

Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization Has Urged Greece to Act Committed to Its International Obligations, After the European Country Seized an Iranian-Flagged Ship and Its Cargo Was Confiscated by the U.S.

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Wrote Letters to His Counterparts in Countries That Host Sources of the Dust Haze That Has Blanketed West Asia and Urged The UN for a Regional Convention

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Iran Urges UN to Firmly Condemn Assassination of IRGC Member

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has warned against the dangerous consequence of terrorist and criminal acts against Iranian citizens, saying the international community must strongly condemn the recent assassination of a member of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) in Tehran.

Majid Takht-Ravanchi made the remarks in a Wednesday letter to Secretary General of the United Nations Antonio Guterres with regard to the assassination of the former IRGC member, Colonel Hassan Sayyad Khodaei, who played a significant role in the fight against Daesh and other terrorists in the region.

"Given the dire implications of this terrorist and criminal act on international peace and security, inaction and silence in the face of such a provocative and norm-breaking act will only encourage and embolden its perpetrators and their accomplices to continue their disgraceful and wrongful acts," the senior Iranian diplomat said.

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Iran Opposed to U.S. Push for Reforms In Global Health Rules

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian health ministry official says the country has publicly declared its opposition to a U.S.-led proposal to reform the International Health Regulations (IHR).

Mohammad Hassan Niknam, a special aide to the Iranian health minister, said that an Iranian delegation attending the World Health Organization's annual assembly in Geneva had rejected a proposal put forward by the United States and other countries to speed up the implementation for future IHR reforms from 24 to 12 months.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran officially distanced itself from accepting any commitment on this proposal during the assembly," said Niknam.

Media reports on Tuesday suggested Iran and Malaysia had expressed reservations about the IHR reforms while a delegate representing African countries had entirely rejected the move.

Niknam said, however, that Iran has publicly announced that it is opposed to fast tracking future IHR reforms.

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Agreement on JCPOA Possible If U.S. Makes Realistic Decision



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian says it is still possible for parties to the 2015 Iran deal to reach an agreement if the American side proves capable of making a realistic decision.

Amir-Abdollahian made the remarks in a Thursday address to the World Economic Forum in the Swiss city of Davos. "Now, we have reached a point [during the negotiations in the Austrian capital city of Vienna] that if the American side makes a realistic decision, an agreement would be within reach," Iran's top diplomat said.

"Zionists tell many lies about Iran's nuclear issue, but Americans exactly know what they must do if they want to return to the JCPOA," Amir-Abdollahian said while referring to the deal under its official name, the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"We have announced time and again that the atomic bomb has no place in our foreign policy doctrine and [religious] beliefs... The [International Atomic Energy] Agency has also announced many times that Iran does not seek the nuclear weapon," Iran's foreign minister said.

"Zionists do not want an agreement [to be reached] in the Vienna talks," Amir-Abdollahian emphasized.

"U.S. blacklisting of IRGC only a secondary issue, nation's interests top priority"

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amir-Abdollahian rejected reports that the main snag that has stalled the Vienna talks is the issue of U.S. blacklisting of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

"There are more important issues involved here. When we talk about [Tehran's] return to the JCPOA, it means resumption of normal economic and trade activities of Iran within the context of international economy and global trade. This is important to us and we have informed the American side of this issue time and again... We say out loud that the main factor [that has stalled the negotiations] is that Iran and the people of Iran must avail themselves of full economic advantages of the JCPOA."

"In fact, the IRGC being on the US blacklist of terrorist groups is a secondary issue that has been magnified by the pro-Israeli lobby and our main priority is the interests of the Iranian nation," Iran's foreign minister said.

Amir-Abdollahian noted, "We have a lot of information, which [shows that] Zionists are taking U.S. foreign policy hostage."

"Be sure that Iran has numerous options on the table, but the most important issue is that factors related to [former U.S. President Donald] Trump's 'maximum pressure' [policy against Iran] must be done away with," Iran's top diplomat added.

Amir-Abdollahian also talked about Iran-Saudi Arabia rapprochement talks, saying Iran has always kept the doors ajar so that Riyadh could resume normal ties with Iran whenever they wanted.

He said that Iran and Saudi Arabia have recently had good progress and have even agreed to hold a meeting at foreign ministry officials or foreign minister level in a third country.

On the war in Yemen, the foreign minister said that all Yemeni sides should have their share in the future of the country, adding that the ceasefire should endure and the blockade should be removed.

Meanwhile Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud says there has been "some but not enough" progress in talks with Iran, and that Riyadh's hands remain outstretched to Tehran.

"We have made some progress but not enough. Our hands are stretched out," Prince Faisal told a World Economic Forum panel on Tuesday.

"We continue to encourage our neighbors in Iran to lean into what can be a very, very important sea change in our region," he said.

The top Saudi diplomat said a "new era of cooperation" could deliver benefits for all.

Israelis Dare Not Fire Even a Single Bullet Toward Hezbollah

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Israeli regime cannot muster the courage to fire "even a single bullet" toward Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement, says the top commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC).

In remarks, Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani hailed the young members of the Lebanese resistance group for their heroic struggle against the occupying regime in Tel Aviv.

"Today, the Zionist regime does not dare fire even a single bullet at one of the teenagers and youth of Hezbollah," Qa'ani said. He recalled that "last year, one of Hezbollah's [warriors] was martyred in Syria due to an act of aggression by the criminal Zionist regime" and that the resistance group declared it would "retaliate."

After making the declaration, he added, "you could not find a single person in the officer uniform in the Zionist front [as] they all went into hiding."

Referring to Israel's withdrawal from south Lebanon on May 25, 2000, he said Hezbollah fighters succeeded in forcing the Israeli military out and ended the regime's more than two decades of occupation with their primitive weapons against Israel's state-of-the-art weapons.

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New Sanctions Prove U.S. Will Toward Iranians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry Saeed Khatibzadeh says new sanctions imposed by the United States against the Islamic Republic and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Quds Force reveal Washington's animosity toward Iranians.

On Wednesday, the U.S. imposed sanctions on what it described as a Russian-backed oil smuggling and money laundering network for the IRGC's Quds Force.

The U.S. Treasury Department claimed the network was led by current and former Quds Force figures, "backed by senior levels of the Russian Federation government" and included Chinese companies and a former Afghan diplomat.

On Thursday, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said, "The Islamic Republic of Iran and its official and legal Armed Forces, especially the IRGC's Quds Force, have been always a nightmare for terrorist and extremist groups in the region."

"Naturally, the U.S. government, as the stepmother of these terrorist groups, spares no effort to support them just in the same way that it has been imposing brutal and illegal sanctions against the people of Iran and their children in the IRGC since many years ago."

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Iran May Barter Car Parts, Gas Turbines For Russia's Steel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Russia may introduce major barter arrangements to facilitate trade between the two countries, including a plan that could allow Iran to import steel from Russia in return for exports of car parts and gas turbines to the country.

Iranian trade and industries minister Reza Fatemi Amin said on Thursday that Iran will use barter trade with Russia to ensure supplies of raw materials for use in its metals and mining sector.

Speaking on the sidelines of Iran-Russia joint economic and trade cooperation commission in Tehran, Fatemi Amin said Iran will need to import raw metals like zinc, lead and alumina from Russia to respond to a growing domestic demand.

He said, however, that Iran and Russia had agreed to introduce barter arrangements for certain goods and commodities, including for Russian steel.

The minister said Iran will be able to export car parts and gas turbines to Russia in return for Russian steel imports.

He said some Iranian companies have signed deals to supply or repair gas turbines in Russian power plants.

Iran and Russia sign major agreements to expand their energy and trade ties.

Iran and Russia are planning to increase bilateral trade as they seek to offset the impacts of American sanctions targeting their economies.

Chances of Reviving JCPOA "Tenuous at Best"

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. special envoy for Iran, Robert Malley, has acknowledged once again that abandoning the 2015 Iran deal did not serve Washington's interests, but said the prospects of reviving the agreement are "tenuous at best."

"As I speak to you today, we do not have a deal and prospects for reaching one are tenuous at best," Malley told a meeting of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Wednesday.

Malley said the Iran deal, officially called the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), "was working" until Washington, under ex-President Donald Trump, decided to pull out of it in 2018, but "leaving it has not."

The administration of President Joe Biden still believes that efforts to restore the JCPOA are in the national security interest of the United States, he added.

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President Felicitates Georgia on National Day

TEHRAN (IP) – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi in a message to the President and the people of Georgia, congratulated them upon the arrival of the National Day.

According to Iran's presidency's official site, President Raisi on Thursday in his message to the President of Georgia Salome Zourabichvili congratulated her on the country's national day.

The message of the President of Iran reads: "I hope that by relying on the cultural and historical ties between the two nations and the various and abundant capacities of the two countries, we will witness the expansion of cooperation between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Georgia in all political, economic and cultural fields."

President Reaffirms Pledge To Neutralize Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says his administration will not tie the country's progress to the removal of sanctions, reiterating that neutralization of the impact of sanctions is being resolutely pursued, separate from efforts to remove them through talks in Vienna.

Addressing an event on Wednesday to commemorate 4,000 martyred clerics, Raisi said the martyrs' blood carries the message of resistance against the enemies, protecting Islamic values, building the country, resolving people's problems, forging unity, national cohesion, and adhering to the guidelines set by the leader of the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

"Just as we do not deem the enemy's threats a hindrance, we do not [intend to] put off the country's progress until the removal of sanctions," he said.

"We have shown this in practice and announced through official tribunes that our strategy is that of the Leader, but at the same time we are pursuing the removal of sanctions as well."

Raisi was referring to negotiations in the Austrian capital to persuade Washington to remove its illegal sanctions on Iran, four years after it unilaterally withdrew from the landmark Iran deal and launched a so-called campaign of maximum pressure against the Islamic Republic.



He further said that a headquarter for neutralizing sanctions has been established and is actively engaged in efforts to deal with the economic difficulties faced by the Iranian people.

"We are striving so that the conditions would become such that these issues are eliminated, and the people's lives, livelihoods, and businesses would become such that they can live differently from the past, and the conditions become better and better," Iran's president stressed.

He further said the enemy's strategy is to dishearten the Iranian population while the Islamic Republic's strategy is to hearten the people.

"Today, anyone who disheartens people with a stroke of their pen or with taking a step – whether intentionally or unintentionally and/or knowingly or unknowingly – is taking the enemy's path, and if they take a step to hearten people, they are following the Islamic [Republic]'s path," Raisi added.

Iran, Italy Diplomats Meet, Stress Expansion of Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - Director-General of the Italian Foreign Ministry has met with Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy during his visit to Tehran.



In the meeting, Mehdi Safari referred to the cooperation possibilities of Iran and Italy, including in the economic sector, and underlined the need for maximum use of the capacities.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister also reviewed the areas of cooperation and reiterated that Italian companies have had a good position with Iranian businesspeople and that Italy should seize this opportunity.

During the meeting, the director-general of Italy's foreign ministry, Ettore Sequi, for his part, said that he was pleased to visit Tehran. Ettore Sequi expressed hope that the Vienna talks would be successful. He underlined Italy's willingness to enjoy the economic possibilities of relations with Iran. Sequi said Italian companies had an active presence in the Iranian market, which can be strengthened in the new era of ties.

In the meeting, the two officials discussed ways of expanding economic and trade cooperation between Iran and Italy.

Developing Ties With Russia Among Iran's Strategic Policies

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber has said that his country is determined to develop ties with Russia in all fields, calling it a strategic policy of the Islamic Republic.

Mokhber made the comment on Wednesday evening in Tehran at a meeting with Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, who is also the head of Russia-Iran Joint Economic Committee.

The Iranian official said that the two sides should set goals for developing their ties and called on the Joint Economic Committee to work in this regard. Mokhber noted that the level of Tehran-Moscow trade ties is low compared with their political relations. He added that Iran has serious determination to expand trade ties with Russia, and if Moscow is determined too, a big growth would take place in bilateral trade relations.

The Iranian official said that transportation and transit as well as oil and gas are among the fields the two sides are currently cooperating on. But, he added, banking issues are an obstacle to boost bilateral cooperation.

Mokhber called for efforts to remove that obstacle and said the two countries can use their national currencies in their trade exchanges. Novak, on his part, called Iran an old friend and a trusted partner for Russia, saying that his country has always attached paramount importance to developing relations with Tehran.

He said that the two countries share common views on many issues, and that, Moscow has serious determination to expand relations with Tehran. The Russia official referred to the negotiations he held with Iranian officials, calling the talks positive and constructive aimed at assessing grounds of cooperation between the two sides.

Novak also said that Russia is ready to use Iranian and Russian national currencies in trade exchanges.

He noted that the completion of the North-South Transport Corridor helps boost trade and economic relations between Tehran and Moscow, adding that Iran can turn into a key transport hub for Russia and the region.

North-South Transport Corridor is a sea, rail, and road route expected to facilitate and boost exchange of goods between Iran, India, Russia, Europe, and the Central Asian states.

Uzbekistan Interested in Use of Chabahar Port

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy foreign minister for political affairs and Uzbekistan's deputy foreign minister held a meeting on Wednesday, discussing the expansion of bilateral ties.



In the meeting held in Tehran, Furkat Sidikov, Uzbekistan's Deputy Foreign Minister said that his country is interested in expanding ties with Iran, especially in transportation, trade, and use of Iran's Chabahar Port to facilitate and increase exports and imports between Iran and Uzbekistan.

In the meeting, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs, Ali Bagheri referred to the strong will of both sides to expand relations in all areas and said: "For the willingness of the two countries to go into effect; they need to speed up administrative processes."

"Iran's policy of neighborliness seeks to turn 'common cultural and civilizational assets' into 'continuous political interactions' and 'sustainable economic ties,'" Bagheri added.

The Iranian deputy foreign minister for political affairs added that to strengthen regional peace and stability and achieve the interests of the two countries in terms of fighting terrorism and narco-trafficking and achieving common security goals in the region, we must engage in intensive and cohesive cooperation. On the developments and the current situation in Afghanistan, Bagheri said under no circumstances should countries ignore the plight of the Afghan people.

He noted that the stability of Afghanistan's neighbors is not separate from the establishment of peace and stability in the country. Bagheri then said long-term cooperation would result in strengthened and lasting regional ties.

He said the traditional and previous routes could not meet food security needs, making it necessary to find alternative ways.

Defeat Has No Meaning for the Islamic Revolution

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - IRGC Deputy Commander Ali Fadavi during a ceremony marking 4 Khordad (May 25), Day of Resistance and Day of Dezful said since the Islamic Revolution has roots in the right front, defeat is meaningless for it.

Addressing the ceremony which was held on Wednesday at the Sacred Defense Museum, Fadavi hailed the Islamic Revolution and its resistance adding that since the revolution is rooted in the right's front, during 43 years after the victory of the revolution, this issue has been proved and it is definite that the Islamic Revolution has roots in the Ahl-e Bayt and Gods brings victory for His believers when nobody expects it.

He then pointed to a historic war during Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) era and said that when Muslims



did not obey God and Prophet's orders, they suffered defeat. He then commemorated Dezful and Resistance Day and said that one of the cities where God's promise was materialized was Dezful.

Fadavi then added that enemies of the Islamic Revolution in the past 43 years tested any form of war

against Iran and they were not limited only to the cold war and when they realized they cannot win in the war, they resorted to other types of the wars.

He reiterated any vice front which waged war against Iran faced defeat and they have not even tasted a single victory.

Fadavi went on say that during the eight-year imposed war although they defeated the invasion was carried out by a stupid named Saddam Hossein buy 87 countries admitted that they supported Iraq.

He pointed to the war in Yemen and called it another sign of resistance and following God's orders.

He once again reiterated, "Wherever we acted based on God's recommends and orders, we won."

Fadavi urged people to meet families of martyrs to better understand martyrdom and their feelings.

U.S. Sanctions on Iran, Cuba Led to Self-Sufficiency

TEHRAN (MNA) - Referring to Iran-Cuba's successful cooperation in producing the Covid-19 vaccine, the Iranian health minister said that U.S. illegal sanctions against Iran and Cuba led to the countries' self-sufficiency.

The Iranian health minister Bahram Einollahi met and held talks with his Cuban counterpart José Angel Portal Miranda on the sidelines of the 75th edition of the World Health Assembly (WHA) held in Geneva.

Referring to the capacity of expanding cooperation in the field of medical and paramedical sciences between universities and research centers of Iran and Cuba, Einollahi stated that holding workshops and scientific conferences, as well as exchanging professors and students, will help promote the medical sciences of the two countries.

TEHRAN – Embassy of Republic of Azerbaijan on Tuesday held a ceremony at Esteghlal Hotel of Tehran to mark the 104th Independence Day.

The ceremony hosted by Azerbaijan Ambassador to Tehran H.E. Ali Alizade and Iran's Roads and Urban Development Minister Rostam Qasemi as well as diplomats were among the distinguished guests to the ceremony.

Addressing to the participants in the ceremony, Azerbaijan Ambassador Mr. Alizade briefed the participants of brief history of his country's independence and said, "28th of May is the Independence Day of Azerbaijan, the day of the establishment of the Azerbaijan Democratic Republic (ADR) and a historic event when a democratic republic was created for the first time in the Muslim world in 1918. The date when the Government and state institutions, armed forces of Azerbaijan were created, a democratically-elected Azerbaijani parliament was formed, official state attributes of Azerbaijan were adopted."

He added, "The Azerbaijan Democratic Republic managed to do a lot, but did not last long and 23 months later, as a result of the military intervention, Azerbaijan was annexed to the Soviet Union in 1920. Azerbaijan Democratic Republic left an indelible mark in the history of national statehood with its rich state building experience and prepared a good basis for the future independence of the Republic of Azerbaijan. Annexation of Azerbaijan to the Soviet Union in 1920 shows again that it is even more difficult to maintain independence than to obtain it. As the successor of ADR, Azerbaijan once again regained its independence in 1991 and when Azerbaijan was again at the verge of civil war and loss of independence, Heydar Aliyev, National Leader of Azerbaijan assumed the responsibility of the country, saved the state and the nation of Azerbaijan from the hard and strict

Azerbaijan Celebrates 104th Independence Day in Tehran

BY: F. TAHERPOUR



upward trajectory in the years ahead.

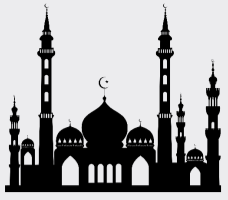
Meanwhile the ambassador along with his chief guest Iranian Minister Qasemi cut a special cake which had been prepared for the ceremony.

tests of history and Azerbaijan embarked on the path of development, ensured stability and the country began to confidently move forward."

He noted, "If the creation of ADR, on May 28, 1918 was a historic event for Azerbaijan nation, the restoration of the territorial integrity of the modern independent Azerbaijan in 2020 became another glorious historic victory and achievement for Azerbaijan and its nation. Under the resolute command of the Supreme Commander-in-chief and due to the professionalism and heroism of victorious Azerbaijan Armed Forces whose 104th anniversary of its establishment will also be celebrated this year, and of course due to the high national spirit and strength, the Republic of Azerbaijan has fulfilled its historic mission. Glory to Allah, thanks to the dedication of our martyrs, Azerbaijan has again secured its territorial integrity. And in the last 2 years we celebrate the anniversary of the Independence Day of the Republic of Azerbaijan with double significance, after the liberation of the internationally recognized territories from almost 30 years of illegal Armenian occupation."

The ambassador then pointed to the achievements of his country under the leadership of President Ilham Aliyev and the country continues its progress.

He also said Azerbaijan and Iran are bound by the relations of strong friendship and I believe that our relations, based on the will of our fraternal peoples, will also continue to develop at the



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:31
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:09
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:51

44. Or think thou that most of them listen or understand?
They are only like cattle;- nay, they are worse astray in Path.
45. Hast thou not turned thy vision to thy Lord?- How He doth prolong the shadow!
If He willed, He could make it stationary! then do We make the sun its guide;

Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (44 - 45)

Iran, Russia Sign Major MoUs on Energy, Banking Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Russia have signed three major memoranda of understanding (MoU) to expand energy and banking ties, says Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji.

The MoUs were signed on Wednesday during a meeting in Tehran attended by Owji and Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak, according to reports by Iran's IRNA and Shana news agencies and reports in the Russian media. The two officials serve as co-chairs of the Iran-Russia economic and trade cooperation commission.

The official IRNA agency quoted Owji as saying that Iran and Russia had agreed to use national currencies for settlement of trade and energy payments.

Novak told Russia's official Tass news agency that Moscow and Tehran had agreed to "move to the highest possible level of mutual settlements in national currencies".

Novak said Iran and Russia will continue talks to connect their electronic payment systems as well as their financial messaging systems.

Owji said that Iranian and Russian government delegates had also signed MoUs on joint projects in the upstream and downstream of their oil and gas sectors.

He told Oil Ministry's Shana news agency that under the deals, Iran will be able to export petrochemicals and technical and engineering services to Russia, including a home-grown technology on catalyst manufacturing.

Novak said he and Owji had discussed issues related to swap supplies of oil and gas between Iran and Russia, as well as ways to attract investment in the implementation of oil and gas projects.



Iranian sources indicated that under new agreements with Russia, Iran will be able to use the Russian territory to carry out swap deliveries of natural gas to other countries.

Under a similar agreement, Iran currently supplies gas to Azerbaijan in return for gas delivered to its northeastern border from Turkmenistan.

Novak's discussion of investment issues with Owji comes amid growing interest in Russian companies to become involved in Iranian oil and gas projects.

The Iranian oil minister did not elaborate on further details about joint projects but said that Iran and Russia will seek to reach a target of \$40 billion in annual value of economic ties as part of a joint efforts by the two countries to offset the impacts of American sanctions on their economies.

Talks Resume for Gas Export to Pakistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of National Iranian Gas Company says talks have resumed over exports of gas to Pakistan but nothing special has been achieved so far.

Speaking to ILNA, Majid Chegini said that Iran seeks exporting gas to Europe and the country wants to expand its market and it is after having new customers.

He added that Iran is willing to enter European gas market via pipeline but it has not decided firmly and for this reason he is unable to talk more.

On exports of gas to Pakistan, he said that since Pakistan is keen to import gas from Iran talks have resumed but still nothing has been achieved.

On the continuity of gas export to Iraq, he said that Iran's contract for gas export to Iraq will end next year and the year after the gas export to Basra will also end but according to the contracts, Iran is obliged to export gas based on what has been stipulated in the contract.

He admitted that Iran has increased its gas export to Iraq on the verbal agreement due to Iraq's needs and Iran's own condition.

He reiterated that Iraq currently owes Iran \$1.6b for gas exports and it has agreed to pay its dues in one month.

Contact for Provision of 2000 Subway Wagons to Be Signed Soon

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy

Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) during his visit



to the 9th International Exhibition on Rail Transportation and Related Industries Equipment in Tehran on Wednesday announced signing of a contract for providing 2000 wagons for the country's subway system in the near future.

Ali Nabavi said that considering finalization of documents for financing the project for providing 630 wagons for Tehran Subway in the form of the consortium of Tehran Wagon Manufacturing and China's CRC, the contract for managing the provision of the urban rail wagons will be signed between Municipalities and Village Administrations Organization as the employer and IDRO as the manager of this project.

He stipulated that this contract will be based on the approval of the Economy Council aimed at centralizing required demands of the urban train of ten metropolises of the country with an approach to improve the share of subway wagon manufactures in order that IDRO can carry out the management of the provision project for providing the rail fleet project with using its experiences in the field of project management in the oil and gas projects.

Nabavi noted that for implementation of this project all main manufacturing groups have been identified, adding that accordingly, in the first step the project management for provision of 630 subway wagon for Tehran is on the cards and in the other phases, the project will be for other metropolises (Shiraz, Isfahan, Karaj and Tabriz).

He expressed hope that by using the modern technologies, the domestic share for manufacturing wagon would increase in the rail fleet.

He said that currently the domestic share for manufacture of wagon is around 40% and according to the defined schedule, this share is expected to rise to 85% by completion of this contract. He added that it is expected the manufacture of 630 wagons to cost over 700m euros.

Tehran, Rome Seek Developing Cooperation On Cooperatives



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In an online meeting, Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC) and Head of Italian Association of industrial and service cooperatives (Legacoop) both explored ways to develop and broaden cooperation on cooperatives.

In the meeting, Head of ICC Mr. Bahman Abdollahi expressed his satisfaction over the online meeting and acquaintance with the Legacoop and briefed his Italian counterpart of the capabilities of Iran's cooperatives sector.

He said that due to the significance of cooperatives in Iran, the ICC has been the parliament of national cooperatives sector and head of ICC attends all national economic councils which make macro decisions in the country.

Abdollahi added that Iran's population is over 84m that over 11m are the members of the cooperatives and there are over 100,000 active cooperatives in the country.

Then Director of Legacoop Mr. Giancarlo Ferrari, for his part, expressed his satisfaction over getting acquainted with the head of ICC and said that Iran and Italy enjoy having historic culture and they have good relations.

He then pointed to the capabilities of the cooperatives sector in Italy and said both countries should help the growth and development of the bilateral economic ties based on the cooperatives principle and multilateralism.

He noted that due to the historic reserves, cooperation of the two countries in the ICA can grow more and they can share their experiences.

Then Abdollahi pointed to the good political relation between Tehran and Rome and said comparing to other European countries, the tie between Iran and Italy is very good and this can help a great deal to the co-operations between the two states in the cooperation sector.

Iran to Make Locomotives in Partnership With Siemens

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's railways chief says the country plans to set up joint ventures with major global manufacturers of locomotives, including the General Electric and Siemens, as part of plans to expand its railways.

Mi'ad Saehi, a deputy transportation minister, said on Tuesday that Iran needs foreign technology to upgrade its outdated railway system although he insisted that the government will continue to provide support to local manufacturers of locomotives.

"It has been agreed that we begin joint manufacturing of locomotives in cooperation with Siemens and GM," Saehi was quoted as saying by the semi-official ILNA news agency.

"The technology in the (Iranian) railway industry is at a low or average level and we desperately need the influence of technology ... that will make the country independent of the foreigners in the long-run," he said.

The official said joint ventures with companies like GM and Siemens will boost parts manufacturing capacity in Iran and will lead to more jobs creation across the industry.

He said that partnerships with foreign companies will be limited to locomotive manufacturing and local companies will continue to supply wagons to the railway system in Iran.

Iran's transportation minister Rostam Qassemi also said on Tuesday that Iran needs at least 1,000 locomotives to increase rail freight capacity by 20 million metric tons per year.

Qassemi said government's policy is to allow joint ventures with foreign companies in the Iranian railway industry to help local manufacturers boost their production capacities.

Iranian government figures show the country has reached a rail length of over 14,000 kilometers after implementing a series of expansion plans in its railways over the past decade.

Tehran, Bishkek Poised to Expand Cooperation in Agricultural Field

TEHRAN (Dispatches)- Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Tajikistan agreed to strengthen their cooperation in the field of agriculture.

For this reason, Tajikistan imported twelve tractors, 100 plows and 427 tons of fish feeds from Iran in the first three months of the current year in 1401 (from March 21 to June 22, 2022).

This is not much, but this is the beginning of a new era of cooperation between agrarians of the two countries.

In a meeting held between Tajiki Minister of Agriculture Sady Karimzoda and Iranian Ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan Mohammad Taghi Saberi, the two sides emphasized the need for strengthening bilateral cooperation in the field of agriculture.

In addition, Iranian and Tajik officials agreed to exchange experience and cooperation in the field of crop production, animal husbandry, protecting plants against diseases and pests, exporting agricultural products, establishing logistics centers and constructing cold storages for agricultural products, etc.

Iranian tractors are presently exported to 30 countries including Central Asian states. Tractors manufactured in Iran are mostly designed for use in gardens and orchards.

The bilateral trade volume exchanged between Iran and Tajikistan hit \$121 million in 2021, showing a twofold hike as compared to a year earlier.

With the coordination made in this regard, the two countries decided to increase bilateral trade up to \$500 million.

Gov't Authorizes Private Sector to Import Wheat

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Iranian government's economic coordination headquarters has issued necessary licenses to facilitate imports of basic goods, particularly wheat, by the private sector.

The move is aimed at achieving the administration's goal to supply and store essential commodities in large amounts.

In a session presided by President Ebrahim Raisi, the economic coordination headquarters instructed the ministry of agriculture to enter into necessary agreements as soon as possible.

It also underlined the need to use existing capacities of the region, especially neighboring countries to expand trade and exports of non-oil products.

Following a report by the minister of industry, mines and trade and a review of the achievements of the president's visit to Oman on Tuesday, some strategic proposals were put forth regarding non-oil exports by Iran to the rest of the region.

Raisi noted that that it's urgent to launch economic diplomacy and use the high potential of the north-south corridor.

He also underlined the necessity of a momentum in expansion of trade with regional countries including Eurasian and African nations

MAPNA Group Signs 6 Contracts, MoUs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the sidelines of the 9th International Exhibition on Rail Transportation and Related Industries Equipment in Tehran, MAPNA Group signed six contracts and MoUs with some rail companies that according to the evaluation of the experts, they will save the national rail industry 50m euros.

According to reports, during the second day of the exhibition on Wednesday, MAPNA Wagon Pars Company had a busy and fruitful day with signing three contracts and three MoUs in the field of rail industry.

Signing contracts for 20 MAPNA passenger wagons with Rail Seir Kousar Company along with signing contract with Parto Bar Farabar Persian Gulf Company for 100 high-sided freight wagons for carrying minerals as well as 20 locomotives are the signed contracts of Wagon Pars Company which is a subsidiary of MAPNA transportation industry group.

Meanwhile MAPNA signed a MoU for the purchase of 400 wagons for carrying grain with Azarkia Trading Company and for 200 low-sided wagon with Arvin Company of Tabriz. Another MoU was signed by the both sides in the field of the purchase of 100 four-axel wagon with Rail Pardaz System Company.



Shanghai to Gradually Reopen Schools in June

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - Schoolchildren in Shanghai will gradually resume some in-person classes in June with daily Covid-19 tests, the local government said, as the Chinese metropolis gradually emerges from a lengthy lockdown that brought it to a standstill.

The country has been fighting its worst coronavirus outbreak since the start of the pandemic, with the epicentre Shanghai banning its 25 million residents from leaving their homes for weeks.

Some of the city's restrictions have recently eased as cases dwindle, though much of the population is still not allowed to venture outside for more than a few hours a day at most.



Tunisia to Vote on New Republic on July 25

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Tunisia will hold a constitutional referendum for a "new republic" on July 25. President Kais Saied has announced, in defiance of critics who warn he wants to establish an autocracy.

The vote will come exactly a year after Saied sacked the government and suspended parliament, moves his rivals called a coup, but which he argues were necessary to resolve a crippling political deadlock.

Saied has since held a widely boycotted public consultation on a new constitution.

He has also appointed a body to suggest how responses from the consultation may be fed into the replacement for the constitution adopted after Tunisia's 2011 revolution, the birthplace of the Arab Spring.



Advancing Russian Forces Reach Key Highway out of Donbas Cities



KYIV (Dispatches) - Advancing Russian forces came closer to surrounding Ukrainian troops in the east, briefly seizing positions on the last highway out of a crucial pair of Ukrainian-held cities before being beaten back, a Ukrainian official said.

Russia has poured thousands of troops into its assault in the eastern Donbas region, attacking from three sides in an attempt to encircle Ukrainian forces in Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk. The cities' fall would bring nearly the whole of Luhansk province under Russian control, a key Kremlin war aim.

Serhiy Gaidai, governor of Luhansk province, acknowledged that Ukrainian forces were retreating, but said the last road out of Lysychansk and Sievierodonetsk, which straddle the Siversky Donets river, remained outside Russian control.

In an interview posted on social media, Gaidai said "around 50" Russian soldiers had reached the highway linking Lysychansk to Ukrainian-held Bakhmut, and "managed to gain a foothold for some time. They even set up some kind of checkpoint there".

"The checkpoint was broken, they were thrown back. That is to say, the Russian army does not control the route now, but they are shelling it," he added.

"From the first day, the entire territory, all the positions of the military, have been shelled. Many of our fortified structures were destroyed," Gaidai said. "It is clear that our boys are slowly retreating to more fortified positions - we need to hold back this horde."

He hinted at further Ukrainian withdrawals, saying it was possible troops would leave "one settlement, maybe two. We need to win the war, not the battle".

Western military analysts see the battle for the two cities as a potential turning point in the war, now that Russia has defined its principal objective as capturing the east.

Reuters journalists operating in Russian-held territory further south saw proof of Moscow's advance in the town of Svitlodarsk, where Ukrainian forces withdrew earlier this week.

The town is now under firm control of pro-Russian fighters, who have occupied the local government building and hung a red flag bearing the Soviet hammer and sickle at the door.

Drone footage filmed by Reuters journalists of the nearby abandoned battlefield showed scores of craters pockmarking a green field surrounded by wrecked buildings. Pro-Russian fighters were milling about in trenches.

Russia's recent gains in the Donbas follow the surrender of Ukraine's garrison in Mariupol last week, and suggest a shift in momentum on the battlefield after weeks in which Ukrainian forces had advanced near Kharkiv in the northeast.

Marcos Says Philippines to Uphold South China Sea Ruling

MAMILA (Dispatches) - Philippine president-elect Ferdinand Marcos Jr said he would uphold an international ruling against Beijing over the disputed South China Sea, insisting he would not let China trample on Manila's maritime rights.

China claims almost all of the resource-rich waterway, through which trillions of dollars in trade passes annually, with competing claims from the Philippines, Brunei, Malaysia, Taiwan and Vietnam.

Beijing has ignored a 2016 decision by The Hague-based Permanent Court of Arbitration that declared its historical claim to be without basis.

Outgoing President Rodrigo Duterte fostered warmer ties with his more powerful neighbor by setting aside the ruling in exchange for promises of trade and investment, which critics said have not materialised.

In his strongest comments yet on the longstanding source of tensions between the two nations, Marcos said he would not "allow a single millimeter of our maritime coastal rights to be trampled upon".



Yemen's Warring Parties Urged to Renew Truce

AMMAN (Dispatches) - The UN special envoy has urged Yemen's warring parties to renew their two-month truce, praising its "tangible benefits" as the deadline approaches next week.

Swedish diplomat Hans Grundberg said the first nationwide truce since 2016 had provided an opportunity to break the cycle of violence that has left hundreds of thousands dead and driven millions to the brink of famine.

"We have seen the tangible benefits the truce has delivered so far for the daily lives of Yemenis," Grundberg said in a statement late on Wednesday.

"The parties need to renew the truce to extend and consolidate these benefits to the people of Yemen, who have suffered over seven years of war."

He was speaking as talks opened in the Jordanian capital Amman between Yemen's Huthi and its internationally recognised government on ending the rebel blockade of Ta'ez, Yemen's third biggest city, which has been largely cut off since 2015.

The meetings were part of the truce agreement that also included resuming commercial flights from Yemen's rebel-held capital, Sanaa, and oil shipments to the lifeline port of Hodeida, which is also under Huthi control.

The Huthis seized Sanaa in 2014, triggering a Saudi-led military intervention in 2015. The war has created the world's worst humanitarian crisis, according to the United Nations.

Under the truce, which expires on June 2, more than 1,000 passengers have flown between Sanaa and Amman, and preparations are underway to start flights to Cairo.

Fighting has "sharply reduced", the statement said, despite reports of continued clashes and civilian casualties. Grundberg urged the two sides to exercise "maximum restraint".

"The truce has presented a window of opportunity to break with the violence and suffering of the past and move towards a peaceful future in Yemen. The parties need to seize this opportunity," he said.

Imran Khan Issues Election Ultimatum After Protest March

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's ousted prime minister Imran Khan disbanded a protest march by supporters after clashes with police outside parliament the previous evening, but he warned that they would return unless an election was called within six days.

Khan has said that the confidence vote that toppled him and ushered in the coalition government led by Prime Minister Shabbaz Sharif last month was the result of a US conspiracy, and he is demanding a fresh election to show he has national support.

"I'm giving you six days. You announce elections in six days," Khan said from atop a truck after he and thousands of his supporters reached Islamabad, adding that the parliament should be dissolved to hold the fresh elections in June.

He warned the government that he will march on the capital again if it didn't meet the demands.

Khan had rallied thousands of supporters to Islamabad, with plans to occupy sensitive part of the capital until Sharif gave in to his demand for new polls.

The Supreme Court had ordered the government late Wednesday night to remove all the blockades police had placed at entry and exit routes into the city, and to give Khan's supporters a specific open place to hold their rally.

The protesters didn't follow the court orders, however, and hundreds reached the heart of the capital,

where they fought running battles with police over several hours before Khan and main body of the rally entered the city.

Police fired tear gas and baton charged the vanguard of the protest march, and detained hundreds of protesters, who had set fire to trees, vehicles, shops, and a bus station, as they advanced up the main thoroughfare of the capital leading to parliament.

At least 18 police and paramilitary troops were wounded, said Information Minister Marriyum Aurangzeb after dozens of the protesters breached the last security defence line to reach just outside the parliament.

The clashes also spread to multiple cities in Punjab province and the southern port city of Karachi.

The government has said Khan's march is illegal and accuses him of seeking to bring protesters to Islamabad with "evil intentions".

Police began removing the shipping containers used to block the main roads into and out of the capital on Thursday. Roads leading to important civic sites, government offices and diplomatic missions had been blocked too, officials said.

And barriers had also been placed across entry and exit points to all major cities in Punjab, and across the Grant Trunk Road, which connects the heartland province and northwest Pakistan.



Taliban Urged to Reverse Restrictions On Afghan Women

KABUL (Dispatches)

- The United Nations rights envoy in Afghanistan said the country faces "severe"

human rights challenges and called on Taliban authorities to reverse growing restrictions on women and investigate attacks against religious minorities.

Richard Bennett, UN special rapporteur for human rights in Afghanistan spoke to reporters at the end of an 11-day visit to the country, his first since his position was created.

"I urge the authorities to acknowledge human rights challenges that they are facing and to close the gap between their words and the deeds," he said.

Bennett expressed concerns over access to education after the Taliban made a U-turn on allowing girls to go to high school in March and this month announced that women must cover their faces, to be enforced by punishing their closest male relatives.

"Directives on maharams (male guardians), enforcing a strict form of hijab and strong advice to stay at home feed the pattern of absolute gender segregation and making women invisible in society," he said.

Taliban deputy spokesman Inamullah Samangani denied human rights concerns, saying authorities had paid attention to the issues mentioned and were working on the issue of girls' secondary education.

Bennett also called for investigation of attacks targeting Afghanistan's Shia and Sufi religious minorities, a trend he said bore "hallmarks of crimes against humanity". Recent months have seen more attacks on mosques and other civilian targets, some of which have been claimed by Islamic State.

The militant group said it was behind three explosions in the northern city of Mazar-i-Sharif yesterday that killed at least 15 in predominantly Shia areas.

Another, unclaimed, blast the same day tore through a Sunni mosque in the capital Kabul, killing at least five people.



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Parsian

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S, J, balcony, F.F

Gheitarieh (\$1600)
140sq.m, 2bdrs
S/p, S, J, F.F

(\$4000)
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Hyundai to Recall 281,000 North American Vehicles

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Hyundai Motor America will recall 281,000 vehicles in North America over seat-belt pretensioners that could explode and project metal fragments, causing injuries. The recall, which comes after three injury reports, covers some 2019-2022 Accent, 2021-2023 Elantra, and 2021-2022 Elantra hybrid vehicles. In the event of a crash, front driver or passenger-side seat-belt pretensioners could explode upon deployment. Dealers will secure seat-belt pretensioners with a cap. Seat-belt pretensioners are part of the a system that locks the seatbelt in place during a crash to provide additional protection to occupants.



Russia on Brink of Historic Default

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia was pushed closer to the brink of a historic debt default on Wednesday as the United States closed the last venue for Moscow to pay its billions in debt back to international investors, as Washington ramps up pressure on the country following its invasion of Ukraine. The U.S. Treasury Department said on its website late on Tuesday it would not extend the license, which was set to expire at 12:01 a.m. ET (4:01 a.m. GMT) on Wednesday. The license allowed Russia to make interest and maturity payments on its sovereign debt to U.S. persons. That waiver has allowed Russia to keep up government debt payments, but its expiry now appears to make default inevitable - the country's first major one on international sovereign bonds in more than a century. Almost \$2 billion worth of payments on Russian international bonds fall due before year-end.

Western sanctions imposed after the Kremlin's Feb. 24 invasion of Ukraine, and countermeasures from Moscow, have complicated the movement of money across borders, yet Russia has made a conscious effort to keep paying bondholders.

"If the bondholders don't get their money when the money is due, factoring in any grace periods that apply, Russia will be in default on a sovereign debt," said Jay Auslander, a partner at law firm Wilk Auslander. "With the waiver gone, there seems to be no way for bondholders to get paid."

While the license only applies to U.S. persons, its lapse will make it challenging for Russia to pay other holders given the integral part U.S. institutions play in the global financial system and the complexity of such payment processes.

On Friday, Russia had rushed forward payments on two international bonds - one denominated in euros and one in dollars - a week before the due date.

But its dash to get the money into creditors' bank accounts ahead of the waiver's expiry might not have left enough time for what is often a multi-day and complex payment process.

One Asia-based bondholder said the payment had not arrived in the firm's account by Wednesday.

Russia has a 30-day grace period on the two payments.

The country's \$40 billion of international bonds have come under the spotlight in recent weeks as debate raged over whether or not to extend the license.

Deputy U.S. Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo previously said the payments siphoned funds away from Moscow's Ukraine war effort and were a "sign of success" for U.S. sanctions policy.

But Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen last week said Washington was unlikely to extend the license.

Unlike in most default situations, Moscow is not short of money. Debt repayment dues pale in comparison to oil and gas export earnings - in April alone, soaring energy prices enabled Russia to reap \$28 billion in revenues.

Russia's most senior lawmaker on Tuesday told the lower house of parliament to study the possibility of stopping the servicing of foreign debt, saying voters were unhappy that Moscow was continuing to pay while its national reserves held abroad were frozen. Bonds are not the only flashpoint, however, as the financial tit-for-tat ratchets up.

Europe, Asia Gas Buyers Switching to Long-Term Supplies

DAEGU (Dispatches) - Natural gas buyers in Asia and Europe are seeking to lock in supplies via long-term contracts as a buffer against volatile global prices, industry executives said, in moves that will reverse the last decade's trend of increasing spot purchases.

Fears of disruptions in Russian gas to Europe and low inventories led the continent to import record volumes of spot liquefied natural gas (LNG), driving prices to all-time highs earlier this year and sparking energy security concerns among buyers globally.

Years of low investments mean new supplies are scarce while Russian supplies are at risk just as more countries have switched from coal to gas to meet climate targets over the past couple of years when LNG prices had been low.

"We see a higher demand now than we had two years ago, definitely, so more interest for longer term contracts, energy security," Peder Bjorland, vice president natural gas marketing and trading at Equinor ASA told Reuters on the sidelines of the World Gas Conference.

He added that European buyers for pipeline and LNG are seeking supplies over a five to 10 years' time frame while longer term contracts spanning 15 to 20 years are more attractive for Asian markets.

The duration of LNG contracts is a sticking point in talks between Qatar and Germany for term supplies.

However, European buyers may go through middlemen to bridge the gap, Anne Mai Hatlem, vice president of LNG at Equinor, said. "For Europe, we see more companies actually signing up for longer term deals and that might be a sign of realism related to how fast can we phase out gas from the market," she said.

Asian spot LNG prices have fallen about 50% from an all-time high in December, but are up nearly three-fold from levels seen in May 2021 as prices have rallied on tight global supplies with European buyers switching out of Russian natural gas for LNG following the Ukraine conflict. Price volatility will likely remain given the uncertainty over Russian gas supplies to Europe and weather conditions, industry executives said. While this drives buyers to lock in supplies, it has also become a stumbling block between sellers and buyers to close deals.



Africa Development Bank Approves \$1.5b for Food Crisis

ACCRA (Dispatches) - The African Development Bank (AfDB) has approved a \$1.5 billion emergency program to alleviate the impact of worsening food insecurity due to the Ukraine war, its director said.

About 20 million farmers on the continent will benefit from the fund as Africa faces a shortage of at least 30 million metric tons of food, especially wheat, maize, and soybeans imported from Russia and Ukraine.

"The US\$1.5 billion... will be used to support African countries to produce food and do so rapidly," AfDB's Group President Akinwumi Adesina told the media ahead of annual general meetings in Ghana's capital Accra.

The program aims to help produce 38 million tons of food. This will consist of 11 million tons of wheat, 18 million tons of maize, six million tons of rice and 2.5 million tons of soya beans.

"Food aid cannot feed Africa. Africa does not need bowls in hand. Africa needs seeds in the ground, and mechanical harvesters to harvest bountiful food produced locally," Adesina said.

"Africa will feed itself with pride for there is no dignity in begging for food." The program aims to deliver seeds, fertiliser and services to farmers and support post-harvest management, the AfDB said in a statement. It will also provide financing and credit guarantees for large-scale supply of fertiliser.

According to an AfDB statement, the food production programme "is an unprecedented comprehensive initiative to support smallholder farmers in filling the food shortfall." The price of wheat has soared in Africa by over 45 per cent since Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

India Caps Sugar Exports After Wheat

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has announced it is restricting its sugar exports to ensure domestic availability and keep prices stable, in a move that comes days after a ban on wheat shipments sent global prices soaring in the wake of the Ukraine war.

The world's largest sugar producer and number two exporter after Brazil said on Tuesday that shipments would be limited to 10 million tons for the current marketing year to September. The export curbs are India's first in six years.

The decision was taken "with a view to maintain the domestic availability and price stability during the sugar season," the food ministry said in a statement.

Benchmark white sugar prices in London jumped more than 1% after India's decision.

Sugar exports are forecast to hit a record high this marketing year, with contracts signed for around nine million tons and 7.8 million tons already shipped, it said.

Although India is a marginal player in the global market, the move sparked a further surge in already-soaring global food prices since Russia's February invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, which previously accounted for 12% of global exports.

The decision also stoked fears of growing protectionism in the wake of the conflict.

Sugar prices have remained relatively stable but the retail inflation rate surged to an eight-year high of 7.8% in April. The government has announced tax cuts on petrol, diesel and coking coal to try to curb inflationary pressures.

"The government is worried about food inflation, and that's why it is trying to ensure that enough sugar remains in the country to cater to the festival season," said a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading firm.

Sugar consumption tends to shoot up during India's major festival season from September to November. Exporters also said the decision to allow mills to export 10 million tons would help India sell a reasonably big quantity of sugar on the world market.

Initially, India planned to cap sugar exports at 8 million tons, but the government later decided to allow mills to sell some more sugar on the world market as production estimates were revised upwards.

The Indian Sugar Mills Association, a producers' body, revised its output forecast to 35.5 million tons, up from its previous estimate of 31 million tons.

Indian mills have so far signed contracts to export 9.1 million tons of sugar in the current 2021/2022 marketing year without government subsidies. Out of the contracted 9 million tons, mills have already dispatched around 8.2 million tons of the sweetener.

Lagarde Gains Key Allies For Rate Hike Plans

DAVOS (Dispatches) - European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde gained key allies for her plan to raise rates out of negative territory this summer, even as one of her own board members expressed some skepticism about the policy path ahead.

With inflation broadening, Lagarde said this week that the ECB's minus 0.5% deposit rate should start rising in July and could be at zero or "slightly above" by the end of September before rising further "towards the neutral rate".

Dutch central bank chief Klaas Knot, among the most conservative members of the ECB's Governing Council said he fully backed this plan and Olli Rehn, Finland's central bank chief, also voiced support for rate hikes in the summer, as did the ECB's own chief economist Philip Lane.

"I'm fully on board. I fully support everything that is in the (Lagarde) blog. I think it nicely charts the policy course," Knot told a World Economic Forum panel in Davos.

Knot earlier said that a 50 basis point rate hike in July should remain a possibility but his comments on Wednesday suggest support for smaller, 25 basis point moves, in line with Lagarde's call for gradualism. Speaking in Helsinki, Rehn, considered by some to be a policy "dove" who favors lower rates, said he also supported 25 point rate hikes in both July and September.

Lane said the rate hike path sketched by Lagarde for the summer was "clear and robust" but he cautioned that any move beyond September will depend on how inflation pans out and the impacts of the war in Ukraine.

Earlier this week, the central bank governors of Austria and Latvia both said that a 50 basis point rate hike should be an option in July, indicating that a 25 basis point increase is not yet a done deal.

Fabio Panetta, an outspoken dove, took a somewhat different view, arguing that policy normalisation should not be equated with getting interest rates back to a neutral setting. Instead, he said the aim should be to cement the inflation at the ECB's 2% target.

"Normal does not mean neutral... the normalisation process should not be assessed against unobservable reference points, such as the natural or neutral rate of interest," Panetta said in a speech in Frankfurt.

Others, including French central bank chief Francois Villeroy de Galhau, an influential centrist voice, have also argued that the neutral rate is a key reference point in policy normalisation.

The nominal neutral rate is estimated to be between 1% and 2%, or 150 to 250 basis points above the current minus 0.5% deposit rate, suggesting that the ECB could raise rates well into next year before approaching this level.

Backing up his argument for caution, Panetta also said that the growth outlook is clearly weakening, a view Rehn appeared to share when he said the ECB was likely to cut its growth projection next month.

Malaysia Among Economies to Win Big From High Commodity Prices



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia will be among the economies that will win big from the high commodity prices and will pay less of a price on the inflation side as it exports several times of its domestic production, according to a Moody's Analytics report.

It highlighted that Malaysia, Colombia, Indonesia, and Saudi Arabia were among the few economies that would benefit from the high commodity prices.

"For Colombia and Saudi Arabia this is crude oil. For Indonesia and Malaysia this is palm oil, the price of which has surged following severe global shortages of Russia - and Ukraine-produced sunflower oil," senior economist Jesse Rogers said in an analysis titled "Emerging Market View: The Growth Recession".

He said across the rest of the emerging world, inflation is pushing higher, and central banks are not going to give up until it is tamed.

"Monetary policy in most of Latin America is now in the restrictive territory. And even in Southeast Asia, where inflation is a relative oddity, higher prices are sprouting.

"Central banks have snapped into action, with bank governors in the Philippines and Malaysia raising rates. Indonesia and Thailand will be next." Rogers said central bank surveys show inflation expectations are still on the rise which could pose a problem if consumers begin to factor price increases into demands for higher wages - something that is not as yet widespread, in large part as labour markets remain weak.

The situation is likely worse in emerging Asia, the senior economist opined.

While there is a general lack of timely labour market statistics, he said emerging Asian economies were hit harder by the Delta wave last summer, and gross domestic product contraction in the second and third quarters.

100k Iranians Gather to Chant "Salute, Commander" Anthem

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Nearly 100,000 Iranians on Thursday gathered at Tehran's Azadi Stadium to sing "Salute, Commander" song.

Although much more people registered to partake in the event, 100,000 people had the chance to attend the stadium, where the original singer of the chant, Abouzar Rouhi, was ready to lead the enormous choir. The organizers have recommended people to avoid flocking to the stadium and watch the event broadcast live via the state TV channel 3.



World Must Unite, Stand Up to U.S. Unilateralism

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official has decried U.S. sanctions against Russia over the Ukraine crisis, calling on the international community to unite and stand up against Washington's unilateral policies.

Ali Shamkhani, Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), in a meeting with his Russian counterpart Nikolai Patrushev on the sidelines of the fourth meeting of the Regional Security Dialogue in the Tajik capital city of Dushanbe on Friday called for resisting US unilateralism.

"The world must unite against the unilateral policies of the United States. The Islamic Republic of Iran has been subject to sanctions for the past 43 years, and has become an epitome of the ineffectiveness of sanctions imposed to impose political will on independent countries," he said.

He stressed the need for strategic cooperation between Tehran and Moscow, the two all-weather allies, in the face of U.S. unilateral policies.

"It seems as if sanctions against Russia will not be lifted once the [Ukraine] war comes to an end. Therefore, it is necessary to devise a coherent system of cooperation between the sanctioned countries on a strategic and long-term perspective," Shamkhani said.

The top security official expressed satisfaction with consultations between Iran and Russia at various levels, calling for stronger bilateral cooperation in the wake of rapidly changing global dynamics.

The SNSC secretary referred to development in cooperation, as well as joint financial, banking, and tariff mechanisms among the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) member states as an important measure that can neutralize the impact of illegal sanctions on economic and trade relations between the countries.

Shamkhani also expounded on Western efforts to involve Russia in the Ukraine crisis, stating that some states are taking advantage of the war to implement their expansionist plans in the region and pursue their ambitious goals.

"Such attempts need to be confronted seriously," he asserted.

Iran's top security official went on to voice concern over unfolding developments in neighboring Afghanistan and the emergence of various terrorist groups in the country.

"The lack of a broad-based government in the country is among the main reasons for the continuing instability and insecurity as well as mounting economic and livelihood pressure on ordinary people there."



Patrushev, for his part, said Western sanctions against Russia would have most likely been enforced even if the Ukraine crisis had not broken out.

"The wide-ranging Western sanctions against Russia have created an opportunity for our people to come to terms with the futility of liberal political groups' calls for full engagement and cooperation with the West. The approach had suppressed our national production," he said.

"Russia's special operation in Ukraine is just an excuse to impose extensive sanctions on our country. The West is determined to double down on its anti-Russia measures. The sanctions would have been imposed even if the Ukraine crisis had not sparked off."

He said the Russian operation in Ukraine exposed the development of chemical and biological laboratories by the United States there, emphasizing that Moscow plans to publish key relevant documents in near future.

Patrushev also underscored the need for activation of extensive cooperation capacities between Russia and Iran, saying, "transit cooperation and completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor are among the most important steps the two countries must take."

Iran Urges SCO to Slam Assassination of Iranian Commander

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarzadeh has written a letter to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) to call on the member states to condemn the cowardly assassination of an Iranian commander.

Keshavarzadeh addressed Secretary-General of the SCO Zhang Ming, writing that one of the objectives of the organization is the fight against terrorism as well as consolidation of peace and stability in Eurasia, so given the fact that Iran plays a key role to this end, Tehran urges the organization to condemn the cowardly assassination of Martyr Hassan Sayyad Khodaei.

Khodaei was assassinated in an armed attack by two motorcyclists in Tehran on Sunday. The terrorist attack took place around 4 p.m. local time, when the IRGC member was getting out of his car to enter his home in an eastern neighborhood of the Iranian capital.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi vowed that the Islamic Republic will definitely take revenge for the assassination of the Iranian anti-terror commander.

Addressing the heads of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU), the Parliamentary Union of the OIC Member States (PUIC), and the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in separate messages delivered on Thursday, Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad-Baqer Qalibaf called for global condemnation of the assassination of the Iranian colonel.

New York Times reported on Wednesday that an intelligence official said that the information of interactions between Israeli and American authorities show that Israel was behind the assassination.

Raisi Gov't Determined To Expand Oil Export Markets

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The administration of President Ebrahim Raisi has paved the way for supply of crude oil in the Energy Exchange to boost oil export and find new purchasers around the globe, an Iranian official underlined.

CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company and Deputy Oil Minister of Iran Mohsen Khojasteh Mehr told IRNA in an exclusive interview that the oil export statistics in the Raisi administration indicate a growing trend, noting that the administration has also succeeded in receiving oil export revenues.

The Iranian oil industry has made efforts to absorb investments in this industry, he said, adding that Iranian companies have improved their capacities in order to pave the ground for participating in international arenas.

Provided that all capabilities of the Islamic country are being utilized to nullify illegal and cruel sanctions, Iran will not be affected by the embargo, he noted.

Pointing to the increase of oil export, the CEO argued that the hike includes both new export destinations as well as new oil purchasers in a bid to revitalize traditional market.

Estimates for mounting Iran's oil production capacity to 5.7 million bpd is a realistic approach, which has its basis on production potential of Iranian oil reservoirs and expertise analyses, he mentioned.

Iran has also succeeded in becoming self-sufficient in planning and installing equipment of oil industry, the official said.

Iranians are conducting negotiations with other states to export technical and engineering services, he noted, adding that the Iranian authorities are determined to enhance the private sector in order to pave the way for implementing projects overseas.

A new suggestion on selling oil has been proposed by the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC), which is being studied, he said, noting that the new model consists of bonds for commodity deposit certificate.

Swiss Envoy Summoned to Protest U.S. Seizure of Iranian Oil Cargo

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry on Friday summoned the chargé d'affaires of Switzerland, which represents Washington's interests in Tehran, to protest the US seizure of Iranian oil cargo from a Russian-operated ship in Greece's territorial waters.

"The Swiss chargé d'affaires was summoned to convey Iran's concern and strong protest over the continued violation of international laws and maritime conventions concerning free navigation and trade by the U.S. administration," the director-general of the ministry's department for American Affairs, said in a statement on Friday.

The ministry also demanded the immediate release of the seized ship and its confiscated cargo.

The Swiss envoy, according to the statement, assured that he would convey Iran's message to American officials.

Chances of...

FROM PAGE 1

The U.S. top negotiator for the Vienna talks said the Biden administration is "prepared to get back into the JCPOA for as long as our assessment is that its nonproliferation benefits are worth the sanctions relief."

"If Iran maintains demands that go beyond the scope of the JCPOA, we will continue to reject them, and there will be no deal. It is not our preference, but we are fully prepared to live with and confront that reality if that is Iran's choice," Malley said.

The U.S. diplomat was apparently referring to Iran's demand for removing its Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) from Washington's list of foreign terrorist organizations.

Iran maintains that the IRGC's designation in 2019 was part of Trump administration's so-called maximum pressure campaign against Iran, and, therefore, it has to be reversed unconditionally.

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

Malley said the IRGC labeling is outside the JCPOA scope, urging Iran to give concessions beyond the deal if it wants the designation removed.

"We'd made clear to Iran that if they wanted any concession on something that was unrelated to the JCPOA - like the FTO designation - we needed something reciprocal from them that would address our concerns," the US envoy said.

"Iran has made the decision that it's not prepared to take the reciprocal steps; they have to decide now, are they prepared to reach a deal without extraneous demands," he added without revealing Washington's demands.

Israelis Dare Not Fire...

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The birth of Hezbollah, according to the senior Iranian commander, is one of the many blessings of the liberation of Iran's southwestern city of Khorramshahr during the Iran-Iraq war in the 1980s.

Those who were trained in the school of the late founder of the Islamic Republic Imam Khomeini, with the culture of the liberation of Khorramshahr, managed to free southern Lebanon, he asserted.

Qa'ani said the youth who liberated Khorramshahr had very basic weapons and equipment but succeeded in their astounding operation because they had been trained in the same school of thought.

Meanwhile Hezbollah Secretary General Seyed Hassan Nasrallah said that Hezbollah "is stronger than you can imagine, it's stronger than any time before."

Hezbollah Secretary General Sayyed Hasan Nasrallah delivered a televised speech on Resistance and Liberation Day on Wednesday that started on at 20:30 Beirut Local Time, Al-Manar TV website reported.

According to Al-Manar, on May 25, 2000, the Israeli occupation army completed its withdrawal from most of the Lebanese territories, except Shebaa Farms and KfarShuba Hills, due to the heavy losses inflicted upon it by the Resistance strikes. At the start of his speech, Hezbollah chief said "The day of victory over 'Israel' and liberation from its hegemony is one of Allah's days."

Nasrallah congratulated all people on this joyful day, saying "This is what people felt when returning to their liberated villages."

He saluted all who sacrificed, factions and sects, for the sake of the resistance, and thanked all who provided help and assistance to the Lebanese resistance during past years.

Hezbollah secretary general further thanked Syria, Iran, and whoever stood beside the resistance during that critical time even if it was only a word of support.

He also extended gratitude to the Lebanese army especially in the late 1990s.

Nasrallah also highlighted that "The new generation shall acknowledge the humiliation and suffering the Lebanese endured at checkpoints and in prisons."

Iran Urges UN to...

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He added, "Bearing in mind the dangerous consequences of such terrorist acts on international peace and security, the international community should strongly condemn such brutal assassinations targeting innocent citizens of other countries by well-known state terrorism of certain regimes."

He said preliminary assessments and available basic evidence showed that the terrorist attack has been carried out in line with "systematic assassinations of innocent Iranian citizens and scientists by certain regimes" with the purpose of advancing their own illegitimate foreign policy goals in the region.

Takht-Ravanchi emphasized that such criminal acts constitute a blatant violation of the UN Charter, principles of international law and fundamental human rights and pose an undeniable threat to regional and international peace and stability.

The perpetrators and supporters are responsible for the consequences, he added.

He noted that the continuation of such acts of state terrorism has vividly challenged the rule of law and created "great and ever-increasing" concerns for the international community.

"In line with its responsibilities to genuinely fight terrorism and in a non-discriminatory manner, the UN is expected to condemn this atrocious act," the Iranian envoy added.

He emphasized that Iran has been a victim of terrorism and a regional leader in the genuine and serious fight against it; however, such a heinous crime would never undermine but would rather strengthen the Islamic Republic's resolve to continue battling terrorism.

Takht-Ravanchi pointed to the investigations underway into the terrorist act against the former IRGC member and reiterated that Iran would take all the necessary measures to protect its people and interests.

"We will use all available mechanisms to hold the perpetrators of this terrorist crime and their supporters accountable," he said.

Meanwhile, the New York Times on Wednesday quoted an Israeli intelligence official as saying that the Tel Aviv regime has informed American officials that it was behind the assassination of the IRGC member.

According to the report, Israeli officials have claimed that Khodaei had been involved over the past two years in attempted terrorist attacks against Israelis, Europeans and American civilians and government officials in Columbia, Kenya, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates and Cyprus.

Iran Opposed to...

FROM PAGE 1

He said Iranian health minister Behrang Eshaghi had declared the opposition during his speech to the WHO assembly while delegates representing the country in committee discussions had also opposed the move.

The Iranian health system has suffered from the impacts of American sanctions on the country during the spread of the coronavirus pandemic.

Iran was forced to rely on home-grown capacities to tackle one of the largest outbreaks of the disease in the Middle East as the sanctions hampered its access to foreign supplies of vaccines, medicines and medical equipment.

U.S. officials have repeatedly claimed that Iran's humanitarian needs have been exempt from the sanctions. That comes as foreign suppliers and banks have refused to process Iranian requests for medical supplies under pressure from Washington.

New Sanctions...

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"It is clear that despite its initial deceiving remarks, the administration of [U.S. President Joe] Biden continues the same failed policy. This recent measure is another sign of the U.S. government's ill will toward the Iranian people and an extension of the disastrous 'maximum pressure' policy," the spokesman added.

"As indicated in a recent statement by the UN Special Rapporteur, unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States amount to blatant violation of international regulations, which pursue no other goal, but to inflict pain and suffering on the Iranian people and the region, and to create unrest," Khatibzadeh said.

He added that such measures will never affect the will of the Iranian people and government in pursuing their goals, including elimination of terrorism from the region.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves the right to counteract such measures in a proportionate and firm manner in accordance with the principles of international law," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said.

PSG to Play Three Games In Japan in July

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain will play three J-League teams on a tour of Japan this summer, the French champions said, as they court an Asian audience with Kylian Mbappe still in tow. PSG will play Kawasaki Frontale, who have won the J-League four times in the past five years, at Tokyo's Olympic stadium on July 20 before taking on Urawa Reds in Saitama three days later. They will round off the tour against Gamba Osaka in Osaka on July 25.

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Ibrahimovic out Seven to Eight Months After Knee Surgery

MILAN (Dispatches) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic will be out of action for seven to eight months after the veteran striker underwent successful knee surgery, new Serie A champions AC Milan announced. In a statement, Milan said that the 40-year-old striker went under the knife in the French city of Lyon today, an operation which the club said had been scheduled some time ago. Ibrahimovic has missed large chunks of the past season with injuries, Milan relying on France forward Olivier Giroud in their charge to a first league title in 11 years.

Roma Win First Europa Conference League Title

TIRANA (Dispatches) - Nicolo Zaniolo's goal earned AS Roma a first major European title in more than 60 years after a 1-0 win over Feyenoord in the Europa Conference League final in Albania, completing a unique European trophy haul for Jose Mourinho.

Roma coach Mourinho, who had previously won the Champions League, Europa League and the UEFA Cup with other clubs, can now add the third-tier European title -- the Italian side's first trophy in 14 years -- to his medal tally.

The 22-year-old Zaniolo earned Roma victory with an expertly-taken finish in the 32nd minute, as he became the first Italian to score in a European final since Filippo Inzaghi against Liverpool in the 2007 Champions League.

Roma, whose only previous continental title was the old Fairs Cup in 1961, held off a spirited comeback from their Dutch opponents, who were twice denied by the woodwork in the second half.

That ensured that Mourinho became the first manager to win a European trophy with four different clubs, after previous successes at Porto, Inter Milan and Manchester United.

"We are a real team, we proved that. Now we have to celebrate and then start again, which is always difficult after a great victory, but a real team wins, celebrates and starts again," Roma captain Lorenzo Pellegrini told Sky Sport Italia.

"I said yesterday that I never would've imagined at the age of 25 to achieve this with the Roma jersey and the captain's armband. It is a wonderful moment."

Given both Roma and Feyenoord came into the contest having already secured Europa League football for next season through their domestic league position, it was all about the glory in Tirana.

Early on it looked like there was only going to be one winner, as Roma dominated the opening exchanges, without troubling Feyenoord goalkeeper Justin Bijlow, playing his first match since March 10.

One chance was all they needed to hold the lead at the interval, with Zaniolo brilliantly bringing the ball down on his chest before slotting home his first goal in all competitions since a hat-trick in the quarter finals against Bodo/Glimt.



Zaniolo also became the youngest Italian to score in a major European final since Alessandro Del Piero against Borussia Dortmund in the Champions League in May 1997.

Feyenoord, looking to be the first Dutch club to win a European competition in 20 years, since their 2002 UEFA Cup triumph, failed to really test Rui Patricio in the Roma goal in the opening period.

Yet they started the second half brightly, with Roma's Gianluca Mancini diverting an early Feyenoord corner onto his own post.

The Dutch side kept coming and hit the woodwork again as Tyrell Malacia's superb strike from 25 metres was tipped onto the post by Patricio.

Further chances came and went, but some last-ditch blocks and wasteful finishing ensured Roma's long wait for a European trophy would end in Mourinho's first season in the Italian capital.

"We really wanted to take that cup with us, to thank the supporters and to put Feyenoord back on the map, unfortunately it didn't work out like that," Bijlow said.

"We put the pressure on them and then you saw they had trouble dealing with us. But unfortunately it wasn't good enough. It's especially terrible that we can't take the cup to Rotterdam."



Nadal Sails Through With 300th Major Win

PARIS (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal produced an imperious show to secure his 300th Grand Slam match victory, dismantling local hope Corentin Moutet 6-3 6-1 6-4 to book his spot in the French Open third round.

Nadal counts 13 Roland Garros titles among his overall 21 majors -- the highest among men -- and despite his injury-blighted buildup to the claycourt tournament he has looked at his usual best in the first two rounds.

The Spaniard, whose preparations were hampered by a rib injury and a foot problem, was not keen to talk about his physical condition.

"I can't try to go very deep in a tournament if I'm worried about my physical issues every single day," he told reporters.

"So if something happens, I am gonna accept it. But for the moment I am focused on the tennis."

The Spaniard, who turns 36 next week, will next meet Dutch 26th seed Botic van de Zandschulp with a potential quarter-final looming against world number one Novak Djokovic who defeated him in last year's semi-finals.

Antetokounmpo, Doncic Head All-NBA First Team

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Milwaukee Bucks forward Giannis Antetokounmpo, Dallas Mavericks star Luka Doncic and two-time MVP Nikola Jokic headed the voting for the 2021-2022 All-NBA First Team, the league said.

Antetokounmpo, Doncic and Jokic were joined in the starting line-up by Phoenix Suns guard Devin Booker and Boston Celtics forward Jayson Tatum.

Antetokounmpo topped the voting, receiving first team votes on all 100 ballots. It was the Greek star's fourth consecutive selection to the first team.

Doncic and Jokic, meanwhile, each received 88 of the 100 votes.

Booker garnered 82 first team selections while Tatum completed the line-up with 49 votes.

There was no place for Philadelphia 76ers star Joel Embiid, who instead found himself heading the second team line-up.

Memphis Grizzlies star Ja Morant, Brooklyn's Kevin Durant, Golden State's Stephen Curry and Chicago's DeMar DeRozan completed the second team line-up.

Neymar Wants To Stay at PSG

PARIS (Dispatches) - Neymar says he would like to stay at French champions Paris Saint-Germain despite rarely justifying his world record fee of 222 million euros (\$236 million) and amid rumors the club would like him to leave.

The 30-year-old Brazilian signed an extension to his contract last year taking him up to 2025.

However, another disappointing season blighted by injury has placed question marks over his future at the Qatari-owned club.

French sports daily L'Equipe claimed in Wednesday's edition PSG "would not be opposed to Neymar leaving."

The former Barcelona star -- who scored his 100th goal for PSG since he arrived in 2017 in the 5-0 thrashing of Metz last Saturday -- said he had not heard the rumors about him possibly leaving the club.

Wimbledon Will Never Be an Exhibition



LONDON (Dispatches) - Two-time former Wimbledon champion Andy Murray said today the tournament "will never feel like an exhibition" despite it being stripped of ranking points over the ban on Russian and Belarusian players.

The decision by the ATP and WTA to remove the sport's most prestigious tournament of ranking points has prompted some players to say they may skip Wimbledon, the year's third Grand Slam.

"I'd hazard a guess that most people watching on centre court Wimbledon in a few weeks' time wouldn't know or care about

how many ranking points a player gets for winning a 3rd round match," tweeted Murray.

"But I guarantee they will remember who wins. Wimbledon will never be an exhibition and will never feel like an exhibition." Former world number one Naomi Osaka has revealed she is "leaning towards not playing" Wimbledon while defending champion Novak Djokovic said he will play despite losing 2,000 points.

But Djokovic described it as a "lose-lose situation", and the controversy has showed no signs of abating, with several players at the ongoing French Open likening Wimbledon to a high-profile exhibition event this year.

"I follow golf very closely and have no idea how many ranking points the winner of the the Masters gets," said Murray, who opted to miss the French Open to prepare for the grass-court season.

"Me and my friends love football and none of us know or care how many ranking points a team gets for winning the FIFA World Cup.

"But I could tell you exactly who won the World Cup and the Masters."

Barcelona Down All Stars 3-2

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Teenage striker Ansu Fati got a late winner as Barcelona survived a scare to beat Dwight Yorke's A-League All Stars in a 3-2 thriller in front of 70,000 fans in Sydney.

The Catalan giants only arrived in Australia on Tuesday morning on a whistlestop 48-hour visit, barely a day after completing their league season with a 2-0 loss to Villarreal, which saw them finish 13 points adrift of champions Real Madrid.

They showed few effects from the long trip to turn on the style for a noisy pro-Barca crowd, dominating the first half and going into the break 1-0 ahead after French striker Ousmane Dembele clinically finished in the 34th minute.

But the All Stars stunned them with two goals in eight second-half minutes, before Xavi Hernandez's side rallied to retake control with strikes from Adama Traore and Fati.

After a rare trophy-less season, Xavi brought a strong squad with him and a host of top names started including captain Sergio Busquets, veteran Dani Alves, and the unsettled Dembele, who may have played his last game for the club.

It was always going to be a tough task for Yorke's hastily convened team, and with the former Manchester United striker on the sidelines for his first major coaching job.

Both sides had early chances with Barca teenager Alejandro Balde testing goalkeeper Filip Kurto at the near post in the sixth minute as the visitors quickly settled into a free-flowing rhythm.

Dembele went close and Gavi should have done better when Alves found him with a cross as the chances began piling up. The breakthrough finally came with Gavi feeding Dembele after intercepting a pass and the Frenchman drilling the ball into the right-hand corner.



Salah Staying At Liverpool for Sure Next Season

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Mohamed Salah has confirmed he will see out his contract at Liverpool next season, but the Egypt forward remains non-committal on his future at Anfield beyond 2023.

Salah's contract expires at the end of next season and talks over a new deal have dragged on for months without a resolution.

Ahead of Saturday's Champions League final against Real Madrid, Salah said his full focus is on winning the biggest prize in European football for the second time.

"I don't want to talk about the contract. I'm staying next season for sure, let's see after that," said Salah at Liverpool's pre-match media day today.

"In my mind I don't focus about the contract. I don't want to be selfish, it's about the team. It's a really important week for us, I want to see Hendo (Jordan Henderson) having the trophy again in his hands." However, Real's failure to land France forward Kylian Mbappe from Paris Saint-Germain has sparked speculation they could now enter the race for Salah.

The 29-year-old picked up his third Premier League Golden Boot in five seasons on Sunday as he shared the award with Tottenham's Son Heung-min on 23 goals.

Salah's fellow forward Sadio Mane also refused to commit his long-term future to Liverpool. The Senegal international is out of contract in 2023 and has been linked with a move to Bayern Munich.

"This question (about my future) I will answer after the Champions League," Mane told Sky Sports. "If I'm staying or not, I'm going to answer after Champions League."

