocks, you have rising costs which are all colliding to put basic needs out of reach for millions of people," Tomson Phiri from the WFP told the briefing.

Thousands Queue for Petrol, Gas in Sri Lanka

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Thousands of people queued for cooking gas and petrol in Sri Lanka's commercial capital and Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe warned of a food shortage as the island nation battles a devastating economic crisis.

Lines formed in many parts of Colombo, a city of around 900,000 people, as residents tried to stock up on fuel, which is mostly imported and is in extremely short supply with the government running out of foreign exchange.

"Only about 200 cylinders were delivered, even though there were about 500 people," said Mohammad Shazly, a part-time chauffeur in a queue for the third day in the hope of procuring cooking gas for his family of five. Hundreds of others were in line, with empty cylinders by their side.

"Without gas, without kerosene oil, we can't do anything," Shazly said. "Last option what? Without food we are going to die. That will happen hundred percent."

Tourism-dependent Sri Lanka, where India and China jostle for influence, is facing a dire shortage of foreign exchange, fuel and medicines, and economic activity has slowed to a crawl.

Public transport is depleted and traffic is light as most people are staying at home because of the scarcity of petrol.

Wickremesinghe, warning also of a food crunch, vowed to buy enough fertiliser for the next planting season to boost productivity and meet the food demand of its 22 million population.

A decision in April last year by President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to ban all chemical fertilisers drastically cut crop yields and although the government has reversed the ban, no substantial imports have yet taken place.

"While there may not be time to obtain fertiliser for this Yala (May-August) season, steps are being taken to ensure adequate stocks for the Maha (September-March) season," the prime minister said in a message on Twitter late on Thursday.

"I sincerely urge everyone to accept the gravity of the ... situation."

Japan, which has long-standing economic ties with the island, said it would provide an emergency grant of \$3 million for medicine and food, its foreign ministry said.

When a truck arrived at a cooking gas distribution centre with fresh supplies, soldiers with automatic rifles guarded the vehicle while people in the queue applauded.

State-run Litro Gas is hoping to start distributing 80,000 cylinders a day by Saturday but has to scramble to fill an estimated 3.5 million cylinder shortage in the market, Chairman Vijitha Herath told Reuters.



Macron Opts For Continuity In Gov't Reshuffle

PARIS (Dispatches) - Emmanuel Macron retained his finance and interior ministers while appointing only the second woman to head France's foreign ministry, as the president reshuffled his cabinet ahead of parliamentary elections next month.

After his re-election in April, when the far right came its closest yet to taking the presidency, centrist Macron pledged to govern France "in a different way" from a first term during which his focus on economic reforms left much of the electorate discontented.

With first COVID-19 and now surging inflation reversing some of the hard-fought gains earned by those reforms, he now needs to persuade voters he is responding to their frustrations in time for June's parliamentary ballot.

The three nominations - plus Macron loyalist Marc Fesneau as the new agriculture minister - would suggest the president has not opted for a wholesale overhaul of his leadership - though with women playing a more prominent role. Retaining their respective finance and interior ministry portfolios, Bruno Le Maire and Gerald Darmanin, will be joined on the cabinet's top table by Catherine Colonna as foreign minister, the presidency announced.

All three come from a center-right background. Colonna is currently France's ambassador to Britain and former spokeswoman to late president Jacques Chirac.

Agnes Pannier-Runacher was promoted from junior minister for industry to energy minister. She will be tasked with reviving the country's ailing nuclear sector and accelerating the rollout of more renewable energy, while shaping France's response to the gas crisis and voter anger over energy prices.

Macron - busy with crisis diplomacy abroad and tough political bargaining ahead of the parliamentary vote at home - has taken nearly a month to appoint a new cabinet.

On Monday he named Elisabeth Borne as prime minister. The left-leaning career technocrat served in his earlier governments, most recently as labour minister, when she stared down trade unions over unemployment benefit reform.



Shanon
(adviser)

Parsian

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220sq.m
3bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
roof garden
marble floor
pkg, & F.F

Farmanieh Villa (\$7000)
2000sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
Sauna, J
nice yard
terrace, pkg
elegantly Furn

Kamranieh Apts
(\$1800) 160sq.m, 2bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F
(\$2700) 260sq.m, 3bdrs, S/p, S, J, pkg, & F.F

Nice mountain View

(\$1800) Gheitarieh Apt
180sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony, & F.F

Niavaran (\$2000)
200sq.m, 3bdrs
balcony

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China Wants to Expand BRICS Bloc of Emerging Economies

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China wants to expand the group of emerging economies known as BRICS, in the first shake up of the bloc in over a decade, a senior Chinese diplomat said on Thursday.

Brazil, Russia, India and China initially formed the bloc in 2009, with South Africa joining in 2010. "China proposes to start the BRICS expansion process, explore the criteria and procedures for the expansion, and gradually form a consensus," Wang Yi, China's state councillor and foreign minister, told an online meeting of BRICS foreign ministers.



About 300,000 Ton of Wheat Bought By Egypt Stranded in Ukraine

CAIRO (Dispatches) - About 300,000 tons of Ukrainian wheat booked by Egypt's state grains buyer for delivery in February and March is yet to be shipped, with one cargo stuck in port and four others still to be loaded, four traders said.

Egypt's General Authority For Supply Commodities (GASC) has granted an extension to secure the cargoes but is not offering trading companies any force majeure release from contractual obligations, according to traders.

Force majeure is a clause in contracts that frees parties from liability due to uncontrollable events.

Egypt, typically the world's largest wheat importer, depended heavily on shipments of Black Sea wheat that were disrupted by Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24.

The war has raised concerns over Egypt's ability to sustain its strategic reserves and secure affordable wheat that is used to make steeply subsidized bread available to nearly two-thirds of the population.

Egypt's prime minister said this week that the government had wheat reserves to last four months. Traders say that any wheat that has been purchased is counted within the country's strategic reserves, even if it has not yet been delivered. GASC imported 4.7 million tons of wheat last year.

Two of the cargoes that have yet to be loaded were contracted by Nibulon and a further two by Inerco, traders said. A fifth cargo contracted by Olam is stuck at Ukraine's Chornomorsk Port on a GTCS ship.

All cargoes were purchased before Russia's invasion.

Egypt's supply minister confirmed on Sunday that authorities had granted an extension for delivery of the cargoes, adding on Tuesday that they were in talks with suppliers on trying to get the four cargoes by rail to Poland.

Three traders with knowledge of the matter said that despite a halt to shipments of Ukrainian wheat exports caused by the war, GASC was requiring the delivery of the four unloaded wheat cargoes, if necessary from other origins.

GASC's tender book contains no provision for force majeure, though one trader said the Grain and Free Trade Association (GAFTA), an international trade group, could arbitrate such cases.

With Ukraine's ports blocked off by Russia's invasion, it has been forced to send shipments across its western border, relying on limited railroad capacity and small Danube river ports.

GASC has purchased foreign wheat just once since the start of the war in Ukraine, buying mainly French grain in April at a higher price than it had paid previously.

Greece Emerging as New Hub for Russian Ship-to-Ship Fuel Oil Exports

LONDON (Dispatches) - Russian fuel oil arrivals offshore Greece jumped to record levels in April, as sanctions on Moscow drive traders to find new ways to export Russian oil via ship-to-ship (STS) loadings, Refinitiv Eikon data showed and sources said.

Trading Russian crude and oil products remains legal for now as the European Union is yet to fully agree on a proposed embargo, but banking and other financial sanctions on Russia following its invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 has made it increasingly more difficult to do so. In April, shipments of Russian fuel oil with Greece as a destination reached nearly 0.9 million tonnes, about double March levels and could reach new records in May, according to Refinitiv data.

The bulk of this was shipped from Russian ports to Greece's Kalamata port, the data showed.

The Greek energy ministry declined to comment on what it said was private companies' business.

Traders said the fuel oil - a by-product of refining crude oil into lighter, cleaner products like auto fuels - is being stored and blended offshore on board tankers and being loaded via ship-to-ship transfer for re-export.

While it is not uncommon for fuel oil to load offshore Greece for exports to other destinations, the level of activity was very high compared to normal April levels, one industry source said.

The Evridiki tanker, which has the capacity to load 130,000 tons, loaded a Russian fuel oil cargo in mid-April off Kalamata, two shipping source said.

The tanker then made its way to the United Arab Emirates oil hub of Fjairah, Refinitiv data shows. Russia has been increasing fuel exports to the hub, with arrivals set to jump to about 2.5 million barrels according to data from oil analytics firm Vortexa.

Japan's Trade Gap Widens as Import Costs Surge on Supply Pressures

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's exports extended double-digit gains for a third straight month in April, but surging global commodity costs inflated the country's import bill to a record, adding to worries about the rising cost of living.

Shoring up the prospects of a private demand-led recovery, however, was a gauge of capital expenditure that posted its first monthly gain in three months.

The mixed data on Thursday followed the yen's falls to two-decade-lows against the dollar earlier this month, which stoked fears of worsening terms of trade and added financial burdens for the resource-poor Japanese economy as import costs soar.

A weak yen, once considered a boon for the export-led economy, now has less of an impact as shipments grow smaller due to the ongoing shift by Japanese manufacturers to offshore production.

Japan's exports rose 12.5% in April from a year earlier, Ministry of Finance data showed, led by U.S.-bound shipments of cars, slightly missing a 13.8% increase expected by economists in a Reuters poll. It followed a 14.7% rise in March.

In a worrying sign for the outlook, China-bound shipments fell 5.9% in April, the biggest drop since March 2020, as heavy COVID-19 curbs in major cities like Shanghai disrupted supply-chains and paralyzed economic activity. Imports from China -- Japan's largest trading partner -- also fell the most since September 2020, the data showed.

"Import gains caused by rising crude oil prices and a weak yen mean a transfer of national wealth to oil-producing nations, depriving Japan of purchasing power," said Takeshi Minami, chief economist at Norinchukin Research Institute.

"As such, Japan's economic recovery depends on coronavirus developments at home and China as the lockdown in Shanghai has disrupted supply-side and consumer activity."

Imports rose 28.2% in the year to April, versus the median estimate for a 35.0% increase, as the weaker yen lifted already surging global commodity prices. Imports hit a record 8.9 trillion yen (\$69.2 billion), topping exports worth 8 trillion yen.

That resulted in a trade deficit of 839.2 billion yen, narrower than the median estimate for a 1.150 trillion yen shortfall but posting a ninth straight month in the red.

Analysts have warned of risks of prolonged cost-push inflation to the fragile economy with external factors, not domestic demand, pushing import bills higher.

"If the zero-COVID policies are extended it will have a really harsh impact," said Taro Saito, executive research fellow at NLI Research Institute, adding that China-bound shipments account for more than a fifth of Japan's exports.

Pakistan Bans Import Of Luxury Items to Boost Economy

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's new government said it would ban the import of over 30 luxury items including cars and fruit jams in an austerity move to help boost the country's faltering economy.

Cash-strapped Pakistan has been hit by a storm of crippling debt, dwindling foreign currency reserves and galloping inflation.

The national currency hit a historic low on Thursday, with 200 rupees fetching \$1.

"My decision to ban (the) import of luxury items will save the country precious foreign exchange," Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif tweeted.

The move was an effort to target the country's elite, with the banned goods including mobile phones and cars -- which make up the largest share of import bills on the list -- as well as cosmetics and jams.

"We will be able to save \$6 billion by imposing a ban on import of the luxury items," information minister Marriyum Aurangzeb said at a press conference, adding that the ban would be effective immediately.

"The decision will give a boost to the local economy and industry".

However, business leaders said the country must seek consent from the World Trade Organization, which regulates international trade.

"I think it is a prudent step by the government... it would help save much needed foreign exchange to pay off our international trade debts," said Khalid Tawab, the former senior vice president of the Pakistan Chamber of Commerce.

"The government has not declared a financial emergency yet, but that is the situation we are facing, and so under such circumstances the WTO could be persuaded to relax its rules."

Pakistan's current trade deficit stands at \$39.2 billion.

Former leader Imran Khan was ousted in a no-confidence vote last month, largely as a result of failing to reverse the soaring cost of living and prices of basic goods.

The announcement comes as Pakistan officials are locked in negotiation with the IMF in the Qatari capital Doha over the release of funds as part of an agreed loan program.

A six billion dollar IMF bailout package signed by former prime minister Imran Khan in 2019 has never been fully implemented because his government reneged on agreements to cut or end some subsidies and to improve revenue and tax collection.

Islamabad has so far received \$3 billion, with the program due to end later this year. Officials are seeking an extension to the programme through to June 2023, as well as the release of the next tranche of \$1 billion.

A major sticking point is likely to be over costly subsidies -- notably for fuel and electricity -- and Finance Minister Miftah Ismail said he wants the two sides to "find a middle ground".

IMF Sees Malaysia's Economy Expanding 5.75% in 2022



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) is optimistic that Malaysia's economy will expand by 5.75 per cent in 2022, driven by pent-up domestic demand and continued strong external demand.

This is in line with the government's growth projection of between 5.3 per cent and 6.3 per cent for 2022. The economy expanded by 3.1 per cent last year. In providing an assessment of Malaysia's growth prospects, the IMF noted that the country's high vaccination rates and limited movement restrictions would also support economic expansion.

On the flipside, the Washington-based agency acknowledged that there were substantial downside risks, including from the Covid-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, a similar predicament faced by both developed and developing economies globally.

"Malaysia's growth is projected to be solid in the medium term, although risks of long-term economic scarring are real," the IMF's Executive Board said in its conclusions following consultations with Malaysian officials in an assessment report released last April.

The IMF also welcomed Malaysia's accommodative monetary policy stance, as inflation expectations are well anchored. To this end, the IMF noted that Malaysia's commitment to exchange rate flexibility, saying it will continue to serve the country well.

This was further reinforced just last week when Bank Negara Malaysia reaffirmed its position that it will not peg the ringgit despite the apparent weakness of the currency.

This was because the banking sector was still well-capitalised and highly liquid, buttressed against a strong asset quality.

The IMF also said that Malaysia's financial sector "remains resilient," and that it was encouraged by its reforms that focused on inclusion, economic transformation, and a sustainable economy.

Indonesia to Lift Palm Oil Ban on Monday Amid Global Price Spike

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia will lift its ban on palm oil exports next week, President Joko Widodo said, relieving pressure on the global vegetable oil market after prices spiked because of the suspension and the war in Ukraine.

The archipelago nation issued the ban last month to secure supplies of the commodity, used in a range of goods from chocolate spreads to cosmetics, in the face of a domestic shortage.

"Based on the supply... of cooking oil and considering there are 17 million people in the palm oil industry -- farmers and other supporting workers -- I decided that cooking oil exports will reopen on Monday, May 23," Widodo told an online briefing.

"The government will still be monitoring everything strictly to ensure the demand will be met with affordable prices," he said. Authorities had rigorously enforced the export ban, with the Indonesian navy seizing a tanker carrying palm oil out of the country in violation of the order earlier this month.

After the ban came into force, Widodo said supplying the country's 270 million people was the "highest priority" of his government.



But Jakarta came under pressure for further saddling prices that were already skyrocketing after Russia's invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine.

Palm oil is the most widely used vegetable oil in Indonesia and, despite being the world's biggest producer, the country has been facing a cooking oil shortage for months because of poor regulation and producers reluctant to sell at home.

The shortages have in some cases forced consumers to spend hours in queues at distribution centers.

Indonesia produces about 60 percent of the world's palm oil, with one-third consumed by its domestic market. India, China, the European Union and Pakistan are among its major export customers.

Paykan of Iran Win 2022 Asian Club Volleyball Championship

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Host Paykan stamped its domination over the 2022 Asian Men's Club Volleyball Championship after an outstanding comeback 3-2 (21-25, 26-28, 25-13, 25-20, 15-12) win against Japan's Suntory Sunbirds in the thrilling final showdown at Azadi Hall on Friday.

Nimir Abdelaziz weighed in with a huge 29 points including 24 attacks from 45 attempts and 3 aces for Paykan, while Earvin Ngapeth kept good company to contribute 14 points in front of over 10,000 fans. Dmitry Muserskiy scored a match-high 30 points for Suntory Sunbirds including 26 kills from 50 attempts.



Nearly 60m People Displaced in 2021 by Conflict and Natural Disaster

LONDON (Dispatches) - Conflicts and natural disasters forced tens of millions to flee within their own country last year, pushing the number of internally displaced people to a record high, monitors said.

Some 59.1 million people were registered as internally displaced worldwide in 2021 -- an all-time record expected to be broken again this year amid mass displacement inside war-torn Ukraine.

Around 38 million new internal displacements were reported in 2021, with some people forced to flee multiple times during the year, according to a joint report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

That marks the second-highest annual number of new internal displacements in a decade after 2020, which saw record-breaking movement due to a string of natural disasters.

Last year, new internal displacements from conflict surged to 14.4 million -- marking a 50-percent jump from 2020 and more than doubling since 2012, the report showed.

And global internal displacement figures are only expected to grow this year, driven in particular by the war in Ukraine.

More than eight million people have already been displaced within the war-ravaged country since Russia's full-scale invasion began on February 24, in addition to the more than six million who have fled Ukraine as refugees.

"2022 is looking bleak," IDMC director Alexandra Bilak told reporters.

The record numbers seen in 2021, she said, marked "a tragic indictment really on the state of the world and on peace-building efforts in particular".

NRC chief Jan Egeland agreed, warning: "It has never been as bad as this."

"The world is falling apart," he told reporters.

"The situation today is phenomenally worse than even our record figure suggests."

In 2021, sub-Saharan Africa counted the most internal movements, with more than five million displacements reported in Ethiopia alone, as the country grappled with the raging and expanding Tigray conflict and a devastating drought.

That marks the highest figure ever registered for a single country.

Unprecedented displacement numbers were also recorded last year in the Democratic Republic of Congo and Afghanistan, where the Taliban's return to power, along with drought, saw many flee their homes.

In Myanmar, where the military junta seized power in a February coup last year, displacement numbers also reached a record high, the report found.

The Middle East and North Africa region recorded its lowest number of new displacements in a decade, as the conflicts in Syria, Libya and Iraq de-escalated somewhat, but the overall number of displaced people in the region remained high.



Syria, where civil war has been raging for more than 11 years, still accounted for the world's highest number of people living in internal displacement due to conflict -- 6.7 million -- at the end of 2021.

That was followed by the DR Congo at 5.3 million, Colombia at 5.2 million, and Afghanistan and Yemen at 4.3 million.

Despite the hike in conflict-related displacement, natural disasters continued to account for most new internal displacement, spurring 23.7 million such movements in 2021.

A full 94 percent of those were attributed to weather and climate-related disasters, like cyclones, monsoon rains, floods and droughts.

Experts say that climate change is increasing the intensity and frequency of such extreme weather events.

China, the Philippines and India were hardest hit, together accounting for around 70 percent of all disaster-related displacements last year.

Increasingly, conflict and disasters collide, creating a "complex quagmire of problems", Egeland said, worsening risks and often forcing people to flee several times.

In places like Mozambique, Myanmar, Somalia and South Sudan, overlapping crises impact food security and heighten the vulnerabilities of millions.

"We need a titanic shift in thinking from world leaders on how to prevent and resolve conflicts to end this soaring human suffering," Egeland said.

Global Smoking Rates Fall for First Time



LONDON (Dispatches) - Smoking rates have declined globally for the first time on record, according to a new report on tobacco use from a public health campaign group and U.S. academics.

However, the figures from the Tobacco Atlas report -- described as a potential tipping point by the authors -- also mask growing numbers of smokers in parts of the world, as well as increased tobacco use among young teenagers in almost half of the countries surveyed.

Globally, there are 1.1 billion smokers and 200 million more people who use other tobacco products, the report from Vital Strategies and the Tobaccconomics team at the University of Illinois at Chicago found.

That represented a decline in smoking rates from 22.6 per cent of people in 2007 to 19.6 per cent in 2019, they said, the first since the report began in 2002.

However, population growth in Africa, the eastern Mediterranean and the Western Pacific regions meant there were still increasing numbers of smokers in a number of areas, the report said. Moreover, prevalence is rising among adults in at least 10 countries in Africa, as well as among young people.

"The industry is still preying on emerging economies in ways that will lock in harms for a generation or more," said Jeffrey Drope, public health professor at the University of Illinois and a report author.

Children were also being targeted in a number of countries, resulting in a rise in smoking among teenagers aged 13-15 in 63 of 135 countries surveyed, he said. Around 50 million in this age group, both boys and girls, now used tobacco products, he said, and the impact of new products like e-cigarettes and flavored products was not yet fully understood.

Falling prevalence globally was a sign of the effectiveness of strong tobacco control measures, such as increased taxes, Drope added, but many lower-income countries did not have tough enough restrictions in place.

The data also shows tobacco use caused almost 8.7 million deaths worldwide in 2019, and approximately \$2 trillion in economic damage. While more than half of the deaths are currently in high-income countries, this is expected to change if cigarette use continues to rise in lower-income areas.

Most Automakers Fall Short on Climate Goals

PARIS (Dispatches) - Only two of the world's 12 top automakers plan to make enough electric vehicles by 2030 to stay in step with Paris Agreement climate goals, experts said.

Globally, more than half of all new vehicles coming off of production lines in 2029 would need to be electric for the sector to be

compliant with the goal of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels, according to Influence Map, a research NGO that evaluates corporate climate goals and policies.

At the same time, 11 of the 12 carmakers -- while publicly supporting the Paris Agreement -- have actively opposed government policies to accelerate the shift to electric vehicles, especially the phase-out of internal combustion engines, Influence Map said.

Japanese auto giants Toyota, Honda and Nissan are especially far off the mark, with non-polluting cars accounting for only 14, 18 and 22 percent, respectively, of their planned production in 2029, the report said.

South Korea's Hyundai, US manufacturer Ford and France's Renault -- with 27, 28 and 31 percent of their global fleets projected to be electric in seven years -- were only marginally more on track.

The standout exception is US-based Tesla, a "pure player" manufacturer that has only ever made electric cars and trucks.

"Almost all automakers are failing to keep pace with the transition to zero emissions," said Influence Map program Manager Ben Youriev.

"Those lagging the furthest behind are also the most negative when it comes to climate policy advocacy."

Ford, Stellantis, Volkswagen and BMW come closer to the 52 percent threshold for compatibility with Paris temperature target, with 36 to 46 percent of their fleets planned to be electric in 2029.

Besides Tesla, only Mercedes-Benz -- at 56 percent -- is projecting a transition in keeping with that target.



To evaluate automaker trajectories, Influence Map cross-references different datasets.

Researchers used the International Energy Agency's (IEA) scenario for decarbonising the transport sector rapidly enough to not jeopardise the 1.5C goal, which would need 57.5 percent of

all cars produced in 2030 to be electric.

The IEA's Net Zero by 2050 report also assumes the share of renewables in global electricity generation would be about 60 percent in 2030.

The Influence Map report then compared this goal with IHS Markit production forecasts to 2029, corresponding to a 52 percent share of electric vehicles in the IEA schema.

Collectively, the combined global production of battery electric vehicles by all automakers is forecast to only reach 32 percent by 2029.

That means the auto industry would need to boost production of zero-emission cars by 80 percent in order to hit the IEA 2030 production target.

The report findings reveal the critical impact of government policy on the pace of the transition away from internal combustion engines, which account for around 16 percent of global energy-related CO2 emissions, according to the UN's Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC).

In the European Union, which aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions to 55 percent below 1990 levels by 2030, Toyota's produced fleet is projected to be 50 percent electric by 2029.

But in the United States, where fuel emissions standards are less stringent, that figure is only four percent.

Similarly, Ford's EU-based production is forecast to be 65 percent electric by 2029 -- nearly double its global average.

One pension fund with shares in Toyota and Volkswagen expressed concern about the Influence of the Map findings.

Using Sanctions to...

FROM PAGE 1

"Despite the fact that resolution 2585 supports early recovery and reconstruction projects, as well as the provision of basic services, unfortunately, continued unilateral sanctions have stymied the resolution's implementation, impeding Syria's reconstruction efforts and hampered humanitarian aid delivery in various ways, even delaying the return of refugees and displaced persons," he said.

"Claiming to care about the difficult humanitarian situation in Syria while backing and imposing unilateral sanctions against the Syrian people is hypocritical," the envoy said.

He also condemned Israel's continued occupation of the Syrian Golan Heights as well as the regime's repeated violations of Syria's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The remarks were made about the occupying regime's frequent air raids on Syria, mostly targeting the Syrian army and its allies. "We demand that the Security Council hold this regime accountable for such acts of aggression and malice," said the official.

U.S. Unilateral Sanction...

FROM PAGE 1

Douhan's landmark visit to Iran came amid the stalemate over the nuclear deal, with the U.S. showing reluctance to respond to Iran's proposals.

Decrying the U.S. decision to abandon the nuclear deal and continue with its sanctions regime, she said the deal was endorsed by UN Security Council Resolution 2231.

"Applying extraterritorial sanctions on Iranian companies or companies working with Iran ... is illegal under international law," she asserted.

Commenting on Iran's frozen assets abroad, the UN official said the assets estimated to be around \$120 billion need to be unblocked.

Last week, Iran's top human rights official Kazem Gharibabadi said Douhan's visit was only aimed at gathering information on the impact of sanctions to hold countries (U.S.) to account.

For years the UN bodies have tried to condemn the Islamic Republic of Iran after an petty incident with accusing the country of some void charges and they have ignored condemning the U.S. or the Zionist atrocities. Nowadays the UN is busy with the Russia-Ukraine war and it seems the body has forgotten other international issues in other countries and we also do not expect the UN to take any serious action against the U.S. atrocities even by listening to this report which has been prepared by its own staff.

Simultaneous with her presence in Tehran and her press conference, some media outlets claimed that Douhan received illegal payment from the Chinese government in 2021 when she was in China to review human rights issue and the condition of the Muslims in this country and she was accused of closing her eyes on the Chinese government's behavior regarding the Muslims in China.

Now after the press conference and publication of such negative claim against Douhan, we cannot expect the UN to blame the U.S. or it may ultimately pass it slightly because of this negative and poisonous climate created against this UN official.

Of course Tehran once again has showed its sincerity and let the UN rapporteur arrive in Tehran for preparing its documented report based on the existing facts in the country regarding the sanctions. Of course, Iranian nations have shown their resilience against the sanctions despite suffering hardships but they have made sanctions ineffective and the country is gradually recovering under the new government which has not tied the fate of the economy and country to the JCPOA talks in Vienna but Douhan's visit will be another test for the UN's sincerity and its claims of defending human rights and rights of the nations.

Tehran Determined to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's foreign ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh commenting on Mora's Tehran visit in his weekly presser on Monday said "serious and result-oriented negotiations" were held during his trip and "special initiatives" were put forward by Iran.

He further added that negotiations were now in a better state after Mora's visit, but Tehran was still waiting for Washington's response to its proposals.

Borrell, for his part, mentioned initiatives put forward by Iran during the Vienna talks, saying the parties are now "on the path of continuing negotiations and focusing on solutions." The European official said he was "hopeful" about the prospect of a "good result", adding that the bloc is determined to continue efforts to close gaps between Iran and the United States.

Amir-Abdollahian in his conversation with the top EU foreign policy official appreciated the bloc's constructive role in the Vienna talks and Mora's role as the coordinator of talks.

The two officials also discussed the raging war in Ukraine, which is now into its third month.

The top Iranian diplomat emphasized that his country was opposed to wars, including in Ukraine, while also drawing the EU official's attention to the crisis in Yemen and Afghanistan. He said the Islamic Republic has never applied double standards in armed conflicts, be it in Yemen, Afghanistan, Ukraine, or elsewhere.

He said Iran urges both warring sides in Ukraine to engage in diplomacy and dialogue to end the war, considering "focus on diplomacy and negotiation" to be the only way out of the crisis. Amir-Abdollahian said, over the past months, he has spoken with his Ukrainian and Russian counterparts, expressing Tehran's readiness to mediate between the two sides.

Borrell commended Iran's efforts toward resolving the crisis in Ukraine, saying Tehran's insistence on negotiations and urging the two sides to reach a ceasefire "reflects Iran's good faith."

Borrell, however, regretted that the warring parties had been accusing each other of lacking the necessary will for negotiations, saying it complicated efforts to broker peace between them.



Stubblety-Cook Smashes 200m Breaststroke World Record

DELAIDE (Dispatches) - Olympic 200m breaststroke champion Zac Stubblety-Cook smashed the world record at the Australian championships with a blistering time of 2mins 05.95secs. The 23-year-old was under world record pace for the entire race to shatter the 2:06.12 mark set by Russia's Anton Chupkov at the 2019 world championships. "I was just trying to swim fast -- I didn't think that fast. I can't really believe it to be honest, but I'm very happy with that," he said poolside.

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Shevchenko Becomes Ambassador for Ukraine Charity

KYIV (Dispatches) - Former Ukraine, Chelsea and AC Milan striker Andriy Shevchenko has a new goal - to help raise funds for rebuilding his country following Russia's invasion. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Shevchenko, whom he met in Kyiv on Wednesday, had been appointed the first ambassador of UNITED24, a fundraising initiative to collect donations for the "restoration and development" of Ukraine.

Djokovic, Nadal, Alcaraz in Same Half of French Open Draw

PARIS (Dispatches) - Defending champion Novak Djokovic, 13-time winner Rafael Nadal and new teenage star Carlos Alcaraz were drawn in the same half of the French Open. World number one Djokovic and Nadal, ranked five, are seeded to meet as early as the quarter-finals. Alcaraz, 19, is bidding to become just the eighth teenager to win a Grand Slam men's title. He could face either Djokovic or Nadal, who holds a record 21 majors, in the semi-finals in a top-heavy draw for the second Grand Slam of the season. "I am very motivated to play my best tennis," said two-time French Open champion and 20-time major winner Djokovic. "In Paris, I always play very strong. Last year, it was the toughest major that I had won." Djokovic had to twice come from two sets down last year to beat Lorenzo Musetti in the last-16 and Stefanos Tsitsipas in the final having also beaten Nadal from a set behind in a bruising semi-final. "Musetti, Rafa, Tsitsipas — every match lasted more than three hours. It was exhausting but I loved the outcome." Djokovic, who celebrates his 35th birthday on Sunday, the opening day at Roland Garros, faces 94th-ranked Yoshihito Nishioka of Japan in the first round. Djokovic defeated Nishioka in straight sets in the Australian Open third round in 2020. He will be fired up to defend his title having been deported from Melbourne in January because of his refusal to get vaccinated.

Real Madrid Sign €360m Bernabeu Deal With Sixth Street

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid have reached a €360 million agreement with Sixth Street to develop and operate new businesses at the Santiago Bernabeu stadium for 20 years, the LaLiga club said. The Spanish champions, who won a record-extending 35th LaLiga title in April, said the partnership included Legends, a premium experiences company that caters to sports and live venue organizations. Sixth Street, which has more than \$60 billion of assets under management, has experience in infrastructure and sports. It has invested a majority stake in Legends. "As part of the long-term partnership, Real Madrid will receive approximately €360 million to be invested across any of the club's activities," Real Madrid said in a statement. "Through this alliance, Sixth Street acquires the right to participate in the operation of certain new businesses of the Santiago Bernabeu stadium for 20 years. "In addition, Legends will contribute its experience and knowledge in the operation of large stadiums and leisure centers, allowing for the optimization of the management of the Santiago Bernabeu stadium."

The agreement, which the club said would allow for multiple events to be hosted at the stadium throughout the year, was ratified at a meeting of Real's board of directors on Wednesday. "The transformation of the Santiago Bernabeu Stadium will be a turning point in the history of Real Madrid," club president Florentino Perez said. "This agreement strengthens the club's goal of continuing to significantly increase the stadium's revenues from both sporting and other types of events." The club's general assembly approved a new €225 million loan in November, increasing the size of its structured finance deal with JPMorgan and Bank of America to €800 million. That deal will enable the club to add a state-of-the-art retractable hybrid pitch that can be moved underground to a 24-metre deep greenhouse so the main venue can be used for other purposes, generating more revenue without spoiling the grass.



The Spaniard could face 2015 champion Stan Wawrinka in the second round. Alcaraz, who has a season-leading four titles in 2022 including Masters crowns in Miami and Madrid as well as Rio and Barcelona, begins against a qualifier. The teenager knocked out Djokovic and Nadal on his way to victory in the Spanish capital. Alcaraz's potential opponent in the last 32 is Sebastian Korda who shocked him in the first round in Monte Carlo in April. Second seed Daniil Medvedev, the US Open champion, faces Argentina's Facundo Bagnis in his first round. Third-ranked Alexander Zverev meets a qualifier while Tsitsipas has a tough opener against Musetti. In the women's draw, world number one Iga Swiatek, the 2020 champion, is on a 28-match win streak and has pocketed five successive titles this season. The 20-year-old Pole begins against a qualifier while second seed and defending champion Barbora Krejickova faces France's Diane Parry. "The courts are incredible. The clay is different from the other tournaments but it suits me," said Krejickova at Thursday's draw ceremony at Roland Garros. Four-time major winner Naomi Osaka, a former world number one but now down at 38, returns to Paris 12 months after she pulled out ahead of the second round, citing mental health issues. She had also been threatened with expulsion and fined by organisers over her refusal to attend press conferences. The 24-year-old, the world's highest-earning sportswoman, faces American 27th seed Amanda Anisimova, a semi-finalist in Paris in 2019. Anisimova knocked Osaka out of the Australian Open in the third round this year. Third seed Paula Badosa of Spain begins against France's Fiona Ferro while fourth-seeded Maria Sakkari also has a French opponent in Clara Burel. Tunisia's Ons Jabeur, seeded six and the champion on clay in Madrid last month, takes on Magda Linette of Poland in her first round clash.

Women to Referee at World Cup Finals for First time

L AUSANNE (Dispatches) - For the first time ever there will be women referees at a men's World Cup finals after FIFA revealed the list for the quadrennial showpiece being hosted later this year by Qatar. France's Stephanie Frappart, Salima Mukansanga from Rwanda and Japan's Yoshimi Yamashita are among the 36 match referees. Brazil's Neuza Back, Mexico's Karen Diaz Medina and American Kathryn Nesbitt have been included in the 69 assistant referees. "We are very happy that ... we have been able to call up female match officials for the first time in the history of a FIFA World Cup," said FIFA Referees Committee chairman Pierluigi Collina. "This concludes a long process that began several years ago with the deployment of female referees at FIFA men's junior and senior tournaments. "In this way, we clearly emphasize that it is quality that counts for us and not gender. I would hope that in the future, the selection of elite women's match officials for important men's competitions will be perceived as something normal and no longer as sensational." All match officials for the finals will participate in early summer in seminars in Asuncion, Madrid and Doha. "We can't eliminate all mistakes, but we will do everything we can to reduce them," said Massimo Busacca, FIFA's Director of Refereeing.



Aubameyang Retires From Int'l Football

MADRID (Dispatches) - Gabon striker Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang has retired from international football, his country's federation has confirmed. Barcelona's Aubameyang, who is Gabon's all-time top scorer with 30 goals in 72 appearances, sent a letter to the federation on Tuesday, confirming his decision. "After 13 years of pride in representing my country, I announce I am ending my international career," wrote the 32-year-old. "I would like to thank the Gabonese people and all those who have supported me in the good and bad times alike."

"I will keep a lot of good memories like the day I made my debut... or the day I came back from Nigeria with the African Ballon d'Or. "I would also like to thank all my coaches, staff and the players that I have come across during this career." Aubameyang tested positive for Covid before this year's Africa Cup of Nations in January and then had to pull out with what the federation said was a heart problem. Gabon reached the Cup of Nations quarter-finals in 2012, equalling their best ever return at an international tournament, with Aubameyang the competition's joint top-scorer on three goals. Aubameyang had his contract cancelled by Arsenal in January and joined Barcelona. He has helped the Catalans qualify for the Champions League by scoring 11 goals in 16 La Liga games.

Tatum Scorches Heat as Celtics Square Series

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum scored 27 points as the Boston Celtics roared back to level the NBA Eastern Conference finals series with a 127-102 thrashing of the Miami Heat in game two. Bolstered by the return of Marcus Smart and Al Horford, who both missed Tuesday's 118-107 game one drubbing, Boston were a team transformed as they squared the best-of-seven series 1-1. Boston made only 11-of-34 from three-point range in Tuesday's lopsided opener, when Miami out-hustled them to claim a decisive victory. But the Celtics shrugged off that misfiring performance in emphatic fashion, draining 20-of-40 from beyond the arc to overwhelm Miami. Tatum led the scorers but there were huge contributions throughout the Celtics lineup. Smart finished with 24 points, 12 assists and nine rebounds, while Jaylen Brown also posted 24 points, including 12 from three-point range. Grant Williams added 19 from the bench, while Horford and Payton Pritchard had 10 points each. Jimmy Butler led the Miami scoring with 29 points but only three other Heat players made double figures.



World Amnesty Demands FIFA to Pay \$440m to Qatar's Abused Migrant Workers

LONDON (Dispatches)- Rights group Amnesty International urged football's governing body FIFA pay compensation equal to the total 2022 World Cup prize money for migrant workers "abused" in host nation Qatar. The call, backed by other rights organizations and fan groups, follows allegations that FIFA was slow to safeguard against the exploitation of workers who flooded into the tiny Persian Gulf state to build infrastructure in the years leading up to the tournament that starts November 21. "FIFA should earmark at least \$440 million to provide remedy for the hundreds of thousands of migrant workers who have suffered human rights abuses in Qatar during preparations for the 2022 World Cup," Amnesty said in a statement accompanying a report. The London-based group urged FIFA president Gianni Infantino "to work with Qatar to establish a comprehensive remediation program". It alleged that a "litany of abuses" had taken place since 2010, the year FIFA awarded the 2022 tournament to Qatar "without requiring any improvement in labor protections". "Given the history of human rights abuses in the country, FIFA knew — or should have known — the obvious risks to workers when it awarded the tournament to Qatar," said Agnes Callamard, Amnesty's secretary general.

