

Health Ministry Announced on Sunday That the Number of Deaths From the COVID Pandemic in Iran Increased to **141,385** With **Two** More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

The Iranian Parliament Is Considering Replacing the Manager of the country's National Soccer Team, Dragan Skocic, as It seems the Parliament Seeks Hiring an Iranian Coach as Skocic's Replacement

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Tehran Not to Back Down From Its Positions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says the country will not stop the negotiations on the removal of the sanctions imposed on the country, adding that the other parties to the talks must return to their commitments under the 2015 deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Raisi made the remarks in a late Saturday televised interview in which he addressed the nation on various domestic and international issues.

Asked about the EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell's visit to Iran, Raisi said, "Our policy is to have the sanctions removed and these sanctions must be removed as soon as possible, because they are unjust and against the commitments of the US and Europe [under the JCPOA]. The other side must return to its commitments. This path will be followed; we follow the path of thwarting the sanctions."

"The issue of [the sanctions removal] negotiations were discussed during the EU foreign policy chief's visit to Tehran. We have no decision to stop the negotiations, but we will not back down from our positions," Raisi said in another part of the interview.

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Doha May Host Fresh Talks on JCPOA

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Nour News, affiliated with the country's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), says a fresh round of talks on the removal of anti-Tehran sanctions is highly expected to be convened in the Qatari capital of Doha.

Nour News made the announcement in a Persian-language tweet on Sunday, a day after a meeting with the European Union foreign policy chief Josep Borrell. The European Union's top diplomat traveled to Tehran to hold negotiations with the country's high-ranking officials as part of efforts aimed at resuming stalled Vienna talks on the fate of the 2015 Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

"After Borrell visited Tehran, everyone is keeping an eye out for the date and venue of the forthcoming negotiations and how they are going to take place. Borrell had said the talks would not be held in Vienna," the tweet said.

"Based on the news received by Nour News Doha has a better chance of hosting the upcoming talks, given Qatar's continued efforts in this regard."

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Iraqi PM in Tehran For High-Level Talks



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhimi arrived in Tehran yesterday at the head of a high-ranking politico-economic delegation to hold high-level talks with senior Iranian officials on the most important mutual and international issues.

Kadhimi was welcomed by Iran's Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian upon his arrival at the Iranian capital on Sunday.

The Iraqi premier was officially welcomed by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi later the same day.

Following the official welcoming ceremony, the two sides sit for talks on matters of mutual interest.

The Iranian and Iraqi officials are likely to discuss the resumption of talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia, among other topics, the fifth round of which was held in April.

Before his Iran visit, Kadhimi had visited Saudi Arabia, where he was welcomed by Saudi Arabia's crown prince and de facto leader, Mohammed bin Salman. The two leaders also discussed potential areas for joint cooperation and exchanged views and opinions on a number of regional and global issues "which contribute to supporting and strengthening security and stability in the region," Saudi Press Agency reported.

Some media outlets claimed al-Kadhimi arrived in Tehran on a visit aimed at reactivating Baghdad-mediated talks between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

In early June, al-Kadhimi said that talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia hosted by Baghdad have entered an advanced stage.

He stressed that talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia hosted by Baghdad have entered a remarkably advanced stage.

Addressing Iraq's foreign relations and regional role of this country, the Iraqi premier said that Baghdad played an important role in bringing the views of countries in the region closer by hosting talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

In recent years the relation between Tehran and Baghdad has become strong and the trade volume of the two countries has increased considerably and it hit \$9.5b last year which was \$1.5m more than their trade in the preceding year.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

No Retreat From Principles in JCPOA Talks

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always welcomed talks and friendship but it is not ready to give in excessive demands of the other parties for talks or friendship and this is one of the major principles of the country and it is observing it during the nuclear talks, so called the JCPOA.

On Saturday, Tehran hosted European Union Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell as the two sides exchanged views on the stalled nuclear talks for the revival of the JCPOA and announced the talks will resume very soon.

Tehran has always welcomed the talks but it has reiterated that it will fight for its rights and it will not bow to the West's excessive demands and this is the West which prolongs the talks or creates hurdle in way of talks.

Iran's top security official in meeting with Borrell slammed Europe's inaction and the U.S.'s lack of commitment to its obligations as per the 2015 agreement, saying Tehran will continue its remedial nuclear measures until the West changes its illegal approach.

"Iran's remedial measures in the nuclear sector are merely a legal and rational reaction to US unilateralism and Europe's inaction and will continue as long as the West's illegal practices persist," Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani said in the meeting.

He added that the illegal withdrawal of the United States from the deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), has caused the Iranian nation to lose trust in the West and Washington.

"We have fulfilled all our commitments under the JCPOA and have never left the negotiating table and we are still looking for a strong, lasting and reliable agreement," Iran's top security official said.

Shamkhani emphasized that the removal of illegal sanctions and full and lasting realization of the economic benefits of the JCPOA are Iran's main objectives in engaging in the talks with the P4+1 group of countries in the Austrian capital of Vienna.

"Iran does not favor an agreement that fails to meet the two above-mentioned principles in providing a reliable guarantee from the U.S. and Europe," he said.

He emphasized that the participants in the Vienna talks failed to reach a final agreement on the JCPOA revival because of the U.S.' contradictory behavior and its sticking to threats and sanctions.

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Pakistan Agrees To Import Tariff of 5% For Iranian Apple

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Pakistan has agreed to limit the tariff imposed on apple imported from Iran to 5% under a new agreement signed between agriculture and food authorities of the two countries.

Head of Iran's National Association of Agricultural Products said on Saturday that a new round of Iranian apple exports to Pakistan will start in September and Iranian exporters can supply up to 500,000 metric tons of the fruit to Pakistan under the new tariff system.

Seyed Reza Nourani said Iranian and Pakistani authorities had signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to boost trade of agriculture products between the two countries.

A report by the official IRNA news agency suggested that Syed Waseem-ul-Hassan, the top food security commissioner from Pakistan's Ministry of National Food Security & Research, had signed the MoU with Iranian agriculture ministry officials in Tehran on Saturday.

The report said the MoU will settle quarantine issues between Iran and Pakistan while allowing for increased trade of agriculture products between the two neighbors.

It said Pakistan will supply mango, kino and rice to Iran under the new agreement while Iran will be able to export apple and nuts to Pakistan. The report did not elaborate on tariffs agreed between the two sides. Other sources said, however, that the new trade arrangement will not be related to a barter mechanism that was agreed between Iran and Pakistan last year.

Iran Begins Buying More Tea From Kochi Sales

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Rising tea prices in North India coupled with the continuing uncertainty in Sri Lanka has prompted overseas buyers, especially from Iran, to source more quantities from Kochi auctions.

Traders pointed out that orthodox tea prices in Kolkata auctions are hovering in the range of ₹350-450 with the second flush, prompting overseas buyers not only from Iran but also from places such as Turkey and Russia to look at South Indian markets.

Auctioneers Forbes, Ewart & Figgis said clean black, well-made Nilgiri whole leaves witnessed a good demand and increased in value and the average price realisation in sale 25 was up by ₹4 at ₹159 per kg.

The quantity offered in orthodox grades is also on the rise in the recent period in which the trade attributed the reason to the shifting of producers with dual manufacturing facilities to orthodox tea production. This is evident from the declining trend in CTC dust future offerings at Cochin from the existing 9,44,752 kg, traders said.

Meanwhile, CTC dust prices were up by ₹3 to ₹5. The average price realization rose to ₹127, witnessing a ₹6 increase from the previous week.

A leading tea exporter in South India told BusinessLine that Iran and other West Asian markets are traditional buyers of orthodox leaf from both South Indian and North Indian auction centers. However, surging prices of orthodox and best quality CTC teas has prompted them to look at South Indian orthodox teas as well.

The uncertainty in Sri Lankan tea market is also a factor in the demand increasing. But the availability of orthodox grades is very low at all these centers. The rising demand is likely to continue for some more time. However, to cater to the growing demand, he said three big tea manufacturing companies in South India are reported to have taken the lead to raise orthodox tea production.

He said CTC dust prices in Coonor auctions have witnessed a subdued demand leading to a significant drop in prices with 75 per cent of the offered quantity remaining unsold. This is mainly because of the reserve price fixed by bought tea leaf tea manufacturers.

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Tehran Ready to Send COVID-19 Vaccines to Yemen

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi said that Iran is ready to dispatch humanitarian supplies, COVID-19 vaccines in particular, to Yemen.

Speaking during a phone conversation with Chairman of Yemen's Supreme Political Council Mahdi al-Mashat, the Iranian president said that Iran supports any ceasefire that would lead to bringing full peace in Yemen and the lifting of the economic siege on the country.

Raisi reiterated Iran's support for Yemen's sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Yemeni official, for his part, hailed Iran's all-out support for the Yemeni people in the international organizations.

Iran Spares No Effort To Help Afghans in Quake-Hit Areas

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker says the Iranian Red Crescent Society made many efforts to help the oppressed people of Afghanistan and, in this way, will use all its experiences to alleviate the problems of the people in the earthquake-stricken areas.

Thousands have been left homeless or injured by the magnitude 5.9 earthquake in Paktika and Khost provinces, which state media said killed 1,150 people. An aftershock on Friday took five more lives.

Condoling the death of many Afghans in the earthquake in the two provinces, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said: "In the absence of many countries and groups claiming friendship with the Afghan people, the Red Crescent Society of the Islamic Republic of Iran made many efforts to help the oppressed people of Afghanistan and in this way will use all its experiences to alleviate the problems of the people in the earthquake-stricken areas."

Qalibaf in the open session of the parliament on Sunday expressed his condolences on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Martyr Beheshti and his companions.

"I congratulate the Judiciary Week and on the eve of the 7th of Tir, and offer my condolences on the anniversary of the martyrdom of Martyr Beheshti and his companions in the tragic explosion of the office of the Islamic Republic Party."

He added: "By orchestrating this assassination and also on 6th Tir of the same year, by assassination attempt against the Leader of the Islamic Revolution in Abuzar Mosque in Tehran, the coward MKO tried to martyr the most elite and popular intellectual forces, the most capable executive officials of the revolution and the closest companions and students of Imam to bring the Islamic Revolution to a standstill, but the will of God Almighty and the wise leadership of the Imam and the



vigilance by the people made the revolution stronger than before."

He stated: "Martyr Beheshti spent his honorable and blessed life in the way of promoting a wise understanding of religiosity and revolutionaryism, and in this way he fought against extremism by following the ideals of the late Imam."

Qalibaf continued: "Martyr Beheshti was at the same time under attack by three groups because he was a clear symbol of rationality-oriented and justice-oriented revolution and did not fall short of the ideals of the revolution and did not allow anyone to violate the basic rights of the people; the first group of foreign arrogance, who were annoyed by his strong logic and strong will in the way of anti-arrogance and considered his loud voice as a strong barrier against the influence and the Islamic Revolution is being dwindled."

He further said: "The second group was the MKO and the domestic counter-revolution elements which management skills of Martyr Beheshti and his unparalleled power in mobilizing the people against the counter-revolution, had made them incapable and ineffective. And the third group, the so-called ardent supporters of revolution who pretended to be super-revolutionary who were incapable against Martyr Beheshti's deep belief in the people and his heartfelt belief in the nation and his protection of the rights of people and they could not tolerate the wise and just revolution of Martyr Beheshti rooted from his theism and belief in people and incited the revolutionary youth against Martyr Beheshti."

Army Air Defense to Unveil 300 km Range Missiles Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - Stating that missiles with a range of 300 km will be unveiled by army air defense, Brigadier General Elhami says that increasing the missile capability of the Army and the IRGC is one of the requirements of deterrence power.

"The only way to counter all sanctions and threats is to become stronger in all matters, especially in the military field," said Deputy Commander of Iranian Army Air Defense Brigadier General Alireza Elhami in a meeting with some forces of the Army, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the police of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

"Increasing the missile capability of the army and the IRGC is one of the requirements of deterrence and protection of national interests, which must be further enhanced," he added.

He pointed out that the missiles with a range of 300 km will be unveiled by the army air defense in the near future, noting that the development of missile capability is a symbol of self-reliance and independency.

Elhami also said that Iranian armed forces are capable of observation, identifying and tracking all aircraft, drones, and fighters within the air borders of the country, especially in the Persian Gulf region, adding that any threats against Iran will be decisively responded to.

Iran, Pakistan Mulling Over to Broadening Maritime Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – Islamic Republic of Iran and Republic of Pakistan explored avenues for enhancing bilateral cooperation in the field of maritime.

During the visit of military delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Karachi in order to take part the graduation ceremony of Pakistan Navy Force, the visiting Iranian delegation met and held talks with the Chancellor of Pakistan Naval University.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to expand educational cooperation between in the field of maritime.

In his meeting with the Commandant Pakistan Naval Academy, Commodore Sohail Ahmad Azmic, Second Rear Admiral Roudsari discussed bilateral tie and issues of mutual interests in the fields of training, exchanging students and also dispatching naval delegation to two countries.

Moreover, the two sides exchanged their views on the latest situation of bilateral cooperation between Iran and Pakistan in the field of sea, maritime security, participation of the two neighboring countries in conducting naval drills and sending ships to each other's ports.

Iran's Head of Military Delegation Second Admiral Arya Shafqat Roudsari, represented by the General Staff of the Armed Forces, also met with Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif.

Commandant Pakistan Naval Academy praised the presence of the military delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the graduation ceremony of Pakistani's naval officers and described it as a deep friendship between the two countries and their common vision to maintain security and stability at sea.

Cooperation between Iran and Pakistan in the fields of military, defense and maritime security has been

Requests for Impeachment of Four Ministers Delivered

TEHRAN (IFP) - A member of the Iranian parliament's presiding board says it has taken delivery of request for the impeachment of the four ministers of industry, mine and trade, interior, roads and urban development, and finally, agricultural jihad.

Hossein Haji Deligani says five requests for impeachment of ministers have been so far delivered to the presiding board.

Haji Deligani says there were two groups who were gathering signatures for the removal of the minister of industry, mine and trade, whose proposals have been referred to specialized commissions and will be sent to the floor after the opinion of the relevant commission is announced.

This follows almost two weeks after the resignation of former Labor Minister Hojjat Abdolmaleki over soaring prices of cars in Iran and his poor handling of workers' issues.

Gov't Lifts Mask Mandate For Outdoor Settings

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's national headquarters against coronavirus says people are no longer required to wear masks in outdoor areas for the time being, as the country has managed to keep the spread of COVID-19 under control.

Abbas Shirozhan said on state television on Saturday, "Wearing masks in outdoor settings is not mandatory for now," as no Iranian city is currently classified as 'red' (high risk) or orange (moderate risk) on the country's color-coded coronavirus tracking map.

"For the time being, we have 357 'blue' cities and 90 'yellow' cities, with no 'red' or 'orange' spots at all. If the color categories see changes, citizens will need to wear masks outdoors again," the health official added.

Iranian authorities have, however, advised all Iranians to keep observing health protocols despite a downward trend in COVID-19 deaths and infections.

Thanks to a successful nationwide fight, Iran has managed to reduce the number of coronavirus deaths from several hundred a day to near zero.

Over 80 percent of the population in the country has been fully vaccinated, with officials advising the people to get booster shots.

Iranian Goods Expo to Be held In Qatar Amid World Cup 2022

TEHRAN (IP) - The Chairman of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) says an exhibition of the Iranian goods will be set up in Qatar simultaneously with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022.

FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 games will be held in November and December 2022 with the cooperation of Iran Qatar in hosting the international event has gotten stronger since the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi talks with the Emir of Qatar.

The Chairman of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization, Alireza Peyman Pak reported that simultaneously with the FIFA World Cup Qatar 2022 competitions, an exhibition of the Iranian goods would be held in the country.

Peyman Pak also reported a trade meeting with Qatar and said 70 Iranian businessmen are familiar with and connected to the Qatari businessmen.

He said that the Emir of Qatar demanded Iran to hold carpet and handicrafts in his country, which would be a good opportunity for Iran's exports.

The 2022 FIFA World Cup is scheduled to be the 22nd running of the FIFA World Cup competition, the quadrennial international men's football championship contested by the national teams of the member associations of FIFA. It is scheduled to take place in Qatar from 21 November to 18 December 2022.

Muslim States Having Ties With Israel Unacceptable to Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - A senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei says Iran cannot accept that Muslim states establish relations with Israel, adding that the closer they become to the regime, the farther they get from the Islamic Republic.

Ali-Akbar Velayati was asked about relations of the Republic of Azerbaijan and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with Israel and how the issue can affect Tehran's ties with its two neighbors.

He said Iran and Azerbaijan have good neighborly ties, but this does not mean that their political agendas are in full accordance.

Velayati, however, added, "Muslim countries having ties with the Zionist regime is unacceptable to us, and if any party has relations with the regime, it gets far from us to the degree of [its closeness to Israel]," he added.

Four Arab countries normalized their relations with Israel in 2020 under agreements pushed by former US President Donald Trump.

The Arab countries, namely the UAE, Bahrain, Sudan, and Morocco, sparked widespread condemnations throughout the Muslim world, especially in Palestine, which sees the deals as a stab in the back of the oppressed nation.

Earlier this month, Ayatollah Khamenei warned that the Zionists were an immediate and obvious plague for the Muslim world, adding the Arab governments that chose to normalize relations with Israel will end up being exploited by the regime.

Creating Ethnic, Religious War in Afghanistan U.S. Priority

TEHRAN (MNA) – Special envoy of the Iranian President for Afghanistan said that the U.S. priority in creating purposeful chaos in Afghanistan is launching ethnic and religious warfare.

The U.S. priority for purposeful chaos in Afghanistan is creating ethnic and religious warfare to victimize the Hazaras and Tajiks and regionalize the Afghan crisis, Hassan Kazemi Qomi wrote in a Twitter message on Sunday.

Qomi added that the war in Balkhab is preliminary American sedition and whoever encourages the conflict is playing according to the scenario of the U.S. Referring to the advice of the religious leaders on staying away from the Balkhab conflict, the senior Iranian diplomat called on leaders of all tribes of Afghanistan to distance themselves from the conflict.

The conflict in Balkhab has resulted in nothing but the bloodshed of the people and the destruction of Afghanistan, he noted.

All well-wishers in Afghanistan must take a stand against the Balkhab conflict; The main drivers of conflict are multinational intelligence services, Qomi stated.

Ukrainian Envoy Leaves Post in Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Ambassador of Ukraine to Tehran Serhii Burdyliak has left his post as his tenure has ended.

An official at Ukraine's embassy in Tehran confirmed to Tasnim on Saturday that Burdyliak is going to be replaced upon a decision by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky.

The official said the tenure of the outgoing ambassador has ended and his successor will be appointed soon. According to the official, Ukrainian ambassadors usually hold posts for four years, noting that Burdyliak had served in Iran for two more years, namely a total of six years. The official noted that the outgoing envoy will remain in Tehran and continue to handle the consular affairs as before until a new ambassador is assigned.

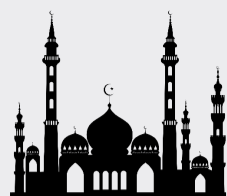
Talks With Borrell "Fruitful"

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian called his talks with EU Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell fruitful.

The two top diplomats held their talks on Saturday morning, discussing a host of issues, including the Vienna talks that are aimed at reviving the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and lifting sanctions on the country.

Amirabdollahian posted a tweet hours after his meeting with Borrell in the Iranian capital.

"Met @JosepBorrell in Tehran. Fruitful talks on a range of bilateral, regional & int. issues, incl. the latest on the sanctions lifting negotiations. A final deal is within reach, if other parties have the will to do so. Iran is resolute on reaching a good, strong & durable deal," the Iranian diplomat tweeted.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:04
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:51

12. Why did not the believers - men and women - when ye heard of the affair, put the best construction on it in their own minds and say, "This (charge) is an obvious lie?"

13. Why did they not bring four witnesses to prove it? When they have not brought the witnesses, such men, in the sight of Allah, (stand forth) themselves as liars!

Surah 24. Light (12 - 13)

Iran Seeks Boosting Economic Cooperation in Africa

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The strategic committee for broadening relations of Iran and Africa was held in Iran's Chamber of Commerce where the participants called for broadening economic cooperation with African states.

In the meeting which was held in the presence of some Iranian economic activists involved in trade with Africa, Head of Africa Department of Oran Foreign Ministry Mr. Rezaee said that soon the direct flight between Iran and Lagos of Nigeria will be launched and part of problems for trade with Africa will be resolved.

He said marine and air transportation are the major problems for boosting trade with Africa, adding that if Iran wants to be more active in Africa, then the government should pay subsidies like what rivals of Iran do.

He added that this subsidy can be in form of cash or fuel because owners of ships claim their ships return unloaded from Africa after delivering their shipments and this makes them suffer losses and the government should compensate through subsidies.

He added that soon a weekly direct flight between Tehran and Lagos will be launched which can help the trade between Iran and Africa.

Meanwhile director general Arab-Africa Department of Iran Chamber of Commerce Mr. Shahram Khasi Pour said that Africa is a rich area in terms of minerals and agriculture and it has a 600-billion-dollar consumption market fitting with Iran's products. He went on to say that unfortunately the trade volume of Iran with African countries stood at \$1.2b last year and it shows that comparing to other rivals, Iran has insignificant share of Africa's market.

He added that the trade interaction with African states is not satisfactory and



both private and state sectors should work together for broadening economic cooperation with Africa and reiterated that this readiness in the chamber is available and all wait to see what will be the government's steps in this field.

Khasi Pour emphasized that transportation and banking interaction are two major hurdles in way of broadening relations with Africa and the private sector expects these problems to be resolved by the government.

Meanwhile Head of Iran-East Africa Joint Chamber Mr. Masoud Berahman deplored that Iran's share of 1000b-dollar turnover of Africa is very insignificant and reiterated Iran should plan to remove hurdles to increase its share of this market.

He criticized the government for not holding the Africa Headquarters in the past three years and said that lack of direct flights, high customs tariffs and banking problem are of the major hurdles in way of trade with Africa which should be resolved. He added that due to these challenges, Iranian traders show no interest for entering Africa's market.

Berahman noted that Iran should prepare a roadmap for this continent for focusing on trade with which African countries cooperate more.

Meanwhile Head of Iran-South Africa Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Babak Hedayati said that one of the important reasons for progress of countries like Turkey is that the private sector is the leading sector and the government follows it but in Iran it is otherwise and there is no belief and trust on the private sector.

Airline Ticket Subsidies Removed for Foreign Passengers

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian aviation authorities have decided to remove airline ticket subsidies offered to foreign passengers in domestic flights, saying nationals of other countries will have to pay full fares for flying to local destinations in the country.

Secretary of the Association of Iranian Airlines Maghsud As'adi Samani said on Saturday that airlines will be allowed to charge full airfare for holders of foreign passports based on a decision adopted in late 2021.

As'adi Samani said the move is meant to free up flight seats for domestic passengers during high travel seasons when foreign nationals normally visit Iran for business or pilgrimage purposes.

"The airline companies have decided that domestic flight tickets will be sold to foreigners based on the new airfare system so that the rial equivalent of \$100 will be charged for flights under one hour and \$150 for flights that take more than one hour," he was quoted by the official IRNA agency.

The official said passengers from Kuwait, Iraq and Russia frequently travel on domestic flights in Iran.

He added that the government has not mandated any use of airfare subsidy for nationals of other countries, saying the airlines have to compensate some of the support provided by the government through payments made in foreign currencies.

The Iranian aviation sector has been grappling with financial difficulties in recent years mainly because of the spread of the coronavirus pandemic and also a series of American sanctions that stifle access to planes and parts from abroad.

Iranian airlines hope they will recoup some of their losses in the upcoming months with a reopening of borders to international tourists and pilgrims.

Over 10m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Month

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last month experienced trade of 10,826,000 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$3b on its physical market, showing 36% and 21% of growth in volume and value of trades respectively, as compared to the month before.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, trade of 1,558,000 tons of commodities valued at more than \$1.1b.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 300,800 tons of vacuum bottom, 400,622 tons of bitumen, 444,102 tons of polymeric products, 206,000 tons of lube cut, 155,855 tons of chemicals, 25,165 tons of sulfur, 24,198 tons of oil, 500 tons of argon and 800 tons of insulation.

Furthermore, the exchange saw trade of more than 9,181,000 tons of commodities worth nearly \$2b on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 5,986,000 tons of cement, 1,669,000 tons of steel, 1,224,000 tons of iron ore, 180,000 tons of sponge iron, 83,470 tons of aluminum, 55,149 tons of zinc, 35,361 tons of copper, 670 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 1,000 tons of coke, 60 tons of lead, 90 tons of precious metals concentrate and 5 kg of gold bars.

On its agricultural trading floor the exchange saw offering of 5 tons of saffron.

Next was the IME's automobile trading floor with trades of 22 Cara Sedan automobiles.

Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 86,358 tons commodities.

Iran Taking Steps to Develop Trade With Azerbaijan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran is taking steps to develop trade with Azerbaijan, Iranian Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI), Alireza Peymanpak said at a press conference.

"At present, the issue of increasing the area of the Astara border checkpoint between the two countries is on the agenda. The border checkpoint is located on the North-South Corridor. In this direction a new bridge over the Astarachay is currently under construction. Because even though the Astara border checkpoint is operating at the maximum level, trucks still have to wait for several days," the minister added.

On the other hand, Iran's Khazar Sea Shipping Lines Company is conducting discussions to purchase several new ships to increase cargo transportation between the two countries, Peymanpak noted.

According to the minister, one of the most important infrastructures for increasing trade and transit links in the North-South corridor is the Rasht-Astara railway line.

"The construction of the Rasht-Astara railway line will begin at the expense of the Iranian government. At the same time, discussions were held with the Russian side, and Russia announced its readiness to invest in the construction of this railway line. The commissioning of the railway will allow solve the main problem in the North-South Corridor. Currently, the North-South Corridor is about 30 percent active. Through the corridor, cargo is transported from South East Asia and India to Middle East," he said.

The foundation of the 'International North-South Transport Corridor' was laid on the basis of an intergovernmental agreement signed between Russia, Iran, and India on September 12, 2000.

In total, 13 countries have ratified the agreement, including Azerbaijan, India, Iran, Russia, Turkey, etc.

The purpose of creating a corridor is to reduce the delivery time of cargo from India to Russia, as well as to North and West Europe. Delivery time on the current route is more than 6 weeks, it is expected to be reduced to 3 weeks via North-South Transport Corridor.

The 175 km long Qazvin-Rasht railway was officially put into operation on March 6, 2019, to connect Azerbaijani railways with the Iranian railway network within the corridor. In addition, the 167 km long Rasht-Astara railway line must be built in Iran.

Iran Non-Oil Exports up 40% in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said that country's non-oil export has increased 40 percent in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year in 1401 (from March 21 to June 22).

Alireza Payman-Pak put the country's balance of trade at \$600 million, showing that Iran's export of products exceeded imports in this period.

He promised that export incentives would be improved in the current year (started March 21, 2022) in cooperation with Plan and Budget Organization (PBO).

The TPOI chief emphasized that Iran's export of non-oil products will boom in the current year since the activities related to exports have been delegated from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) to the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI).

The Organization has taken giant steps since the beginning of the current year in line with accelerating export of non-oil products, he added.

SCOCOEX Proper Investment Platform for SCO Members

TEHRAN (MNA) - A member of the policy-making council of Iran SCOCOEX 2022 International Event said that the event provides a useful platform for a boom in tourism and paves the way for investment for all member states.

Mohammad Hossein Fazli, referring to the holding of Iran's SCOCOEX exhibition in October in Iran, said, "due to the presence of foreign participants, this important event provides a useful platform for a boom in tourism and also lays the ground for investment, providing modern technologies and industries for all member states."

Referring to Iran's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, he added, "there is a good opportunity to share economic activities between the member states of this organization, the Persian Gulf, and some other target countries with the aim of neutralizing sanctions."

Iran SCOCOEX Exhibition will host various economic fields including oil and gas, power plant and energy, steel industry, machine building, automobile, building and urban planning, transportation, shipping, food, agriculture, pharmaceutical and medical equipment, cyber and informatics, tourism, Printing and packaging and so on.

The main addressee of this event will be managers of industrial units, manufacturers and owners of industries, owners of enterprises and brands, suppliers of raw materials, investors and owners of personal, national and international projects, all of which are high-ranking companies.

Fazli stated, "About 300 foreign companies are going to be invited to attend the SCOCOEX event, and the process of issuing visas for the representatives of these companies is in progress."

He also continued that as long as the Leader has named this year as the year of "production, knowledge-based and job-creating", knowledge-based companies will also be among the participants in the event. So far, many universities and professors have announced their readiness.

This member of the policy-making council of the Iran SCOCOEX 2022 continued, "As the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization constitute about 50% of the world's population, and attendance of more than 26 countries, this exhibition paves the way for investment, presentation of technologies." Also during the event, working groups B2B (business model related to the relationship between two companies) and G2G (business model related to governments) were held and companies take the advantage of them.

Fazli added, "According to the taken appropriate action we are planning to hold the opening of the exhibition with the participation of the president at the summit hall." The exhibition will be held from 19 to 22 October 2022.

Preparing "Media Attachment" For Isfahan Urban Projects

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – A member of presiding board of Isfahan's Islamic City Council says the council is seeking a targeted plan for promoting the performance of the city different from advertisement, adding that it intends to use the media persons for consultation on big urban decisions.

Ali Salehi stated that beyond getting consultation which is formed in the urban management bodies and the parallel organs, sometime it is necessary to consider the social indexes and in this regard the media can help the bodies.

He said that sometimes the council needs to get acquainted with the demands in the society and response to this question is immediately needed and therefore the media can consult the urban management in this regard.

Salehi then pointed to the priorities of the urban management and said sometimes some considerable issue happens in the city which needs criticism both during its implementation or after it and the council can take advantage of opinions of the media persons.

He then noted to the media attachment plan of the council and municipality is obliged to provide condition for cultural, media, social, environmental and IT attachments which have been approved for this year.

Salehi added that the council is preparing the media attachment plan and the media persons will be crucial in its preparation.

Somalia Parliament Endorses New PM

MOGADISHU (Dispatches) - Somalia's parliament unanimously endorsed Hamza Abdi Barre as new prime minister, paving the way for the creation of a new government for the troubled Horn of Africa nation.

All 220 lawmakers present gave their blessing to Barre's appointment, and he was then sworn in to office, the parliament speaker said. Barre 48, told parliament he would form a "quality" government that would focus on "creating inclusive political stability (in line with) the president's motto of a reconciled Somalia that is at peace with the world".

Somalia's new administration faces a raft of challenges including a looming famine and a grinding insurgency by Al-Shabaab jihadists.



Protestors in Munich to Demand G7 Action on Poverty, Climate

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Some 4,000 people marched in Munich on Saturday calling on leaders of the Group of Seven industrialized countries to take action to fight poverty, climate change and world hunger and end dependence on Russian fossil fuels.

Leaders of the United States, Germany, France, Britain, Italy, Canada and Japan will meet on Sunday at a three-day summit at Schloss Elmau in the Bavarian mountains, aiming to increase pressure on Russia whose actions in Ukraine have created food and energy shortages across the globe.



Sievierodonetsk Falls to Russia After One of War's Bloodiest Fights



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian forces have fully occupied Sievierodonetsk, the mayor of the eastern Ukrainian city said, confirming Kyiv's biggest battlefield setback for more than a month, after weeks of some of the war's bloodiest fighting.

Ukraine called its retreat from the city a "tactical withdrawal" to fight from higher ground in Lysychansk on the opposite bank of the Siverskiy Donets river. Pro-Russian separatists said Moscow's forces were now attacking Lysychansk.

The fall of Sievierodonetsk - once home to more than 100,000 people, now a wasteland - was Russia's biggest victory since capturing the port of Mariupol last month. It transforms the battlefield in the east after weeks in which Moscow's huge advantage in firepower had yielded only slow gains.

Russia will now be hoping to press on and seize more ground on the opposite bank, while Ukraine will hope that the price Moscow paid to capture the ruins of the small city will leave Russia's forces vulnerable to a counterattack in coming weeks.

"The city is now under the full occupation of Russia. They are trying to establish their own order, as far as I know they have appointed some kind of commandant," Mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said on national television.

Kyrylo Budanov, Ukraine's military intelligence chief, told Reuters that Ukraine was carrying out "a tactical regrouping" by pulling its forces out of Sievierodonetsk to higher ground across the river.

"Russia is using the tactic ... it used in Mariupol: wiping the city from the face of the earth," he said. "Given the conditions, holding the defense in the ruins and open fields is no longer possible. So the Ukrainian forces are leaving for higher ground to continue the defense operations."

Russia's Interfax news agency cited a representative of pro-Russian separatist fighters as saying Russian and pro-Russian forces had entered Lysychansk across the river and fighting was taking place in urban areas there.

In the Ukrainian-held Donbas town of Pokrovsk, Elena, an elderly woman in a wheelchair from Lysychansk, was among dozens of evacuees who arrived by bus from frontline areas.

"Lysychansk, it was a horror, the last week. Yesterday we could not take it any more. Thank you to the soldiers who evacuated us from there. Otherwise that would have been it," she said. "I already told my husband if I die, please bury me behind the house."

As Europe's biggest land conflict since World War Two entered its fifth month, Russian missiles also rained down on western, northern and southern parts of the country.

Russian President Vladimir Putin sent tens of thousands of troops over the border on Feb. 24, unleashing a conflict that has killed thousands and uprooted millions. It has also stoked an energy and food crisis which is shaking the global economy.

Since Russia's forces were defeated in an assault on the capital Kyiv in March, it has shifted focus to the Donbas, an eastern territory made up of Luhansk and Donetsk provinces. Sievierodonetsk and Lysychansk were the last major Ukrainian bastions in Luhansk.

The Russians crossed the river in force in recent days and have been advancing towards Lysychansk, threatening to encircle Ukrainians in the area.

Ecuador Opposition Lawmakers Push To Remove President

QUITO (Dispatches) - A group of opposition lawmakers in Ecuador are pushing for the removal of conservative President Guillermo Lasso after nearly two weeks of mass protests led by indigenous groups demanding lower fuel and food prices, though other legislators say they will not back his ouster.

The sometimes-violent demonstrations, which began on June 13, have led to at least six civilian deaths and featured multiple attacks on security forces. The protests have worsened Lasso's already-adversarial relationship with the national assembly, whose lawmakers have blocked his major economic proposals as he has struggled to contain rising violence he blames on drug gangs.

Lawmakers from the opposition UNES movement, loyal to former leftist President Rafael Correa, called on Twitter for elections - not scheduled until 2025 - to be moved forward.

The constitution allows lawmakers to remove presidents and call elections during a political crisis or mass unrest. "The country can't take it anymore," UNES lawmaker Fausto Jarrin said. Jarrin formally asked the legislature to convene a debate on the removal process. "Dialogue is being broken by all sides, with violence."

Lawmakers from other parties would individually support the efforts, Jarrin said.

Lasso's removal would require the support of 92 of the assembly's 137 lawmakers. Lasso can also dissolve the legislature and call for elections.

The government criticized the UNES move, insisting it has made significant concessions through decree and is willing to discuss the issues. Lawmakers from three other parties including Lasso's rejected the move to oust him and said they support dialogue between the government and indigenous groups.

Despite some government concessions, there has been little sign of a rapprochement between officials and protesters, who are led by indigenous group CONAIE.

Indigenous leaders have demanded the withdrawal of security forces and an end to special measures put in place for six provinces before the two sides can discuss a list of 10 indigenous demands, including lower fuel prices and a halt to oil and mining development.



Erdogan Signals No Progress on Sweden's NATO Bid

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's President Recep Tayyip Erdogan signalled that no progress had been made in Sweden's bid to join NATO, urging Stockholm to take "concrete actions" to meet Ankara's concerns, his office said.

In a phone call with Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson, Erdogan reiterated that "Sweden should take steps regarding such fundamental matters as combatting terrorism", the Turkish presidency said in a statement.

Turkey "wanted to see binding commitments on these issues together with concrete and clear action," he added.

Finland and Sweden discussed their stalled NATO bids with Turkey in Brussels on Monday, but Ankara dampened hopes that their dispute will be resolved before an alliance summit next week.

Turkish officials said Ankara does not view the summit as a final deadline for resolving Ankara's objections.

Ankara has accused Finland and in particular Sweden of providing a safe haven for outlawed Kurdish militants whose decades-long insurgency against the Turkish state has claimed tens of thousands of lives.

Erdogan told Andersson that Sweden "should make concrete changes in its attitude" toward the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) and its Syrian affiliates, the presidency said.

"In this regard no tangible action aimed at addressing Turkey's concerns was seen to have been taken by Sweden", it added.

The Turkish leader also voiced expectations that Sweden would lift an arms embargo against Turkey that Stockholm imposed in 2019 over Ankara's military offensive in Syria. He also said he hopes that restrictions on Turkey's defense industry would be lifted, and that Sweden will extradite several people Ankara has accused of involvement in terrorism.

The phone call comes after Erdogan discussed the two countries' bid with NATO chief Jens Stoltenberg.

Taliban Pledge No Interference With Quake Aid

SERAI (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's Taliban rulers pledged they would not interfere with international efforts to distribute aid to tens of thousands of people affected by this week's deadly earthquake.

Even before Wednesday's quake the country was in the grip of a humanitarian crisis, with aid flows and financial assistance severely curtailed since the Taliban's return to power.

The 5.9-magnitude quake struck hardest in the rugged east along the border with Pakistan, as people slept, killing over 1,000 and leaving thousands more homeless.

Aid organizations have complained in the past that Taliban authorities have tried to divert aid to areas and people that supported their hardline insurgency - or even seized goods to distribute themselves and claim the credit.

But Khan Mohammad Ahmad, a senior official in hard-hit Paktika province, said international organizations helping relief efforts would not be interfered with.

"Whether it is WFP, UNICEF or any other organization... the international community or the United Nations... they will do the distribution by themselves," said Khan.

"The responsible people from the Islamic Emirate are here... our members will be always with them (to help)," he added, referring to the Taliban's new name for Afghanistan.

The disaster poses a huge logistical challenge for the government, which has isolated itself from much of the world by introducing hardline rule that subjugates women and girls.

But the international community has been quick to respond to the latest disaster to befall the country and aid is starting to flow - although not always where it is needed most.

"What don't we need? We need everything," Said Wali told AFP in Serai, a small village close to the epicentre of the quake, around 200 kilometres (125 miles) southeast of Kabul.

"We are alive, but there is no one listening to us and we have not received any aid so far."

Many of the buildings in the village - like most in the Afghan countryside, made out of mud bricks - had been flattened in the quake.

"Our beds and all our stuff are buried under our home. Our homes are destroyed... there is nothing left," he said.

"Currently we need money so that we can buy our necessities - clothes, mattresses, equipment. We also need flour and rice."

Ramiz Alakbarov, the UN's top official in Afghanistan, praised Afghans for their resilience and courage after touring the area Saturday.



Qatar, Egypt Cement Rapprochement on Emir's Cairo Visit



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egypt's leader on Saturday discussed energy and investment with Qatar's emir, who was in Cairo for the first time since the countries restored relations following a Saudi-led rift.

Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani told President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi that his country was keen to "maximize Qatari investments in Egypt and take advantage of the vast investment opportunities available", according to an Egyptian presidency statement.

The pair discussed developing cooperation "in various fields, especially in the energy and agriculture sectors", and in trade and investment, "particularly the flow of Qatari investments towards Egypt", the statement added.

In late March, Cairo said the gas-rich Persian Gulf state would be investing \$5 billion in Egypt.

At the same time, Qatari hydrocarbon giant QatarEnergy announced an agreement with ExxonMobil to acquire a 40 percent stake in a gas exploration block off Egypt in the Mediterranean.

No new agreements were announced during the emir's two-day trip, which concluded Saturday and was his first to Cairo since 2015.

After relations between Egypt and Qatar were restored in January 2021, Sisi and the Qatari emir had only met twice, both times on the sidelines of summits abroad.

Egypt had joined Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain in breaking off relations with Qatar in June 2017, citing its support for the Muslim Brotherhood and alleged soft line on Iran.

The Islamist group was founded in Egypt in the 1920s before spreading through the Arab world.

The Egyptian government banned the Brotherhood in 2013 following the overthrow of President Mohamed Morsi, who hailed from the movement.

According to Egyptian presidency, the emir also "praised Egypt's ongoing efforts on reconstruction in the Gaza Strip".

Doha and Cairo -- key U.S. allies in the Middle East -- have both provided reconstruction aid to the territory and have been involved with mediation efforts between Israel and the Gaza Strip's Islamist rulers Hamas.

Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis Threatens Its Dollar-Earning IT Firms



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - There have been days when cybersecurity professional Asela Waidyalankara and his colleagues have sat in hotel lobbies to complete projects during power outages. Other days, they have run around Colombo looking for fuel for generators so they could work from home. "We have a buddy system at the company to inform each other about fuel availability," laughs Waidyalankara, adding that his company encourages staff to carpool if they have to attend meetings in Colombo and work from home when possible.

Before the pandemic, Sri Lanka's IT industry employed more than 120,000 people and was the fifth-largest export earner for the island nation of 22 million. It was on track to become the top exporter within the next five years and double its employees. But with the government of President Gotabaya Rajapaksa having defaulted on its foreign debt earlier this year and critical shortages crippling the economy, those plans are now in jeopardy as it becomes harder to maintain normal business operations.

Daily, hours-long power cuts are now normal. Fuel queues stretch for kilometres, sometimes so far that one fuel queue meets another. The country is running on a cash flow basis. "We are using whatever dollars that flow in to purchase the essentials we can," Nandalal Weerasinghe, governor of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), said last month.

On May 19, the CBSL said it expects the economy to "record a setback" even as the cost of living continues to shoot up - May inflation was 39.1 percent, and fuel prices have more than doubled since the start of the year.

Steady power and smooth internet, essential for the IT industry to function effectively, are constantly affected. "We have weekly and monthly deliverables and we struggle to meet them sometimes," Waidyalankara told Al Jazeera. "Our service levels are also affected, for example, we have to reply to a cybersecurity incident within two hours, but with power cuts and slow internet it is a challenge to meet these expectations," he said.

Sri Lanka has several regional competitors in the IT sector, including India, Bangladesh and Vietnam. "We have spent years cultivating relationships with clients, so they are understanding, but there is always a fear that our business will be taken away and given to competitors if we cannot maintain our delivery and quality," says Waidyalankara.

The ongoing economic crisis and the lack of a cohesive plan by the incumbent government to resolve it are starting to affect the confidence of foreign investors.

Sanjiva Weerawarana, founder and chief executive of WSO2, a Sri Lankan software company which raised \$90m from Goldman Sachs in November, told Al Jazeera that his company has had to look for creative ways to hedge the country's risk to appease investors. While WSO2 has offices in several countries, including the United States, the United Kingdom, Dubai and India, the company will "likely expand" its presence outside Sri Lanka to boost investor confidence and ensure business continuity, Weerawarana said.

Some companies have even set up temporary offices in neighbouring countries like India and Dubai and relocated some of their staff to these offices to maintain business continuity. "We are not going to relocate the company, but we temporarily relocated a few staff members to a Dubai office in April just to ensure business runs smoothly," said Weerawarana.

Humble Rice Bran Becomes Hot Commodity as India Scours for Edible Oils



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Rice bran has become a sought-after commodity in India as the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils tries to overcome an edible oil shortage caused by global supply disruptions.

A by-product in rice milling, rice bran has been traditionally used for cattle and poultry feed. In recent years, oil mills have started extracting rice oil, which is popular among health-conscious consumers but historically more expensive than rival oils.

Rice bran oil accounts for a small portion of overall vegoil consumption in India but is one of the fastest-growing among edible oils, industry officials say, and production and imports are set to increase to meet the demand.

The recent rally in global edible oil prices fuelled by Indonesia's restrictions on palm oil exports and disruptions to sunflower oil shipments from Ukraine has wiped out rice bran oil's traditional premium over rival oils. That has triggered a surge in demand for bran oil which has similar taste properties to sunflower oil.

As sunflower oil imports plunged from Ukraine, consumers started replacing it with rice bran oil, said B.V. Mehta, secretary general of the International Association of Rice Bran Oil (IARBO). India usually fulfills more than two-thirds of its sunflower oil requirements through imports from Ukraine.

"Because of COVID-19, I was looking for healthier food options. I first used rice bran oil for health benefits six months ago and since then I've been using it," said Aditi Sharma, a Mumbai-based homemaker, who switched to rice bran oil from sunflower oil.

"It tastes good and is good for health as well," Sharma said, referring to the oil's cholesterol-lowering and anti-oxidative properties.

In India, rice bran oil is now trading at 147,000 Indian rupees (\$1,879) per tonne compared with sunflower oil at 170,000 rupees.

Rice bran oil usually commands around a 25% premium over other oils, but in recent months has been cheaper than imported vegetable oils, making it more affordable for the masses, according to data compiled by Solvent Extractors' Association of India (SEA).

Competitive prices boosted rice bran oil consumption since March and has encouraged companies to extract more oil.

Sharma said that even if premiums returned, she would still buy rice bran oil for her family of four.

The demand for rice bran oil has become so strong that it has flipped the economics for rice millers, who are now prioritising bran oil output.

"For rice mills, instead of by-product, now rice bran has become a main product," said Puneet Goyal, chief executive officer at Ricela Group, the country's biggest producer of rice bran oil.

To meet rising demand Ricela is planning to increase oil refining capacity to 750 tonnes per day in the next two months from 600 tonnes, Goyal said.

With a vegetable oil shortage, oil mills are ready to pay record high prices for bran, said B.V. Krishna Rao, president of the All India Rice Exporters Association.

Rice bran prices have jumped to 30,000 rupees to 36,000 rupees per tonne compared with paddy prices of around 19,000 rupees, which is milled for rice extraction.

However, a shortage of oil processors in all rice milling areas remains a key limiting factor on bran oil supply, as rice bran must be processed into oil within 48 hours of being separated from chaff in order to be fit for human consumption.



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German Economy Nervous, But No Sign of Recession

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Angst is growing in the German economy, Europe's largest, but as yet there are no signs of recession, Ifo economist Klaus Wohlrabe told Reuters. The threat of gas shortages has increased firms' uncertainty but bottlenecks in the industrial and retail sectors have eased slightly, he said. The hospitality industry is hoping for a good summer after the relaxation of coronavirus restrictions. A Reuters poll of analysts had pointed to a minimal fall in June to a reading of 92.9.



Britons, Shaken by Cost-of-Living Squeeze, Cut Back on Shopping

LONDON (Dispatches) - British consumers cut back on shopping in May in the face of fast-rising inflation, and a measure of their confidence sank to a record low this month, according to data that underscored the scale of the cost-of-living squeeze.

The Office for National Statistics said on Friday that sales volumes in May fell by 0.5% on the month, a slightly smaller decline than the 0.7% drop expected by economists polled by Reuters. But the ONS also slashed its estimate for month-on-month sales volumes growth in April to 0.4% from an originally reported 1.4% after an annual review of its seasonal adjustments process.

May's fall was driven by weaker food sales, Heather Bovill, ONS deputy director for surveys and economic indicators, said.

"Feedback from supermarkets suggested customers were spending less on their food shop, because of the rising cost of living," she said.

Earlier on Friday, Britain's longest-running gauge of consumer confidence, the GfK survey, fell to its lowest since records began in 1974.

"The consumer mood is currently darker than in the early stages of the COVID pandemic, the result of the 2016 Brexit referendum and even the shock of the 2008 global financial crisis, and now there's talk of a looming recession," Joe Staton, client strategy director at GfK, said.

Other data published this week which has raised questions about how much higher the Bank of England can raise interest rates, after five hikes since December, without pushing the economy into a recession.

Worries about the hit to living standards contributed to two defeats on Friday in parliamentary by-elections for Prime Minister Boris Johnson's Conservative Party.

Johnson responded to the losses by pledging to do more to tackle the cost-of-living crisis.

Overall UK inflation is running at a 40-year high of 9.1% and, according to the Bank of England, is set to rise further to more than 11% in October.

Sterling weakened briefly after the retail sales data before recovering.

The ONS said food store sales fell by 1.6% in May from April, the biggest monthly fall since January.

"Many customers are buying down, particularly with food, choosing value range items where they might previously have bought premium goods," Helen Dickinson, chief executive of the British Retail Consortium, said.

Automotive fuel sales volumes rose by 1.1%, possibly reflecting a fall in the number of people working exclusively from home, the ONS said.

The ONS said retail sales in the three months to May fell by 1.3% after falling by 1.4% in the three months to April.

Compared with a year ago, sales volumes were 4.7% lower.

Excluding fuel, which has soared in price, sales volumes were down by 0.7% on the month and by 5.7% in annual terms.

Saudi Arabia Strengthens Position as Largest Arab Economy

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's share of the Arab economy grew 0.4 percentage points in 2021, as it retained its position as the region's largest economic player.

The Kingdom recorded a domestic output of \$833.5 billion last year, the equivalent of 29.7 percent of the entire Arab region, according to a report of the Arab Corporation for Investment and Export Credit Guarantee, Dhahran.

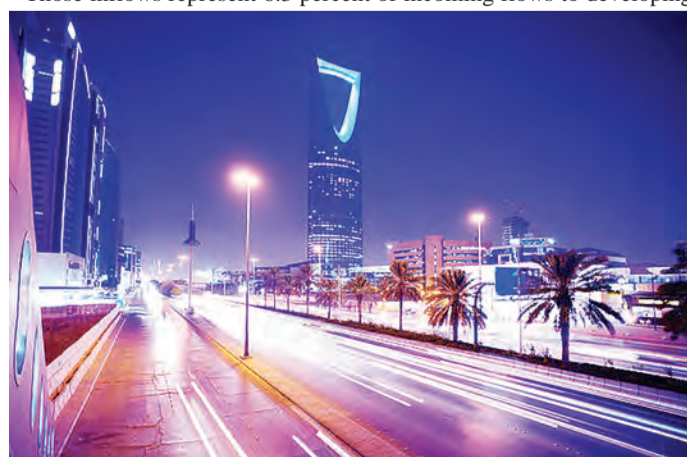
The UAE was the second largest Arab economy, with \$410 billion — 14.6 percent of the total, while Egypt ranked third, with a production of \$402.8 billion.

Dhahran Director General Abdullah Ahmed Al-Sabeeh expects continued growth in 2022, especially after the value of foreign projects imported to the region increased by 86 percent to reach \$21 billion during the first quarter of 2022, compared to the same period in 2021.

The report showed that the Arab economy as a whole, outperformed the eighth largest economy in the world, Italy, with a gross domestic product of \$2.1 trillion.

Foreign direct investment grew in the region, with inflow increasing by 43 percent year-on-year, equal to about \$53 billion. This brought the FDI total to around \$1.58 trillion.

Those inflows represent 6.3 percent of incoming flows to developing countries and 3.3 percent of global flows.



Brazil's Central Bank Aims for Inflation Around 3.25% Target in 2023

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil's central bank is aiming for inflation in 2023 "around" the 3.25% target but less than 4%, its chief, Roberto Campos Neto, said, as policymakers hike interest rates to cool surging consumer prices in Latin America's largest economy.

When it raised its key interest rate to 13.25% last week and penciled in another hike for August, the central bank said it was looking to ensure inflation next year converged "around the target" rather than "to its target." "Around is less than 4%, just to make that very clear," Campos Neto said in an online news conference. He repeated the central bank's guidance that interest rates would rise and stay in significantly contractionary territory for longer to fight inflation.

Consumer prices grew at an 11.7% rate in the 12 months through May.

According to Campos Neto, that strategy is necessary because of uncertainty marking Brazil's inflation path. Despite government proposals to lower fuel prices, Campos Neto said policymakers have not seen a relevant change in the balance of risks for inflation, which he indicated were still not tilted to the upside.

On a more positive note, the central bank earlier on Thursday lifted its economic growth outlook for 2022 to 1.7% from 1%, on the back of a stronger-than-expected performance in the first quarter.

When asked about Brazilian presidential candidate Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva's economic program and its criticism of the country's "passive orientation towards exchange rate policy in recent years," Campos Neto said the central bank believes in a floating exchange rate and will stick with that stance.

Japan's Inflation Tops BOJ Target for 2nd Month

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's annual core consumer inflation topped the central bank's target for a second straight month in May, data showed on Friday, highlighting the intensifying pressure on the country's fragile economy from soaring global raw material costs.

The data challenges the Bank of Japan's view that the recent rise in prices is temporary, and does not warrant withdrawing monetary stimulus.

But with wage growth subdued, many analysts expect the BOJ to remain firmly focussed on stimulating a sluggish economy rather than fight inflation with interest rate hikes.

The nationwide core consumer price index (CPI), which excludes volatile fresh food but includes fuel costs, rose 2.1% in May from a year earlier, data showed, matching a median market forecast.

It stayed above the BOJ's 2% target for a second straight month, following a 2.1% rise in April which was the fastest pace of increase in seven years.

The core-core CPI, which strips away both volatile food and fuel costs, was up 0.8% in May from a year earlier after climbing by the same pace in April.

"Food prices are rising quite significantly even as wage growth remains slow. This may hurt consumption and make retailers hesitant of further passing on costs to consumers," said Takumi Tsunoda, senior economist at Shinkin Central Bank Research Institute.

"I don't think core consumer inflation will hit 3% unless a broader range of daily goods and services prices rise."

While soaring fuel costs remained the key driver of the rise in CPI, the pace of year-on-year increase in energy prices slowed to 17.1% in May from 19.1% in April.

But prices of food excluding volatile vegetable, meat and fish rose 2.7% in May, marking the fastest growth since 2015.

In a glimmer of hope, separate data released by the BOJ on Friday showed the price companies pay each other for services rose 1.8% in May year-on-year.

The increase, which was the fastest annual pace since 2020, partly reflected a rebound in demand for services as COVID-19 infection numbers fell, the data showed.

Rising fuel and food prices, blamed on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a weak yen that inflates the cost of imports, are expected to keep Japan's core consumer inflation above the BOJ's 2% target for most of this year, analysts say.

India Inflation Likely To Exceed Top of RBI Band Until December

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India's central bank is on course to bring down prices but the retail inflation rate is likely to remain above the top end of its mandated target band until December, Governor Shaktikanta Das said in an article in the Times of India.

"We are well on track to bring down inflation and inflation expectations. Until December, CPI is expected to remain higher than the upper tolerance level. Thereafter, it is expected to go below 6% as per our current projections," Das said.

Retail inflation eased marginally in May, after touching an eight-year high of 7.79% in April, but remained above the central bank's tolerance band of 2-6% for a fifth month in a row.

Das said despite current inflation being driven by supply-side factors, monetary policy still plays an important role when inflation rises since household price expectations are backward-looking.

"Inflation expectations influence not only households but also businesses and drive up pricing of food, manufactured goods and services. If they expect inflation to be high, even companies will defer their investment plans," he added.

Das also said India's economy is stable and continues to steadily recover from the shock of the COVID-19 pandemic.

He said pressure on the rupee, which hit a record low of 78.39 against the dollar on Wednesday, was largely due to the monetary policy tightening in advanced economies to tackle high inflation.

"In such a situation, there will be outflow of capital from emerging market economies.

It is happening across emerging market economies. This is nothing but the spillover of the monetary policy actions in advanced economies," he said.

But added that India's foreign exchange reserves are quite strong at around two-and-half times the country's short-term foreign debt and the country's macroeconomic fundamentals are far better than many other countries.

India's monetary policy committee (MPC) raised rates by 50 basis points earlier this month, after a 40-bps increase in May, to prevent growing inflationary pressure from becoming broad-based. Further hikes are expected in coming months.

Bank Indonesia Predicts 4.5 To 5.3% Economic Growth in 2022



JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Bank Indonesia (BI) projected the country's economic growth to range between 4.5 and 5.3 percent in 2022. The central bank's governor, Perry Warjiyo, said the forecast is in line with the ongoing domestic economic improvement, supported by increased mobility, sources of financing, and growing business activities.

"With these developments, 2022's economic growth is predicted to stay within Bank Indonesia's projection at a range of 4.5 to 5.3 percent," Perry said in a written statement, Thursday, June 23.

He said the domestic economy continued to improve along with increasing demand amidst positive export performances. This is reflected in various early indicators in May 2022 and the results of BI's surveys.

Surveys revealed that domestic demand—such as consumer confidence, retail sales, and the manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI)—have improved, driven by increased mobility and financing from banks.

The export performance also remained strong, particularly for coal, steel, and metal ores, amid risks of stifled demand due to the global economic slowdown. The positive export performance occurred in all islands, especially Kalimantan and Sumatra.

"Economic improvement is also indicated by the improving performances of several key sectors like manufacturing, trade, and construction industries," he said.

The central bank held its board of governors meeting on June 22 and 23. The meeting resulted in a decision to keep the 7-Day Reverse Repo Rate (BI7DRR) at 3.50 percent, the Deposit Facility rate at 2.75 percent, and the Lending Facility rate at 4.25 percent.

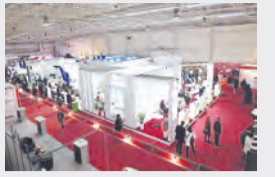
Perry said that the decision was made to support the national economic growth amid increasing external pressures. Indonesia, he said, is facing an increasing risk of stagflation in various countries.

14th Doors, Windows Int'l Exhibition Opens in Tehran

TEHRAN (MNA) – The 14th edition of the Doors and Windows Technology International Exhibition kicked off in Tehran, Iran.

The active participation of knowledge-based companies and startups is one of the significant features of this year's exhibition.

Also, some scientific, educational, and specialized workshops are to be held at the event. The exhibition is being held from June 26 - 29, 2022 at Tehran Permanent Fairground.



Japan Emphasized Support for Hybrids

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Toyota Motor Corp's chief lobbied the Japanese government to make clear it supported hybrid vehicles as much as battery electrics or face losing the auto industry's support, a senior lawmaker told a ruling party meeting.

The lobbying by Akio Toyoda, president of Toyota and chairman of the Japan Automobile Manufacturers Association (JAMA) industry group, comes as the automaker has faced increased scrutiny from green investors who say it has been slow to embrace battery-electric vehicles and pressed governments to slow a transition to them.

Akira Amari, a former industry minister and a veteran member of the Liberal Democratic Party (LDP), requested changes to the government's annual economic policy roadmap at a June 3 meeting, saying he had spoken with Toyoda a day earlier, according to notes and audio of the meeting reviewed by Reuters.

The final version of the document included a reference to "so-called electric-powered vehicles" and appeared to put fossil-fuel burning hybrids on equal footing with zero-emission battery vehicles, even though environmentalists say there is a vast difference.

"I spoke with Chairman Toyoda yesterday and he said that JAMA cannot endorse a government that rejects hybrids," Amari told the policy meeting of LDP lawmakers, according to the notes and audio.

Use of synthetic fuel, such as from hydrogen, would make hybrids "100% clean energy" cars and the policy document should make that explicit, Amari said.

"If we don't make that clear, JAMA will push back with all its might," Amari said, according to the notes and audio.

"If we don't say that hybrids are included in the category of electric vehicles, that won't look good," he said, adding that a reference to electric-powered vehicles should be changed to "so-called electric-powered vehicles".

Amari confirmed to Reuters that he asked for the inclusion of "so-called" to make clear that electric vehicles were not limited to battery-electric vehicles and included hybrids. He said he asked for no other changes.

He confirmed that he had spoken to Toyoda.

"What Mr. Toyoda is trying to say is that hybrids running with synthetic fuels are good for the environment because they are extremely fuel efficient. He said he would be extremely unsatisfied if hybrids were rejected. That's what he told me. He asked if the LDP were rejecting hybrids and I said that we were doing no such thing."

Amari told Reuters that by developing synthetic fuels automakers would be able to produce zero-emission internal combustion engines. Such fuels could also be used in aircraft, which can't run on battery power, he said.

In a statement to Reuters, JAMA said the auto industry was making every effort toward its goal of becoming carbon neutral by 2050. Since the goal was carbon neutrality, it was important to broaden options and not be limited to specific technologies, it said. It was also necessary to respond to various situations and customer needs in each country and region, it said.

A Toyota spokesperson referred Reuters to JAMA.

The final version of the document, available online, refers to Japan's 2035 target of all new domestic car sales being "so-called electric-powered vehicles," and specifically mentions in the main text that such vehicles include hybrids.

An earlier draft from May 31, also available online, shows the reference to hybrids only in a footnote. The main text refers to the 2035 target as having all new car sales being "electric-powered vehicles".



The annual policy document is of major importance for the government and serves as a framework for its future policy.

Toyota, the world's biggest automaker by sales, has said fossil fuels, not internal combustion engines, are the problem. As well as the hybrids it popularised more than two decades ago with the Prius, it also champions hydrogen technology, although that has so far not caught on the way battery-electric cars have.

Hybrids, including plug-in hybrids, accounted for almost 44% of the new passenger cars sold in Japan last year, while battery electric vehicles accounted for less than 1%, according to data from the Japan Automobile Dealers Association.

That doesn't include mini cars, trucks or buses.

Energy and climate think-tank InfluenceMap has rated Toyota the worst among major automakers for its lobbying record on climate policy, which includes public statements and interaction with governments.

It has been criticized by its own investors, including pension funds, over its lobbying. Denmark's AkademikerPension has sold down most of its stake in Toyota over the last year.

Toyota last year committed 8 trillion yen (\$60 billion) to electrify its cars by 2030, with half of that slated to develop battery electric vehicles. Still, it expects annual sales of such cars to reach only 3.5 million vehicles by the end of the decade, or around a third of current sales.

On Thursday, Toyota said it recalled more than 2,000 of its first mass-produced electric vehicle, the bZ4X SUV, less than two months after rolling the vehicle out, because of a risk the wheel could come loose.

It says hybrids make sense in markets where infrastructure isn't ready to support a faster move to battery vehicles, and that customers should have more choices for cleaner technology.

No Retreat...

FROM PAGE 1

"The language of force cannot be used in addressing a country that has overcome the most difficult conditions of sanctions with vigorous resistance and the sympathy and support of its people," the SNSC secretary said.



The senior EU diplomat, for his part, said the possible JCPOA revival under the current global circumstances can be regarded as a very important security achievement in the international system.

Borrell criticized Trump for pulling the United States out of the multilateral agreement and said all the parties to the JCPOA must look ahead to the future to reach a good final deal. So he openly blames the U.S. for the current political chaos and Iran should not be blamed.

Tehran has repeatedly stressed that it welcomes talks and will remain committed to the JCPOA if it benefits it, otherwise it is meaningless to observe its commitments while the other parties give no damn to their commitments.

In recent months the West has tried to paint a negative picture of Iran and has tried to blame Tehran for the halt in the talks and even its failure, while it has been the main culprit of this stall.

Borrell visited Tehran to revive the talks but he is better first to bring the West and above all the U.S. to their senses that the era of unilateral concession has ended and Iran will not retreat an iota from its due rights and it will observe its JCPOA commitments when the other parties do the same or else it will continue its uranium enrichment whether the West likes or not because it is its right.

The European official is better to tell the U.S. statesmen that the only solution for the revival of the JCPOA and return of the U.S. to this bloc is to remove all unilateral U.S. sanctions, and removing all sanctions is the least that the U.S. can do to compensate its past offences and mistakes.

As Shamkhani reiterated, as long as the West does not change its illegal approach, the talks will be in vain and uranium enrichment will continue with higher speed but as Tehran has always stressed, its nuclear program is for peaceful purpose and it will not move towards making A-Bomb because its Supreme Leader has called it haram (forbidden) and this fatwa will remain valid.

Instagram Tests New Tools for Age Verification



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Instagram said it is testing new options for users to verify their age on the platform, starting with people in the United States.

The photo-sharing service owned by Meta Platforms Inc said it is testing two new ways to verify a person's age, in addition to allowing them to upload their identity proof online.

"When we know if someone is a teen (13-17 years), we provide them with age-appropriate experiences like defaulting them into private accounts, preventing unwanted contact from adults they don't know and limiting the options advertisers have to reach them with ads," Erica Finkle, director of data governance at Meta, said in a blog post.

Instagram said it has partnered with Yoti, a company that specializes in online age verification to ensure users' privacy.

Users can upload a video selfie to verify their age, after which Yoti's technology estimates their age based on facial features. Both Meta and Yoti will delete the image once the age has been verified, Instagram said.

Another option is for people to select three mutual followers to confirm the user's age, and the person vouching must be at least 18 years old.

The move comes after Instagram paused the launch of Instagram Kids last year, after receiving criticism and opposition for the project.

Instagram Kids was touted as requiring parental permission to join, and was supposed to provide ad-free, age-appropriate content, but U.S. lawmakers and advocacy groups urged the company to drop its launch plans, citing safety concerns.

Latin America's Kids Slid Into Education Black Hole During Pandemic

LA PAZ (Dispatches) - In Bolivia's highland city La Paz, Maribel Sanchez's children spent much of the last two years huddling over a small smartphone screen to attend online classes amid a lengthy lockdown due to the coronavirus pandemic.

The two boys, aged 11 and eight, frequently missed lessons when their timetables collided as the family had no computer. Bolivian school children only finally returned to in-person classes in March this year, many still not full time.

The story is echoed around the region from Mexico to Brazil.

Latin American has one of the worst records of school closures globally, according to a World Bank report, which shows children here faced almost 60 weeks of fully or partially closed schools between March 2020 and March this year.

That's behind only South Asia and twice the level of Europe, Central and East Asia, Sub-Saharan Africa or the Pacific. In North America there were long partial closures, but just seven weeks of full closures versus 29 in Latin America and the Caribbean.

That threatens to take a generation of children in the region back a decade, some experts say, in terms of education levels, weighing on incomes and job prospects for years to come.



"With virtual classes, the little ones didn't learn anything. They were distracted. My son, who's in first grade, hasn't learnt anything. Nothing!" Sanchez said while waiting to pick her children up outside a school in La Paz.

Emanuela di Gropello, a researcher for the World Bank, said Latin America's school kids would see a 12% decline in their lifetime earnings due to gaps in education during the pandemic.

"Those young people arriving in the labor market will basically see a long-term decline in their salaries," she said.

In Argentina, Mercedes Porto at Fundacion Cimientos, which works with youths, said the school system has "lost" a cohort of students with some 1 million young people not returning to school after the period of virtual schooling.

Andres Uzin Pacheco, an education expert and academic director of a business school in La Paz, said that the impact would be long lasting and severe.

"This locked-up generation is going to suffer the consequences, not just for five years, but for the next 20 or 30 years, which implies all their education, even university, and their working life," he said.

Doha...

FROM PAGE 1

In a meeting with Borrell on Saturday, Ali Shamkhani, the SNSC's secretary, blasted Europe's inaction and the US's lack of commitment to its obligations as per the 2015 agreement, saying Tehran plans to continue its remedial nuclear measures until the West changes its illegal approach.

Shamkhani underlined that the removal of illegal sanctions and full and lasting realization of the economic benefits of the JCPOA are Iran's main objectives in engaging in the talks with the P4+1 group of countries in the Austrian capital of Vienna.

Borrell, for his part, said the possible JCPOA revival under the current global circumstances can be regarded as a very important security achievement in the international system.

The senior EU diplomat criticized the United States for copping out of the multilateral agreement and said all the parties to the JCPOA must look ahead to the future to reach a good final deal.

Tehran Not to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's chief executive said a headquarters has been set up under the direct command of the First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber to follow up on the removal of sanctions.

Negotiations have been held in the Austrian capital of Vienna since April last year to restore the 2015 Iran deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was ditched by former US President Donald Trump in May 2018.

The chief executive, meanwhile, criticized the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for issuing an anti-Iran resolution earlier this month, which accused the country of withholding cooperation with the agency.

Raisi said the adoption of the resolution was a wrong move in the middle of the Vienna talks, adding, "The International Atomic Energy Agency had confirmed 15 times that there were no deviations in Iran's nuclear activities."

The Iranian president then described interaction with Iran's neighboring countries as a "priority" of his administration's foreign policy, saying adoption of the policy had resulted in a trade balance surplus of 450 percent for the country and increased trade with neighbors.

Iran has entered cooperation agreements with 18 countries, he said, noting that these countries were now on the receiving end of \$2.5-billion worth of technical and engineering services exported to them by the Islamic Republic.

Iran's president said the first quarter of this year witnessed a 20-percent growth in the level of commercial cooperation with the neighborly states, the president added.

Sounding upbeat about the country's oil exports and the resultant oil revenues, Raisi said, "At the present time, [Iran's] oil sales are in a good condition and we are doing our best to get the foreign exchange earned through oil and non-oil exports back to the country."

The president finally said the situation is ripe for investment throughout the Islamic Republic, saying Tehran has entered into agreements that have paved the way for as much as 5-20 billion dollars worth of investment in the country.

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Schauffele Leads After McIlroy Meltdown

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Xander Schauffele took advantage of a second round meltdown by Rory McIlroy to open up a five-shot lead at the halfway stage of the PGA Tour's Travelers Championship. Schauffele surged clear of the field after shooting a bogey-free seven-under-par 63 to move to 14 under at TPC River Highlands in Cromwell, Connecticut. But while Schauffele reflected on a round that has set up a golden opportunity to claim a sixth PGA Tour win, overnight co-leader McIlroy was left pondering a dramatic stumble on the back nine that sent him tumbling down the leaderboard.

Forest Sign Nigeria Striker Awoniyi From Union Berlin

LONDON (Dispatches) - Nottingham Forest have paid a club record fee of around £17 million (\$20 million) to Nigeria striker Taiwo Awoniyi from Union Berlin. Awoniyi agreed a five-year contract with Forest, who are preparing for their first season back in the Premier League since 1999. The 24-year-old scored 20 goals in 43 games in all competitions in his last season in the Bundesliga. He is Forest's first senior signing since their victory over Huddersfield in the Championship play-off final.

U.S. Ban Fuels Djokovic's Wimbledon Motivation

LONDON (Dispatches) - Defending champion Novak Djokovic says he will be extra motivated to claim a fourth successive Wimbledon title as it could be his last Grand Slam action of the year.

The 35-year-old Serb missed the Australian Open after being deported for not having been vaccinated against COVID-19 and will not be allowed to compete at the U.S. Open for the same reason.

Those decisions have severely impacted Djokovic's hopes of winning the most Grand Slam titles, with Rafa Nadal now holding the record on 22, compared to Djokovic's 20.

With Australia enforcing strict entry criteria, it is likely that Wimbledon could be Djokovic's last Grand Slam event until next year's French Open.

"As of today I'm not allowed to enter the States under these circumstances. I'm aware of that. That is an extra motivation to do well here," he told reporters on Saturday.

"Hopefully I can have a very good tournament, as I have done in the last three editions. Then I'll just have to wait and see. I would love to go to States.

"But as of today, that's not possible."

Should Djokovic retain the title he would be only the fourth man in the modern era to win four successive Wimbledon crowns. It would also put him level with Pete Sampras on seven Wimbledon titles, one behind record holder Roger Federer.

"I would love to be in a position to fight for another trophy," top seed Djokovic said.

"Pete Sampras, winning his first Wimbledon, was the first tennis match I ever saw on the TV. So, of course, there's a lot of connection to this tournament.

"Pete has won it seven times. Hopefully, yeah, I can do the same this year."

Even if Djokovic wins he will lose the



2,000 ranking points he is defending from last year, following the ATP and WTA decision to strip the tournaments of points in the wake of the ban on players from Russia and Belarus.

Djokovic was also prevented from defending 2,000 points in Melbourne, but says he is not overly concerned.

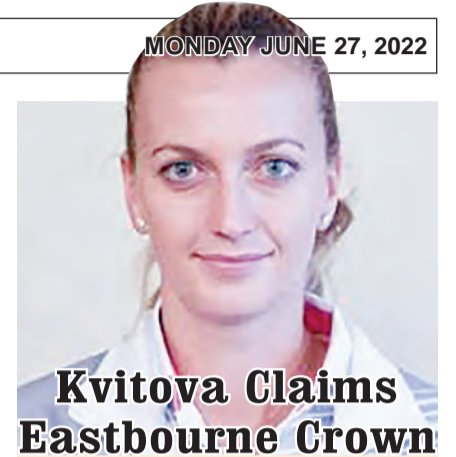
"My priorities are different now," he said.

While respecting Wimbledon's stance, Djokovic said he feels it is unfair that Russian players, including world number one Daniil Medvedev, are not competing at the grasscourt major.

"I understand both sides. It's really hard to say what is right, what is wrong. But in my heart as an athlete, putting myself in a position where someone would ban me from playing because of these circumstances, and I have not contributed to that, I wouldn't think that's fair," he said.

"Let me remind you that back in the 90s, from 92 to 96, any athlete from Serbia was not allowed to compete on the international stage in any sport. At that time I was too young, but I know athletes that were competing at that time.

"I know how it affected their lives. Many of them have left their sport because four years is a very long time."



Kvitova Claims Eastbourne Crown

LONDON (Dispatches) - Twice Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova geared up for this year's tournament in style as she sailed past former Roland Garros winner Jelena Ostapenko 6-3 6-2 to capture the WTA 500 Eastbourne International.

It was a 29th career title and the first in more than a year for the 32-year-old Czech as she underlined her status as an outside contender for Wimbledon, which begins on Monday.

Kvitova was flawless on serve and surged into an early lead, racking up 18 winners on the back of some superb ball-striking against Latvian defending champion Ostapenko, who was on a nine-match winning streak in Eastbourne.

Former world number two Kvitova was truly tested only once during the 77-minute encounter, saving five break points in a marathon 12-minute game at 2-1 in the second set.

Wimbledon 25th seed Kvitova takes on Italian Jasmine Paolini in the first round at the All England Lawn Tennis Club, while 12th seed Ostapenko faces France's Oceane Dodin.

Chun Tightens Grip at Women's PGA Championship

BETHESDA (Dispatches) - Chun In-gee extended her lead at the Women's PGA Championship, firing a three-under-par 69 to open up a six-stroke advantage at the halfway stage as she hunts down a third major title.

The 27-year-old South Korean had demolished Congressional Country Club in Bethesda, Maryland, in Thursday's first round, shooting a course record eight-under-64 that left awed rivals in disbelief -- and five shots adrift.

Chun found the going slightly harder, opening with three early birdies before back-to-back bogeys checked her progress just before the turn.

However, she regained those two strokes with birdies on the 10th and 18th to maintain a vice-like grip on the lead heading into the weekend on 11 under with a 36-hole aggregate 133.

Chun's nearest rivals are New Zealand's Lydia Ko, who moved up the leaderboard with a five-under-par 67, and in-form Jennifer Kupcho, who shot seven birdies and three bogeys in a four-under-par 68.

Kupcho and Ko are five under for the tournament. Former world number one Ko is chasing her first major victory in six years.

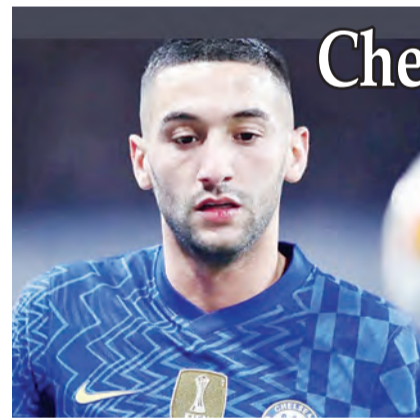
The last of her two majors came at the ANA Inspiration in Rancho Mirage in 2016 -- the same year she finished second at the Women's PGA Championship.

"It is hard to win, but I'm just trying to put myself more in that kind of position, and I think when you keep knocking on the door, you hope that one day that door will open," Ko said.

Five players are tied for fourth on four under, including Canada's Brooke Henderson, Australia's Hannah Green and South Korea's 2020 Women's PGA champion Kim Sei-young.

Lexi Thompson and Australia's Minjee Lee are eight off the lead on three under, tied for ninth with three other players including Thailand's Pornanong Phatlum and South Korea's Choi Hye-jin.

Chelsea in Talks With AC Milan Over Deal for Ziyech



LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea are 'in talks' with AC Milan over a deal to sell Moroccan winger Hakim Ziyech, according to reports.

Ziyech joined the Premier League club from Ajax for a fee in the region of £36m in 2020.

The 29-year-old has made 83 appearances for the Blues, scoring 14 and assisting ten. He played 44 times across all competitions last term -- starting half of those games.

However, he only featured 23 times in the league as his side finished third.

Writing for The Guardian, Fabrizio Romano has revealed that Ziyech's representatives are 'in talks' with Italian champions AC Milan.

The Moroccan is 'open' to joining Milan, but an arrangement regarding his salary must be found before he can complete a move to Italy.

The Rossoneri are discussing the matter 'internally' with Ziyech's agents, Romano adds.

Romano shared the news to his Twitter followers on Saturday morning. He wrote: "Hakim Ziyech's agents have already had direct talks with AC Milan board. Ziyech would be happy to join Milan -- been told Chelsea and Tuchel are open to let him go if right conditions are guaranteed."

"Ziyech's on AC Milan list since long time -- talks will continue soon."

Swiatek Says Still Figuring Out Grass

LONDON (Dispatches) - Poland's world number one Iga Swiatek is the red hot favorite to win the Wimbledon title but admits that grasscourt tennis is something she is still trying to figure out.

That admission will offer hope to her rivals but the bad news is the 21-year-old has done a pretty good job of figuring everything out so far in her stunning early career.

Only four years ago she won the Wimbledon junior title and since then has turned herself into a dominant force on the WTA Tour, so much so that she has two French Open titles and is currently on a 35-match winning streak, featuring six titles.

Those were on hard courts and clay and the switch to the All England Club lawns will be a stern challenge.

"Honestly I still feel like I need to figure out grass. Last year, for sure, it was that kind of tournament where I didn't know what to expect," Swiatek told reporters.

"Then match by match I realized maybe I can do more and more. Still this year I only played, like, 10 days on grass, so it's not a lot. I didn't have a lot of time to prepare.

"But I'm just trying to stay open-minded and kind of take positives from the situation and realise that I can play without any expectations."

Swiatek, who reached the fourth round last year, begins her quest against Croatian qualifier Jana Fett, ranked 254.

That clash will open play on Centre Court on Tuesday -- the traditional slot for the reigning champion. With Australian Ash Barty having quit the sport, that honor has been given to Swiatek and few could begrudge her.

"We didn't really request that. I know that there has been some discussions about who should open, and I feel really privileged that I've been chosen," she said.



Roma Trying In Every Way To Sign Ronaldo

ROME (Dispatches) - According to reports, Cristiano Ronaldo 'will leave' Manchester United this summer with AS Roma 'trying in every way' to sign him.

The 37-year-old returned to the Red Devils last summer following successful spells at Real Madrid and Juventus.

The 2021/22 campaign was a torrid one for Man Utd. Ole Gunnar Solskjaer was sacked in November and they went onto finish sixth in the Premier League.

Christian Eriksen's quandary marks another nadir in Manchester United's downfall. Ronaldo was one of their only shining lights. He netted 24 goals in 39 appearances across all competitions.

Erik ten Hag is United's new permanent manager. The club are yet to sign any new players ahead of the 2022/23 season.

Earlier this week it was reported that Ronaldo is 'ready to quit' Man Utd if they do not improve their transfer game.

Retesport are now reporting that Roma are 'trying in every way to take Ronaldo'.

It is noted that 'fine details' would be needed to overcome -- such as the player's image rights -- but the attacker 'will leave' Man Utd.

Meanwhile, an executive at Man Utd is reportedly 'stunned' that the Red Devils have not done everything possible to persuade Michael Edwards to join the club.

By the way Mohamed Salah may leave Liverpool for £60m this summer, while Chelsea are offering £38m plus a player to Juventus for Matthijs de Ligt...

After selling Sadio Mane to Bayern Munich, Liverpool could also cash in on Salah, if The Sun are to be believed. The forward is in 'deadlock' with the Reds over a new contract, with him 'demanding £400,000 a week'.

