

In Line With the Interventionist
Stance of Berlin and Vienna Against
Tehran, the Foreign Ministries of
Germany and Austria Summoned
The Iranian envoys on Tuesday

IRAN NEWS

The Commander of the IRGC
Described the Expulsion of the
'Iran International' TV Channel's
Employees From the UK as a
Demonstration of The
Islamic Revolution's Power and
Sphere of Influence

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Annual Inflation Rate Rises 1.4% to 47.7% in February

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's annual inflation rate rose by 1.4% to 47.7% in the calendar month to February 19, according to latest figures by the government's statistics agency the SCI.

The Statistical Center of Iran said in a report on Tuesday that Iran's consumer prices index (CPI) had increased by 46.9% for urban households and by 51.7% for rural families in the year to late February compared with the same previous period.

It said that the CPI had risen by 3.5% in February compared to last month, adding that the figure was down from a 4.3% month-on-month increase reported in January.

Inflation calculated on a point-to-point scale, which measures price hikes in February this year compared to the same month in 2022, reached 53.4%, said the SCI.

Iran has experienced high but controlled levels of inflation in recent years both because of the economic impacts of U.S. sanctions and tensions in global food and commodity supplies as a result of issue like the pandemic and the war in Ukraine.

Enemies Consider Iran as Superpower

TEHRAN (MNA) - Referring to Iran's achievements in the nuclear, missile, and drone fields, the Commander of the IRGC Aerospace Force said that the enemies consider Iran as a superpower.

At the very beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the enemies dealt with the Islamic Republic from a position of strength, but today they continue their war against Iran from a position of weakness, Brigadier General Amir Ali Hajizadeh said.

After the Islamic Revolution, with all the restrictions, there has been a lot of hope for the future and success, the IRGC commander said.

Today advanced countries need Iran's human resources, Hajizadeh also said.

Referring to Iran's achievements in the nuclear, missile, and drone fields, he further added that the enemies currently consider Iran a superpower.

Iran to Go for Plan B If U.S. Continues Its Hypocrisy in Talks



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian foreign minister said that Iran welcomes diplomacy to resolve differences in the nuclear talks, warning Washington about its hypocritical behavior in blaming Iran for not concluding the talks.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a joint press conference in Baghdad after meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein.

Amirabdollahian pointed to the visit of the IAEA delegation to Tehran and said, "Within the framework of the conclusion of negotiations, the officials of the International Atomic Energy Agency will visit Tehran in the coming days."

"We hope that Mr. Rafael Grossi, the Director General of the Agency, with a technical view and far from political excitement, will reach a conclusion and agreement with my colleagues in the Atomic Energy Organization [of Iran] in order to resolve the difference..." the top Iranian diplomat said.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has never sought to acquire nuclear weapons and atomic bombs, and the fatwa of the Leader Imam Khamenei also reaffirms this issue," he added.

"We are ready to take a step towards concluding the talks conducted in Vienna based on the previous negotiations and respecting the Islamic Republic of Iran's redlines," he said.

He went on to point out that the Americans send contradictory messages to Iran on their alleged desire to conclude the Vienna talks, warning Washington not to take a different path in contradiction to Iran's positive stance.

"I emphasized to my brother Mr. Fuad Hussein in today's talks that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always welcomed negotiations and the path of diplomacy, and we, in the new Iranian government, have worked for months to conclude and reach a good, strong and durable agreement, and now we are ready to meet," the Iranian diplomat said.

"But if the American side opts for a different path, we are also ready to implement Plan B and step in a different path, and all options are available to us and are on the table," he noted.

Elsewhere, he stressed the need for suing and bringing to justice the perpetrators behind the assassination of anti-terror commanders Haj Qassem Soleimani and Iraqi Abu Mahdi Al-Muhandis in cooperation with the Iraqi judicial authorities.

"We have always welcomed Iraq's positive and constructive role in regional developments. We have welcomed Iraq's policy in the direction of opening and developing relations with the countries of the region, the Arab world, and the Islamic world, and we pay attention to this important issue through a positive prospect," Amirabdollahian further said about relations with neighboring Iraq.

He also expressed his gratitude to the Iraqi government for its endeavors to restore Tehran's relations with Saudi Arabia and Egypt.

He thanked Hussein and the Iraqi government for their attempts to strengthen the dialogue and cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia as well as Iran and Egypt.

"Within the framework of boosting cooperation with Muslim countries and the region, we welcome the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia and Egypt," he said. "We express gratitude to Fuad Hussein's efforts in closing the gaps between the two sides."

The Iraqi minister, for his part, emphasized in the joint press conference that coordination and understandings with Tehran continue and that Baghdad hopes that Iran and the United States will return to the negotiating table.

"We hope that the Iranian and American sides will return to the negotiating table regarding the nuclear issue, reaching an understanding between Iran and the United States is important for Iraq," the Iraqi minister said.

Hussein once again stressed that Baghdad will not allow any group or country to use its soil to attack other countries.

Iran Slaps Retaliatory Sanctions on EU, British Individuals, Entities

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has announced the imposition of retaliatory sanctions against a number of European Union (EU) and British individuals and entities.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry announced the countermeasures in a statement on Tuesday.

The ministry had warned on Monday that it would retaliate against similar moves taken earlier by the Council of the European Union and the UK against scores of Iranian individuals and entities over what they call the Islamic Republic's approach towards foreign-backed riots that erupted in some Iranian cities in September.

The ministry's statement referred to the reciprocal measures as "counteraction" approved by the Islamic Republic's "relevant authorities" and authorized by the country's "counter-sanction mechanisms."

It specified some of the reasons for the enactment of the reciprocal measures as the EU and UK's "support for terrorism and terrorist groups" and their "incitement to acts of terror and violence against the Iranian people."

Iran's intelligence bodies have found footprints of American and other Western spy agencies in the violent riots. The rioters went on a rampage, brutally attacking security officers and causing massive damage to public property. Dozens of people and security personnel were killed as a result of the violence.

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Sanction, A Contagious Disease

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



It seems a new kind of pandemic which is called "sanction" threatens the world and nations should find ways to tackle it otherwise this disease will affect them unless they take serious action in confronting it.

Where does sanction come from? The first records of sanction come from the 1500s. It is derived from the Latin sancire, meaning "to decree" or "to prescribe by law." Sancire also means "to make holy" and is the root of words like sanctify and sanctuary.

But this word has turned into a devastating virus whose origin seems to be the Western states because this is the Westerners who use sanctions against others and they spread this contagious disease even among other states.

In recent decades the Islamic Republic of Iran has suffered the most from this disease whose origin has been the U.S., and other Western countries have also resorted to this virus in confronting with the Islamic Revolution.

After years of ineffective U.S. sanctions against Tehran, now it is the turn of Europe to resort to this virus and every day and with any pretext it imposes a new round of sanctions on Iranian individuals and entities.

On Monday as it was expected, the EU approved a new round of sanctions against Iran to show its harmony with its lord, the U.S., and follow this disgusting habit of Washington.

In a hostile move, Council of the European Union has imposed sanctions on a number of Iranian individuals and entities over alleged human rights violations.

In a press release issued on Monday, the EU Council said it has decided to impose restrictive measures on additional 32 Iranian individuals and two entities in a fifth round of sanctions over what the bloc claimed to be Tehran's crackdown on the recent riots.

Foreign-backed riots broke out in Iran in mid-September after the death of the 22-year-old Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, in police custody. She fainted at a police station in Tehran and was pronounced dead three days later at the hospital. An official report by Iran's Legal Medicine Organization concluded that Amini's death was caused by illness rather than alleged blows to the head or other vital body organs.

Iran's intelligence community has said several countries, including the United States and the UK, have used their spy and propaganda apparatuses to provoke violent riots in the country.

Rioters went on a rampage, brutally attacking security officers and causing massive damage to public property. Dozens of people and security personnel were killed in the riots.

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Omani King to Visit Iran With Good News

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian lawmaker has said Oman's king is going to visit Tehran in the near future for the purpose of mediating between Iran and the U.S. over the deadlocked JCPOA revival talks.

Ali Alizadeh cited Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian as saying that the Omani officials have repeatedly announced their willingness to act as a mediator between Tehran and Washington. He added in that vein, the Omani king has said he will soon travel to Iran with good news.

The king has been exchanging messages between the U.S. and Iran. Alizadeh noted that Qatar's Central Bank has also started acting as a mediator in the dispute between Tehran and Washington. According to the MP, Iran's Central Bank and the U.S. Treasury are indirectly exchanging messages with the Qatari side acting as the mediator. The U.S. has imposed crippling sanctions on Iran after Washington withdrew from the 2015 nuclear deal during former President Donald Trump.

The current U.S. president initially said he sought to return to the JCPOA. Joe Biden has however ended up imposing sanctions on Iran like his predecessor. Iran says the U.S. must return to the deal and stick by its obligations under the agreement as it was Washington that left the JCPOA unilaterally.



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Minister Says Not Care About His Boycott

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Culture says that he does not care about his being boycotted by the West. On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, Mohammad Mahdi Esmaili told reporters: "My being boycotted is not an important issue and you should not engage yourself in the issue either." The Council of Foreign Ministers of the European Union adopted the fifth package of sanctions against Iran on February 20, in continuation of supporting the recent unrest in Iran. In the new package, two entities along with 32 Iranian authorities have been sanctioned including the Minister of Culture, Minister of Education, and a number of MPs.

Iran Has Thwarted U.S. Schemes to Control West Asia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the country has managed to thwart the United States' attempts to establish a foothold in West Asia and bring nations under its control.

"Although former U.S. president [Donald Trump] openly admitted to Washington having spent 7 trillion dollars and lost at least 7,000 forces in Afghanistan, what brought such an ambitious project to an abject failure was Iran's Islamic establishment and the Islamic Revolution's culture," Brigadier General Esmail Qaani said in an address to the Assembly of Experts in Tehran on Wednesday.

He noted that Iran – irrespective of the vicious plots hatched by the enemies, above all the U.S. and the Israeli regime – continues to tread the path of progress, has become a source of influence in the region and the world, and has notched notable achievements under the Islamic establishment.

The IRGC commander pointed out that American statesmen changed their strategies in West Asia in cooperation with a number of regional countries and created the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group.



"The deviant Daesh outfit, which was a fake copy of the resistance front, had the capacity to transform the status quo of the region in favor of Americans. It was, however, because of the endeavors and sacrifices made by Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani that the fiendish conspiracy fell short," Qaani said.

The chief commander of the IRGC Quds Force also described the assassination of General Soleimani as the beginning of a new stage of hostile US activities against the Islamic Revolution, which includes an extensive economic and media hybrid war that is still going on.

The culture of resistance, which has its roots in the original concepts and teachings of Islam, has now become a global phenomenon and has frustrated hegemonic powers, Qaani said.

Vessel Carrying U.S. Weapons Seized in Persian Gulf

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of Iran's Border Guard claim that a vessel carrying US-made weapons, including "swords" was seized in the Persian Gulf.

Ahmad Ali Goudarzi said the vessel was carrying more than 5,000 machetes and swords made in the United States, claiming that when more blood touches the blades, the sharper they get.

He did produce any photos, evidence or provide other details about the alleged vessel or if any crew were arrested.

Stating that Iran also seized electronic cigarettes and various harmful systems made in the United States, Goudarzi added that over 3,000 other weapons were also discovered that were supposed to be given to the "rioters" in Iran.

Iran Keen on Boosting Cultural Ties With Russia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) of Iran says that the country is willing to widen cultural and scientific cooperation with Russia at the international and regional levels.

Mohammad-Mehdi Imanipour, who is now in Moscow, made the remarks during his meeting with the head of Russia's Agency for the Commonwealth of Independent States Affairs, Evgeny Primakov.

Imanipour expressed hope that exchange of cultural delegations between Iran and Russia would prepare the grounds for implementation of mutual agreements.

He went on to say that the Iranian government underlines the importance of development of ties with the neighbors, adding that relations with Russia is fortunately at a high level.

Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali and Iran's cultural attaché in Russia Massoud Ahmadvand were also present in the meeting where the ambassador elaborated on bilateral cooperation and called on Iranian students studying in Russia to act as a bridge to promote Tehran-Moscow ties.

Export of Agricultural Products To China Rises 5 Folds

TEHRAN (MNA) - Agriculture Minister Javad Sadati-Nejad said the export of agricultural products to China has increased by fivefold in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023), as compared to the previous year's same period, IRNA reported on Wednesday.

Sadati-Nejad, who accompanied President Raisi on his recent visit to China, said earlier that the Chinese president is interested in Iranian agricultural, food, and dairy products, and such products can conquer China's one-billion markets more than ever.

Speaking to IRNA on February 15, the minister referred to signing a number of cooperation documents in the agriculture field with China, adding, "Today three agriculture documents were signed with China, two of which is about exporting Iranian dairy products to China and one is on exporting apples to that country."

UK Chargé d'Affaires Summoned

TEHRAN (IRNA) – Foreign Ministry summoned the interim chargé d'affaires of the United Kingdom's embassy in Tehran to voice its protest at baseless claims leveled against the country by the UK government.

Isabelle Marsh was summoned by Ministry's West Europe Department on Tuesday and was told that London should stop its unfriendly gestures against Iran.

The ministry officials told Marsh in the meeting that Iran regards baseless allegations by the UK government against itself as a continuation of the Iranophobia campaign.

The ministry also described UK's new sanctions against Iran, which have been imposed under the pretext of supporting human rights, as politically-motivated, adding that the UK is not in a position to speak about human rights given its illegal way of treating immigrants and Muslims.

It said that Iran has shown over the past decades that it will not submit to foreign pressure and propaganda, adding that the country will soon reciprocate British regime's decision to impose sanctions on Tehran.

Marsh told the ministry authorities that she will convey Iran's protest to London as soon as possible.

Agreements With Regional States to Help Economic Stability

TEHRAN (IP) - The Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi said that the recent agreements with the regional countries will contribute to economic stability in the coming year.

The intensification of the currency war of the ill-wishers with the Iranian people, especially after the failure of the riots project, and the Iranian President's strategic and fruitful trip to China, shows that after being disappointed in the street and realizing their miscalculation, they are focusing on their hybrid war on the economic aspect, Bahadori Jahromi said.

It is aimed at creating a psychological atmosphere and dissatisfaction and blowing the flames of riots and unrest in Iran, he added.

Detailed information indicates that the U.S. espionage services and some specific governments have been assigned the mission to prevent stability in the Iranian currency market, he noted.

The government is adopting a new arrangement in the field of foreign exchange from today, he said adding that this arrangement is designed by taking advantage of past experiences and anti-sanction achievements.

Referring to the government's acts in the field of monetary and banking diplomacy, he said that thanks to good negotiations with other countries, especially the global economic powers in Asia, good economic and banking agreements have been made, which will help economic stability in the coming year.

The government will continue to develop trade channels with other countries, especially regional allies, Bahadori Jahromi said.

This process started last year and Iran's foreign trade has increased by 40% compared with the last year, he stated.

"We have also provided various routes for trade exchanges with our trading partners, including Russia and China, and we have introduced ruble and yuan instead of dollars and euros into our exchanges, which will also help to better manage the foreign exchange market," he concluded.

Documentary on War in Ukraine Screened at Embassy of Italy

TEHRAN – One the eve of the first anniversary of Russia-Ukraine war, Embassy of Italy screened a documentary on the bravery of Ukrainian women during the war.

Ambassador of Italy H.E. Giuseppe Perrone hosted this event at the Italian Residence where some foreign diplomats and honorary guests attended to watch screening of this documentary.

Before the screening of the film, Mr. Perrone said that Italy like many other European states have shown their support to Ukraine and its nation and hailed the resistance and pride of Ukrainians in defending their lands against Russians. He also said that Iranians because of their experience of eight years of war can feel what is going in Ukraine.

He then pointed to Ukrainian President's recent remarks that he has said he hopes this would be the first and last anniversary of the war.

Then he touched upon the documentary "Kordon" (Border) which has been made by young Italian film-maker Alice Tomassini.

Co-produced by Vatican Media and Tenderstories, Kordon held its world premiere at the 2022 Rome International Film Festival and its European premiere at the 2022 UK Film Festival, where it won the award for "Best Documentary."

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



Displaying the importance of non-violent social help through the stories of these five women, the film aims to shine a light on the powerful role women can play as peacemakers in times of conflict and turmoil.

Kordon is a call to stand together in solidarity and unite in the face of unspeakable trauma and difficulty; to help each other and those in need.

Meanwhile Charge d' Affaires of Ukraine in Tehran Yevhen Kravchenko, for his part, pointed to the war which has affected the lives of Ukrainians and expressed his gratitude to Embassy of Italy for holding the event for reflecting what has happened in Ukraine. He then pointed to some field developments in the war.

Then the documentary "Kordon" was screened for the participants in the event. The documentary «Kordon» narrates the story of 5 ordinary women doing some extraordinary things to help and give hope to Ukrainian refugees, united through a timeless train station at the Ukrainian border with Hungary. «Kordon» is a thoughtful and blaring portrait of female resistance, courage and solidarity.

The documentary is to be screened worldwide on February, the anniversary of Russia war against Ukraine.

At the end of the event, cultural attache and press secretary of Embassy of Italy, Yara Romanova, briefed the participants about the war in Ukraine.

Some European States Don't Qualify to Advise Others on Int'l Law Principles

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says certain European states do not qualify to advise others towards observing the principles of international law, reacting to the Council of the European Union's sanctioning of dozens of Iranian individuals and entities.

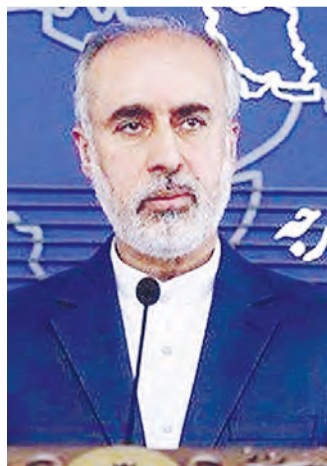
The Foreign Ministry's spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks on Tuesday after the EU council imposed the restrictive measures on 32 Iranian individuals and two entities over what the bloc called Tehran's crackdown on recent riots.

The European states, which have been issuing such pieces of advice, Kan'ani said, themselves, do not abide by the norms of international law and take steps towards violation of international commitments and human rights.

The countries in question have arbitrarily detained a considerable number of Iranian citizens, sentenced them to long-term incarceration, or extradited them for "vain reasons and unfounded accusations" based on "self-made and illegal criteria," the spokesperson noted.

"These states have replaced the international laws and conventions with their own courts' political and non-legal rulings," he noted.

"The Islamic Republic is aware of and committed to its international obligations and takes [its] actions in line with its domestic laws and regulations and its international commitments," he concluded.



Iran, Niger Have Major Capacity to Expand Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Iran and Niger have a major capacity to expand their ties as he insists that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not recognize any limits to developing relations with African countries.

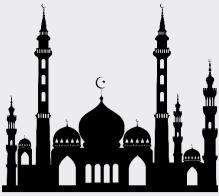
Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a meeting with visiting members of Niger-Iran parliamentary friendship group late on Tuesday.

He emphasized Iran's plans to boost relations with African countries and said that the visit by parliamentary delegations from Africa can pave the way for such an expansion in ties.

The top Iranian diplomat said that Iran and Niger have a major capacity to expand their ties, adding that the two countries should hold joint economic meetings under an intergovernmental committee initiative.

Head of the parliamentary delegation from Niger, for his part, underlined his country's willingness to develop relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Amadou expressed hope that the two countries can expand their ties relying on contribution by members of the Iranian parliament.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:17
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:11
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:24
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:40

41. If they charge thee with falsehood, say: "My work to me, and yours to you! ye are free from responsibility for what I do, and I for what ye do!"

42. Among them are some who (pretend to) listen to thee:

But canst thou make the deaf to hear,- even though they are without understanding?

Surah 10. Jonah (41 - 42)

Tehran, Yerevan Seek \$3b Trade Target

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran’s Trade Promotion Organization Mr. Alireza Peyman-Pak says Iran and Armenia have set target of \$3b bilateral trade, adding that Iran currently after Russia and China is Armenia’s third major trade partner .

Payman-Park attended a one-day workshop held in Yerevan for trade with Armenia which was aimed at introducing the target market of Armenia to Iranian traders. The workshop witnessed the presence of ambassadors of both countries and some officials of both states. Speaking in the workshop, Peyman-Pak said that Armenia has the biggest amount of imports from Iran after from Russia and China, adding that currently Iran’s exports to Armenia stand at \$437m and according to the plans of both countries, the amount is to hit \$3b. He then pointed to the good political relations between Iran and Armenia and determination of both states for improving the trade and finalizing the free trade agreement with EAEU, adding that Armenia is the only EAEU member which has borders with Iran and it can play the role of gateway between Iran and EAEU market. Peyman-Pak further said that capabilities of Iran in the fields of technical and engineering services and capacities of Iranian companies for presence in the technical and engineering



services of Armenia are good opportunity for presence of activists of those fields in Armenia. He said exchange of gas and electricity, presence of Iranian automakers in Armenia, producing industrial products especially Iranian home appliances inside Armenia as joint production, holding different exhibitions and construction of refinery are of the joint programs of Iran and Armenia. Peyman-Pak also pointed to the launch of Iran’s trade center in Yerevan and said that the center in Yerevan is very active and dynamic. He added that the most important factor that they seek in the trade centers is a powerful and big partner in the target country that Armenia has this condition. He then pointed to the issue of industrial participations and emphasized that the issue of the free zone, joint industrial parks and the issue of creating production lines in Armenia with using capacities of Armenia can help both countries to broaden their trade.

Saffron Exports Up 55% In 10 Months to January

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reported a major increase in its saffron exports in the 10 months to late January amid better government support for famers and exporters. Head of Iranian agriculture ministry’s department for medicinal herbs Hossein Zeinali said that Iran had exported some 178 metric tons of saffron worth \$173 million in the 10 calendar months to January 20. Zeinali said the figure was an increase of 55.62% compared with the same previous period. He said the increase in Iran’s saffron exports was a result of better government support for the sector in the form of guaranteed purchases from farmers and discounts on loans given to exporters. The official said that the cultivation area for saffron in Iran had expanded in the year to March 2022 to reach nearly 122,000 hectares. Zeinali said a total of 326 saffron processing and packaging units are currently operating in Iran with a total capacity of 596 metric tons per year, adding that more than a half of those factories are based in the eastern Khorasan Razavi province where much of the country’s saffron crop is grown.

U.S. Decision Had Its Impact on Iran Forex Market

to the country to reinforce some part of the forex resources. He further said Iraq as the second trade partner of Iran that has traditional banking system has always helped Iran to round the sanctions and this decision of the U.S. will make the condition difficult. He added that however this decision is part of the reality of the forex market of the country and we should not forget this point that Iraq will soon join the SWIFT and this will make Iran lose some of its tools for rounding the sanctions and therefore officials do their best to bring into the country all of its forex to stabilize and cause peace in the market.

TEHRAN – A board member of Iran-Iraq Chamber of Commerce says Iraq will join the SWIFT and it will cause Iran to lose some of its tools for skirting the U.S. sanctions. Speaking to ILNA, Ali Shariati touched upon the U.S. decisions for creating some restriction for arrival of dollar in Iraq and said that one should consider this point that Iran is under unfair and cruel U.S. sanctions and all in Iran try to increase oil sales and return its money back of the free zone, joint industrial parks and the issue of creating production lines in Armenia with using capacities of Armenia can help both countries to broaden their trade.

Shariati stated that all efforts of the statesmen are to ease exit and arrival of the forex and efforts for unfreezing the funds or connection of Iranian and banks are in this line. He reiterated that the officials should calculate all of their actions because Russia with increasing sales of oil and gas will definitely not understand Iran’s problems but if Iran can ease trade with China and Iraq it will benefit but so far no detail of agreements with China has been revealed. He also criticized the current policy of the Central Bank for selling dollar for 28,500 toman for imports and said that it is like the decision of President Rouhani government’s decision of selling dollar for 4200 toman which was mocked and led to more corruption. Shariati reiterated that preferential rate of forex will lead to rent-seeking and corruption and the Central Bank should take lesson from the past, reiterating that in the current economic condition, exporters will be loser of this policy and expressed hope soon businesses in the country would pick up.



Chinese Pursue Implementation of Financing Tehran-Isfahan Railway

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Road and Urban Development and the CEO of Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructures Company Kheyrollah Khademi says the Chinese persistently pursue implementation of financing the Tehran-Isfahan railway as the amount of China’s financing in Iran has reached 3.8b yuan. Speaking to ILNA, Khademi said that there is no state credit for the express Tehran-Qom-Isfahan railway project and China has accepted to finance 3.8b yuan in this project but the economic council is reviewing to increase the ceiling of finance by the Chinese. He noted that the Chines are cooperating in the developmental projects of the country, adding that in the field of transport infrastructures, the project of express Tehran-Qom-Isfahan railway project is underway thru finance of the Chinese. Khademi reiterated there is no problem in implementation of this project and the Chinese persistently seek financing this project. He added that some issue has been raised in the economic council that there should be a ceiling for the amount of financing as in the past 4m euros of the financing had been activated and it should now reach 13m euros which is the ceiling. He added that so far the ceiling for this project is 3.8b yuan and the council is reviewing the case for increasing the ceiling. On the latest decisions over financing the Rasht-Astara railway and the outcome of talks with Russia, he said that in the past days a Russian delegation once again visited the route and the actions taken in this project as Russians are interested in helping the implementation of the project through investment. Khademi further said that of course the government has had its own predictions for the start of the operation and its finance through its resources and at the same time talks with Russia for financing the project are underway and expressed hope the talks would bear fruits very soon.



TCCIMA Calls on Mining Companies to Fulfill Their Social Responsibilities

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Industry and Mining Committee of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (TCCIMA), in its 28th meeting on Wednesday, discussed issues related to the social responsibility of the mining companies active in the country. In this meeting, which was attended by Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister for Mining Affairs Reza Mohtashami-Pour, the attendees emphasized the need for mining companies to fulfill their duties towards the local community and adhere to their social responsibilities, the TCCIMA portal reported. Speaking at the gathering, Deputy Head of the TCCIMA Industry and Mining Committee Sajad Ghoroghi pointed out some positive and negative impacts of mining activities in any region and said: “Creation of employment, development of the region, increase in gross domestic product, generation of income for governments and development of infrastructure are among the positive points of mining activity in a region, and on the other hand, loss of pastures, pollution of surface and underground waters, disruption of the landscape, change in the direction of waterways and soil pollution are among the negative consequences of mining.”

2,300 Production Units Put Into Operation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) Ali Rasoulilian said that 2,300 production units have been put into operation across the country since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022). Rasoulilian underlined the need for completing the value chain of industrial products in the country, saying that the Ministry of Industry, Mining, and Trade should pave the way for investment in this sector. The official further emphasized the necessity of technological development in the industry sector and stated: “In this regard, the entry of knowledge-based companies into the field of production can be effective.” In line with the current Iranian year’s motto, which is “Knowledge-Based and Job-Creating Production”, the Ministry of Industry, Mining and Trade has been implementing new programs to support productive units across the country. Providing infrastructure and incentives to small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) are among the major programs that the ministry has been following in relation to industrial parks. Rasoulilian had earlier said that over 2,023 projects related to providing infrastructure for industrial parks, including water, electricity, and gas supply, with 60 trillion rials (more than \$132.7 million) of credit were underway in different parts of the country. According to Rasoulilian, 2,067 idle industrial units were revived in the country’s industrial parks and zones during the previous Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022). The official noted that with the reviving of the mentioned units, job opportunities were created for over 39,000 people. “ISIPO had put it on the agenda to revive 2,000 stagnant units inside and outside industrial parks and

zones in the previous year and by the end of the year 2,067 idle units returned to the production cycle, which provided employment for more than 39,000 people,” Rasoulilian said. The official noted that 1,433 small workshop units were also established in the mentioned year most of which were productive and knowledge-based units with high technology. The necessary licenses were also obtained for establishing 26 new industrial parks and zones across the country in the previous year, he added. He stressed that reviving idle production units is the main approach that the government is currently following in the industry sector. The government is seriously pursuing its programs to resolve production units’ problems in collaboration with the private sector; Very good planning has been done in this regard, Rasoulilian said.

Over 46,000 Tons of Pistachios Exported in 10 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran exported over 46,000 tons of pistachios in the first ten months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-January 20, 2023), Arsalan Qasemi, the chairman of Agriculture and Food Industries Committee of Iran Chamber of Cooperatives (ICC), announced. Although Iran is mostly known for its vast hydrocarbon resources, there are some other precious products that people all around the world put the Iranian brand on and appreciate greatly, one such product is Iranian “green gold” or pistachio. Cultivation of pistachios in Iran dates back to the Achaemenid period or the fifth century B.C; Like the great dynasty, the Islamic Republic was the world’s unrivaled, leading producer of pistachios for a long time, with southeastern Kerman province being the hub of production for so-called green gold. Over the past decade, climate change has caused severe drought in Iran, leading to 85 percent of the country being classified as arid or semi-arid. The decline in annual average rainfall and shortage of surface water has forced farmers to dig more wells to pump water from underground reserves. The situation is the same in Kerman province, which accounts for 70 percent of Iran’s pistachio production. As announced by Hossein Rezaei, the secretary-general of the Iran Pistachio Association (IPA), the production of pistachio in Iran fell by 70,000 tons in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20, 2022) to hover at around 150,000 tons. Hossein Rezaei said that the current year’s sprouts have also been destroyed by climate change, and this year it is difficult to keep the market, so government support is required.

No More Production of Peugeot 206

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran’s giant auto making company Iran Khodro has announced that it will remove the Peugeot 206 from its production circuit and replace it with other products. Peugeot 206 is Iran Khodro’s most popular and cheapest product in the last two decades, and Iran Khodro explained its production freeze, saying that “the development of new and up-to-date products and products” has led to this decision. The Peugeot 206 platform is currently used in two cars: Rana and Peugeot 207 Iran Khodro. On the other hand, a car named TF21 is also built on the developed Peugeot 206 platform, which Iran Khodro has published images of. “Stopping production of Peugeot 206 means the arrival of new and new cars,” a website wrote of the Peugeot 206 alternatives. With the removal of this popular hatchback, a new version of the Peugeot 207 and another car with the current name TF21 will go into mass production next year. “The new Peugeot 207 uses a T-3 engine, while the TF21 will be marketed in the form of a crossover car and will most likely be equipped with a T-5 Plus engine.” Peugeot revolutionized its design and engineering in 1998 by introducing the 206 product as an alternative and the new generation of the popular product 205.

Japan, China to Work Towards Direct Communication Line for Security

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan and China will work towards launching a direct communication line for security from this spring, Japan's defense ministry said in a statement after talks between senior defense officials from both countries.

Japan told China that violations of its airspace by unmanned surveillance balloons were unacceptable, Kyodo news agency reported, citing a Japanese defense ministry source.

Tokyo also urged Beijing to examine the situation and take preventive steps, the report said.

Japan's Defense Ministry said last week it "strongly suspects" Chinese surveillance balloons had entered Japanese territory at least three times since 2019.



Death Toll From Brazil Rains Hits 40

SAO SEBASTIAO (Dispatches) - The death toll from devastating rainfall in southeastern Brazil rose to 40, official figures showed, as President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva visited the region and said homes should no longer be built in areas at risk of landslides and major floods.

Authorities in the state of Sao Paulo said on Monday four more people had been killed in addition to 36 tallied a day earlier, but more casualties were still expected to be reported as three dozen people remained missing.

Lula flew over the coastal town of Sao Sebastiao alongside Cabinet ministers and pledged to help rebuild the town of some 91,000 people by constructing new houses in safer places.



Putin Issues New Nuclear Warnings to West Over Ukraine



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin delivered a warning to the West over Ukraine by suspending a landmark nuclear arms control treaty, announcing that new strategic systems had been put on combat duty, and threatening to resume nuclear tests.

Nearly a year after ordering an invasion that has triggered the biggest confrontation with the West in six decades, Putin said Russia would achieve its aims and accused the West of trying to destroy it.

"The elites of the West do not hide their purpose. But they also cannot fail to realize that it is impossible to defeat Russia on the battlefield," he told his country's political and military elite.

Alleging that the United States was turning the war into a global conflict, Putin said Russia was suspending participation in the New START treaty, its last major arms control treaty with Washington.

Signed by then-U.S. president Barack Obama and his Russian counterpart Dmitry Medvedev in 2010, the treaty caps the number of strategic nuclear warheads that the countries can deploy.

Due to expire in 2026, it allows each country to physically check the other's nuclear arsenal, although tensions over Ukraine had already brought inspections to a halt.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken called Putin's move "deeply unfortunate and irresponsible". NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said it made the world a more dangerous place, and urged Putin to reconsider.

The Russian leader said, without citing evidence, that some in Washington were considering breaking a moratorium on nuclear testing.

"... if the United States conducts tests, then we will. No one should have dangerous illusions that global strategic parity can be destroyed," Putin said.

"A week ago, I signed a decree on putting new ground-based strategic systems on combat duty."

It was not immediately clear which systems he meant.

Putin said Ukraine had sought to strike a facility deep inside Russia where it keeps nuclear bombers, a reference to the Engels air base.

Russia and the United States together hold 90% of the world's nuclear warheads.

The New START Treaty limited each side to 1,550 warheads on deployed missile launchers and heavy bombers. Both sides met the central limits by 2018.

Putin, who has over the past year repeatedly hinted that Russia could use a nuclear weapon if threatened, was in effect saying that he could dismantle the architecture of nuclear arms control unless the West backs off in Ukraine.

Putin said the conflict had been forced on Russia, particularly by NATO's eastward expansion since the Cold War.

"The people of Ukraine have become the hostage of the Kyiv regime and its Western overlords, who have effectively occupied this country in the political, military and economic sense," he said.

Kyiv and Western leaders such as U.S. President Joe Biden, who visited the Ukrainian capital on Monday, reject that narrative as an unfounded pretext for a land grab, and say Putin must be made to lose his gamble on invasion.

Russian forces have suffered three major battlefield reverses but still control around a fifth of Ukraine. Tens of thousands of men have been killed on both sides.

Biden Rallies NATO Allies in Poland

WARSAW (Dispatches) - Fresh from an unannounced visit to Ukraine, President Joe Biden rallied NATO allies in Poland, proclaiming "unwavering" support for Kyiv and a commitment to bolstering the alliance's eastern flank.

On a trip clearly timed to overshadow a major speech by Russian President Vladimir Putin before the anniversary of the invasion, Biden met Polish President Andrzej Duda, one of the most vocal proponents of stronger Western support for Ukraine.

The U.S. president was due to give a keynote speech of his own later on Tuesday, in which he would rally support for Ukraine as the war enters its second year with no end in sight.

He opened his trip on Monday with an unannounced trip to Ukraine, billed as the first time a U.S. president has made such a journey to a country at war without U.S. troops on the ground controlling the area.

"As I told President Zelenskyy when we spoke in Kyiv yesterday, I can probably say that our support for Ukraine remains unwavering," Biden told his Polish counterpart.

Duda said Biden's visit showed U.S. commitment to maintaining security in Europe, and described Biden's stop in Kyiv as an "incredible gesture".

Poland has NATO's longest border with Ukraine and has been the main route in for weapons and out for refugees. Duda's foreign policy adviser said the men would discuss Poland's security, and scaling up NATO resources there.

"It is no secret that we will talk about increasing the presence, also in terms of infrastructure, of NATO," Marcin Przydacz told private broadcaster TVN 24.

The visit was welcomed by ordinary Poles and by the 2.5 million Ukrainians, mostly women and children refugees from the conflict, now living in the country. Many called for bolder Western support for Kyiv, including the supply of fighter jets, which Biden has so far held back from offering.

"We hope that they (the U.S.) will increase shipments of arms, that things at the front will improve and that we will win," said Alina Kiiiko, 32, a Ukrainian in central Warsaw.



Serbia to Buy Loitering Munitions From UAE

BELGRADE (Dispatches) - Serbia said it would buy loitering munitions, a type of drone that flies to a target and detonates, from the United Arab Emirates, signaling a further distancing from longtime ally and arms supplier Russia.

"Within the next 48 hours, we will sign the contract (for the munitions)," President Aleksandar Vucic said while visiting a defense exhibition in the UAE's Abu Dhabi.

"These are suicide drones and they will be in Serbia, and we are hoping to have the first domestic suicide drones in the Serbian army within five or six months," he told reporters in remarks carried live by Serbian television.

Vucic did not specify how many loitering munitions Belgrade would obtain from the UAE, their price, or the manufacturer.

Serbia, a candidate to join the European Union, has been under pressure from the West to scale back its links with Russia, a traditional Orthodox Christian and Slavic ally, since Moscow's devastating invasion of Ukraine almost a year ago.

Although Serbia has voted against Russia three times at the United Nations since the invasion, the government in Belgrade has so far refused to join Western sanctions against Moscow.

Vucic said Serbia wants to bolster its military and defense industry by investing an additional 700 million euros (\$746.62 million) through 2023.

Serbia's military is loosely based on older, former Soviet hardware, with MiG-29 fighters and MI-35m helicopter gunships, and its air defenses are mainly comprised of Russian missile systems and radars. Its ground forces also use Soviet-made T-72 tanks and armored personnel carriers.

It also operates Chinese reconnaissance and combat drones and mid-range surface-to-air missiles. Last year, Vucic said Serbia wanted to purchase Rafale multipurpose fighter jets from France. On Monday he said that the talks on the price, which he estimated at around 3 billion euros, were still ongoing.

Taiwan Bolstering Military Exchanges With U.S.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan is bolstering its military ties with the United States and will cooperate even more closely with it and other friendly nations to deal with "authoritarian expansionism", President Tsai Ing-wen has told a group of visiting lawmakers from the United States.

The bipartisan delegation including Ro Khanna from California and Tony Gonzales from Texas arrived on the self-ruled island amid heightened tensions between the US and China over an alleged Chinese spy balloon.

The US, like most countries, has no formal diplomatic ties with Taiwan, but is the island's most important international backer and arms supplier.

"Taiwan and the United States continue to bolster military exchanges, and going forward Taiwan will cooperate even more actively with the United States and other democratic partners to confront such global challenges as authoritarian expansionism and climate change," Tsai told the five lawmakers at her office in Taipei. No further details were given.

While the United States no longer maintains military bases in Taiwan, the countries' military ties have deepened as China has stepped up pressure on the island, which it claims as its own. Illustrating the strength of ties with the United States, the delegation is on the island after a sensitive visit by a senior Pentagon official on Friday that was reported by the Financial Times.

Taiwan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs said it had no

information about any such visit.

China opposes any form of exchange between Taiwan and foreign governments. Nor has it ruled out the use of force to take control of the island.

Khanna, a member of the US House China Select Committee, told Tsai the group, which on Monday met the founder of Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Co (TSMC), was there to boost security and economic ties. TSMC is the world's largest contract chipmaker.

In August, China staged its largest ever military exercises around Taiwan, including sending missiles over the island, after then-US House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei.

Taiwan's democratically elected government rejects China's sovereignty claims and says only the Taiwanese people can decide their future.

"Our efforts to come here are in no way provocative of China, but consistent with the president's foreign policy that recognises the importance of the relationship like Taiwan, while still seeking ultimately, peace in the region," Khanna said on Monday.

Tensions between the US and China increased again last month after Washington accused Beijing of sending a spy balloon over North America and Secretary of State Antony Blinken cancelling his planned trip to Beijing. The craft, which Beijing said was a weather balloon that had gone off course, was eventually shot down off the coast of South Carolina.



Pakistan's President Slammed for Declaring Poll Date in Provinces

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Yet another political crisis is brewing in Pakistan after President Arif Alvi bypassed the country's election commission and unilaterally announced election dates for Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces.

In a letter to Sikandar Sultan Raja, Pakistan's chief election commissioner, Alvi said he was using his constitutional authority to declare April 9 as the poll date in the two provinces.

The two assemblies were controlled by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party before they were dissolved last month as part of Khan's bid to force early general elections, otherwise due later this year.

"I am under oath to preserve, protect and defend the constitution of Islamic Republic of Pakistan ... Therefore I have felt it necessary to perform my constitutional and statutory duty to announce the date of elections," Alvi, who is a senior leader of the PTI, wrote to Raja.

Following a meeting on Tuesday to discuss Alvi's decision, the Election Commission of Pakistan (ECP) in a statement said it will seek further advice from the attorney general of Pakistan and other constitutional and legal experts over the matter.

Since his removal from office in April last year, cricketer-turned-politician Khan has been holding public rallies across Pakistan to demand early polls.

According to Pakistan's constitution, provincial governors should announce new elections within 90 days of the dissolution of the assembly.

The controversy has only exacerbated the political instability in Pakistan at a time when the country is battling multiple challenges, including making fiscal adjustments to unlock crucial International Monetary Fund (IMF) funds urgently required to keep the economy afloat.

The ECP said it needed 15 billion rupees (\$57m) to hold the elections in the two provinces. It also asked law enforcement agencies to provide security for the exercise. However, both the finance and defence ministries turned down its request.

In his letter to the ECP, Alvi said the governors in the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provinces did not perform their constitutional duties by refusing to announce poll dates. The president also slammed the poll panel for dithering on the issue. But the government as well as constitutional experts have condemned Alvi's unilateral decision to announce the poll date.



Third Person Cured of HIV After Stem Cell Transplant

PARIS (Dispatches) - A man known as “the Duesseldorf patient” has become the third person declared cured of HIV after receiving a stem cell transplant that also treated his leukaemia, a study said.

Two other cases with both HIV and cancer, patients in Berlin and London, have previously been reported as cured in scientific journals following the high-risk procedure.

Now the details of the Duesseldorf patient’s cure have been revealed in the journal Nature Medicine.

The 53-year-old man, whose name has not been released, was diagnosed with HIV in 2008, then three years later with acute myeloid leukaemia, a life-threatening form of blood cancer.

In 2013 he had a bone marrow transplant using stem cells from a female donor with a rare mutation in her CCR5 gene. The mutation has been found to stop HIV from entering cells.

The Duesseldorf patient then ceased antiretroviral therapy for HIV in 2018.

Four years later, consistent testing found no trace of HIV returning in his body.

The study said that “this third case of HIV-1 cure” provides “valuable insights that will hopefully guide future cure strategies”.

The patient said in a statement that he was “proud of my worldwide team of doctors who succeeded in curing me of HIV — and at the same time, of course, of leukaemia”.



He said he celebrated “in a big way” the 10-year anniversary of his transplant on Valentine’s Day last week, adding that the donor was the “guest of honour”.

The recoveries of two more people with HIV and cancer, the so-called New York and City of Hope patients, were announced at different scientific conferences last year, though research has yet to be published on those cases.

While a cure for HIV has been long sought after, the bone marrow transplant involved in these cases is a severe and dangerous operation, making it only suitable for a small number of patients suffering from both HIV and blood cancers.

Finding a bone marrow donor with the rare CCR5 mutation can also be a major challenge.

One of the study’s co-authors, Asier Saez-Cirion of France’s Pasteur Institute, said that during the transplant, “the patient’s immune cells are completely replaced by those of the donor, which makes it possible for the vast majority of the infected cells to disappear”.

“This is an exceptional situation when all the factors coincide for this transplant to be a successful cure for both leukaemia and HIV,” he said.

Meta Subscriber Plan Risks Digital Divide

PARIS (Dispatches) - Years after Facebook quietly removed a slogan that declared the site was “free and always will be”, parent company Meta announced on Sunday a paid-for subscription service that has already been widely criticized.

Meta is following a well-trodden path to subscription services, with rivals from Reddit and Snapchat to Twitter and Discord already in the game.

But critics raised deep concerns with the way Meta had chosen to structure its new offering, which will cost US\$11.99 for web or US\$14.99 for mobile.

The firm said subscribers would get a verification badge, extra protection against impersonation, direct access to customer support and more visibility.

Online safety expert Kavya Pearlman was unimpressed with the idea of paying for protection, which she said would create a “digital caste system” of haves and have-nots.

“Safety and security features must NOT be up for sale,” she tweeted, suggesting “dude bro CEOs” should charge the impersonators rather than squeezing money from customers who already pay with their personal data.

The Real Facebook Oversight Board, a lobby group highly critical of Meta, tweeted: “Now Facebook wants you to fund the harmful model that fuels its whole business.”

And there were wider concerns from Sinan Aral, a professor at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) who conducted a two-year experiment analysing the effects that account labelling had on online behaviour.

He said his study showed that “identity cues” like Twitter Blue or Meta Verified could lead to more “knee jerk” reactions, a divide between “in groups and out groups” and an intensified focus on personalities over content.

Financial analysts said the new models being tested by social media companies would not — in the short-term at least — come close to generating the tens of billions that the likes of Meta make from advertising.

“We don’t expect the new account verification service to surpass more than one to 2 per cent of total revenue over the next 18 months,” said Angelo Zino of CFRA research.

He said Meta was likely to continue its hunt for other ways to monetize its two billion users, with other big players like Netflix likely to take chunks out of its ad revenue in the coming years.

Meta’s new service will be rolled out in Australia and New Zealand before it hits the rest of the world.

The announcement was greeted online with trolling and memes ridiculing Meta boss Mark Zuckerberg for lifting ideas from his Twitter counterpart Elon Musk.

“Inevitable,” replied Musk to one such message.

Zuckerberg will be hoping for a smoother ride than Musk faced when he rolled out Twitter Blue, only to recall it as the platform was flooded with impersonation accounts.

However, Matt Navarra, a social media consultant, flagged that Instagram had announced the move before Zuckerberg.

He suggested the launch had been “a bit unplanned and last minute”.

“For most Meta users, whether on Facebook or Insta, this new offer is likely to be greeted with a shrug of indifference,” said Susannah Streeter of Hargreaves Lansdown.

She said small businesses and higher profile people might be tempted to pay to protect themselves from hacks or impersonators, or get better visibility.

But Dan Ives of Wedbush securities reckoned the move was “risky” for Meta.

“There could be clear backlash from consumers that will never pay a dime for Facebook or Instagram and this move could push them out the door,” he said.



How New Forms of Packaging Could Save Money and Reduce Waste

PARIS (Dispatches) - Consumers aren’t the only ones thinking up ways to save money as inflation bites. Manufacturers also have a role to play, particularly in rethinking food packaging.

Whether it’s by extending shelf life of products or encouraging alternative cooking methods, packaging innovations are good news for the planet, as they can help reduce food waste.

By comparing prices, choosing cheaper products (or ‘trading down’), picking up goods with short expiry dates, or loading up on offers and promotions, consumers are using all kinds of strategies to make ends meet at a time when inflation is driving up prices and putting pressure on household budgets.

But solutions to cope with the economic situation should not only be sought by consumers themselves, but also by brands and food manufacturers. Here, it’s not a matter of talking about their strategy to secure their margins, but rather to support customers in their need to save money.



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German State Tax Revenues Up Slightly in January

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Tax revenues of Germany's federal and regional state governments increased by 0.8% in January compared with the previous year, driven by higher sales taxes and wage taxes, the finance ministry said.

Federal and state governments' tax revenue increased to a total of 58.03 billion euros (\$62.01 billion), according to the ministry's monthly report.

Germany needs a turnaround not only with respect to security policy, but also in economic and financial terms, with a focus on strengthening growth, the finance ministry said in the report.

The finance ministry will modernize Germany's tax law with legislative initiatives that foster growth, according to the ministry's report. Draft legislation will focus on making taxation simpler and more transparent, the report added.



Asia's Easing Economic Headwinds Make Way for Stronger Recovery

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - The economic headwinds that faced Asia and the Pacific last year have started to fade. Global financial conditions have eased, food and oil prices are down, and China's economy is rebounding.

These developments are helping improve prospects across the region, with growth set to accelerate to 4.7 percent this year from 3.8 percent in 2022. This will make it by far the most dynamic of the world's major regions and a bright spot in a slowing global economy.

The region's emerging and developing economies, poised to expand by 5.3 percent this year, drive this dynamism. These economies are hitting their stride as pandemic supply-chain disruptions fade and the service sector booms. China and India alone are expected to contribute more than half of global growth this year, with the rest of Asia contributing an additional quarter. Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam are all back to their robust pre-pandemic growth.

The most significant revision since we last published forecasts in October has been to China, where a sudden re-opening has paved the way for a faster-than-expected rebound in activity. China has strong trade and tourism linkages, so this is positive news for Asia, as half of the region's trade takes place between its economies.

Our analysis in the latest Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and the Pacific shows that, for every percentage point of higher growth in China, output in the rest of Asia rises by around 0.3 percent.

While benefiting from these developments, prospects for Asia's advanced economies are more mixed. The near-term outlook for Japan is stronger, supported by accommodative policies, border reopening and supply chain improvements while growth would fall back in 2024 as conditions normalize and policy support eases.

The strong performance of manufacturing exports has also started to cool under the weight of slowing global trading partners. For Korea, Singapore, and Taiwan Province of China, the technology cycle—visible in the sagging price of microchips—is a drag on exports that's likely to last through year-end. But with growth thought to be bottoming out in the rest of the world, external demand should firm heading into next year.

Asia's inflation—which rose worryingly above central bank targets last year—is poised to moderate. There are now encouraging signs that headline inflation peaked during the second half of last year, though core inflation is proving more persistent and has yet to ease definitively. We expect inflation to return to central bank targets sometime next year amid an easing of financial and commodity headwinds.

Global financial conditions have eased somewhat, and with them the US dollar has lost some strength. Central banks in Asia have been hiking interest rates as they tackle above-target inflation. These factors have helped Asian currencies rebound, with most erasing about half of last year's losses, which has eased pressure on domestic prices.

Hong Kong Under Pressure to Cut Spending in Budget as Deficit Soars

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Hong Kong is under pressure to rein in spending when it unveils its annual budget on Wednesday, after racking up huge fiscal deficits during the COVID-19 pandemic and as it struggles to kick-start the economy and regain its financial luster.

The sustainability of the city's fiscal reserves has come under the spotlight after the authorities spent more than HK\$600 billion containing the spread of infections and providing economic relief for businesses and families struggling with pandemic restrictions.

This whittled down the Asian financial hub's fiscal reserves to around HK\$800 billion (\$102 billion) - equivalent to 12 months of government expenditure -- around half the levels three years ago.

"As our economy and market came under pressure, we took exceptional measures during exceptional times to safeguard people's livelihood," Financial Secretary Paul Chan wrote in a recent blog post. "However, as our economy stabilises, we have to make adjustments to our fiscal measures accordingly."

PWC estimates a budget deficit of HK\$109 billion for 2022/23. That compares with a shortfall of HK\$56.3 billion or 1.9% of GDP, projected by the government in its budget last year.

Chan noted a need to rein in spending now that many COVID-related restrictions have been lifted, but he said any moves would be carefully considered.

"Even though the government is under tremendous pressure to reduce public expenditure, it may not be appropriate to abolish relief measures across the board," he added.

Hong Kong hewed closely to China's zero-COVID policies -- imposing some of the world's toughest measures including lengthy quarantines for inbound travellers and social distancing rules that hurt the tourism, retail and catering sectors.

Since China's imposition of a sweeping national security law in 2020 that markedly curbed individual freedoms, hundreds of thousands of Hong Kongers have emigrated abroad, bringing further uncertainty and longer-term economic pressures on Hong Kong's regional competitiveness.

Exacerbating the shortfall for Hong Kong has been a sharp drop in land sales that have long been a core source of revenue -- with PWC expecting this to hit HK\$80 billion -- 33 percent less than the original government estimate.



Pakistan Hikes Tax on Luxury Goods and Services to Get IMF Deal

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's parliament gave the go-ahead yesterday for the government to raise taxes on a raft of luxury imports and services in a bid to unlock the next tranche of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan.

Faced with critically low foreign exchange reserves, the government has already halted most imports — apart from food and pharmaceuticals — but hopes to boost revenue with the broad tax hike.

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have pushed Pakistan's economy to the brink of collapse, exacerbated by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country in 2022.

However, with an election due by the end of the year, the government is reluctant to be too harsh in case it is punished at the polls.

Parliament approved yesterday a supplementary finance bill that increases sales tax from 17 to 25 per cent on imports ranging from cars and household appliances to chocolates and cosmetics.

People will also have to pay more for business-class air travel, wedding halls, mobile phones, and sunglasses.

A general sales tax was raised from 17 to 18 per cent.

"The prime minister will also unveil (further) austerity measures in the next few days," Finance Minister Ishaq Dar told the national assembly as the bill was passed, adding "we will have to take difficult decisions".

Pakistan is desperate to unlock the next tranche of a \$6.5 billion loan facility with the IMF but struggling to meet tough conditions set by the global financier.

The IMF is demanding that Pakistan boosts its pitifully low tax base, ends exemptions for the export sector, and raises artificially low energy prices that are meant to help poor families.

"Those who are making good money in public or private sectors need to contribute to the economy," IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva told German state broadcaster Deutsche Welle at the weekend.

"It shouldn't be that the wealthy benefit from subsidies. It should be the poor who benefit from them."

Dar told parliament when tabling the bill this month that the luxury tax would generate an additional 170 billion rupees (\$650 million).

"These are the items which are widely used by the rich class," he said, adding it would "put minimum burden on the common man".

While an IMF cash injection will not be enough to rescue Pakistan on its own, it is necessary to boost confidence and open the doors for friendly nations such as Saudi Arabia, China and the United Arab Emirates to offer further loans.



Euro Zone Business Growth at 9-Month High

LONDON (Dispatches)- Buoyant services growth meant the recovery in euro zone business activity gathered steam this month, expanding much faster than thought, according to a survey providing the latest evidence the currency union could escape a recession.

S&P Global's flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), seen as a good gauge of overall economic health, climbed to 52.3 in February from January's 50.3, data showed on Tuesday.

That was comfortably above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction and above all forecasts in a Reuters poll which had predicted a more modest rise to 50.6.

"Business activity across the euro zone grew much faster than expected in February, with growth hitting a nine-month high thanks to resurgent service sector activity," said Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global.

"February's PMI is broadly consistent with GDP rising at a quarterly rate of just under 0.3%."

Suggesting the upswing could continue, demand increased for the first time since mid-2022 and firms again added to headcount. The new business index rose to 50.6 from 48.9.

Activity in the bloc's dominant services industry grew this month at its fastest pace since June and its PMI bounced to 53.0 from 50.8, above all estimates in a Reuters poll and far exceeding the median estimate for 51.0.

With recession fears fading, optimism about the year ahead improved again in February. The business expectations index rose to a nine-month high of 61.5, from 61.2 in January.

However, factory activity declined at a slightly sharper pace this month. The manufacturing PMI dipped to 48.5 from 48.8, confounding expectations in the Reuters poll for an uptick to 49.3 and below all forecasts.

But an index measuring output, which feeds into the composite PMI, bounced to 50.4 from 48.9, its first time above 50 since May.

Input costs barely rose and factories raised their selling prices at the slowest pace in almost two years. The output prices index fell to 58.3 from 61.6.

Japan Economy in Modest Recovery

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan kept its assessment of the economy unchanged in February as consumer spending remained on a recovery trend despite soft exports and factory output due to the global economic slowdown.

The government also retained its caution over the impact of global monetary tightening, price hikes and supply constraint in its monthly report. It will continue to closely monitor financial market fluctuations and China's COVID-19 situation, the report said.

The new economic assessment comes after data last week showed Japan's economy averted recession but rebounded much less than expected in the fourth quarter last year as business investment slumped.

"The economy is picking up moderately, although some weakness is seen recently," the Cabinet Office said in its monthly economic assessment, which was unchanged from January.

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than half of Japan's gross domestic product (GDP), was "recovering moderately" as people spent on eating at restaurants and travelling as well as purchasing autos, according to the report.

The government's campaign to subsidise domestic travel and the easing of border control steps boosted tourism, the report said.

The Cabinet Office described exports as "weakening recently", unchanged from the January report. Japan's shipments to Asia weakened due to impacts from China's coronavirus wave and softer demand for the semiconductor market. These also impacted manufacturers' production activities. The Cabinet Office said recovery in Japan's factory output was "stalling" in the latest report.

Uninspiring data highlights the delicate task at hand for academic Kazuo Ueda, the government's nominee to become the next central bank governor, as he plots a path to normalising the bank's ultra-easy policy without derailing a fragile economic recovery.

Bank of Korea to Hold Rates Despite Still High Inflation



BENGALURU (Dispatches) - The Bank of Korea will hold its base interest rate at 3.50% on Thursday and for the rest of this year, suggesting its longest tightening cycle on record is over despite still high inflation, a Reuters poll of economists found.

After raising rates by 300 basis points since August 2021, the BOK is managing a shrinking economy - the 0.4% contraction last quarter was the first in 2/1-2 years - as well as falling exports and high household debt.

At the same time, consumer price inflation, at 5.20% in January, is well over double the central bank's 2.00% target and is not expected to return there for at least another year, according to a separate Reuters poll.

All 42 economists polled Feb. 13-20 predicted no change to the 3.50% base rate, already the highest since late 2008, at the central bank's Feb. 23 meeting.

Only a few respondents expected rates to climb above 3.50% at some point this year, while nearly half expected at least one rate cut by year-end.

Nearly 90% of economists who provided forecasts through the first quarter of next year, 26 of 29, expected the base rate to fall below 3.50% then, with a majority forecasting 3.00% or above, compared with 3.25% or higher in the previous poll.

"Domestic demand faces headwinds from high debt-servicing burdens and a faltering property market; consumer sentiment is also subdued and households are deleveraging," Krystal Tan, economist at ANZ, wrote.

"Overall, we remain of the view that the BoK will embark on a prolonged rate pause. We expect the first rate cut to materialize in 2024, when we expect inflation to settle around the 2% mark and the U.S. (Federal Reserve) to pivot."

IAEA Officials Start Investigations in Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – IAEA officials arrived in Tehran on Tuesday and have begun their investigations, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami announced.

Eslami made the remarks on the sidelines of the cabinet meeting on Wednesday morning.

“With the interaction and coordination made, we always try to avoid creating new ambiguity in the agency’s cooperation process,” Eslami stressed.

Turning to the JCPOA revival negotiations, Elsami criticized the approach of the other parties who did not adhere to their commitments. The main parties of the JCPOA agreement did not adhere to their commitments, Americans in particular neither cooperated nor allowed others to cooperate, he stressed. It is unacceptable for the Islamic Republic of Iran to fulfill commitments unilaterally, Eslami added.



How the War in Ukraine Has Changed Germany

BERLIN (AFP) - Chancellor Olaf Scholz took just days to announce seismic shifts in Germany’s military, foreign and economic policies after Russia invaded Ukraine.

Germany would plough 100 billion euros (\$107 billion) into revamping the army, send weapons to Kyiv and wean itself off Russian energy.

But a year after Russian troops marched onto Ukrainian soil, Scholz is finding himself struggling to put his ambitious plans into practice and to make them palatable to all in the country.

Wracked by guilt over the Holocaust, post-war Germany has always tread lightly on the world stage and pursued a pacifist approach when it came to conflicts.

It was only in 1999, under heavy pressure from NATO, when the German army joined the operation in Kosovo.

Until then, Germany was happy to take on the mantle of Europe’s leading economic force, but not a military power.

Russia’s role as part of the allies that ended Adolf Hitler’s regime, and Germany’s recent history as country split between a capitalist West and a communist East for five decades before reunification in 1990 also led it to view Moscow through a different prism.

Successive German leaders -- from the centre-left Gerhard Schroeder to the centre-right Angela Merkel -- pursued a path of dialogue and detente with Moscow.

“We believed that there could only be security with Russia and not against it,” Rolf Nikel, vice president of the DGAP think tank in Berlin, told AFP.

“This was a mistake,” he said.

On February 27, 2022, Scholz hailed a “new era” as he announced the special fund for the military and promised to meet NATO’s target of spending two percent of GDP on defence.

Germany’s energy policies were also upended, throwing its export-orientated industry into chaos.

Before Russia’s invasion, Berlin was dependent on Moscow for 55 percent of its gas supplies and 35 percent of its oil.

The cheap Russian power supplies were welcomed by German industries as they helped keep costs low and, thereby, their exports competitive.

Gas has been a particular sticking point since Germany needs the fuel -- less damaging to the environment than coal -- to plug the gap left by the planned closure of its nuclear plants.

“We thought it was a double dependency: yes, we were dependent on Russian deliveries, but we assumed that Russia was also dependent as a seller,” Nikel said.

To make up for the missing supplies from Russia, Berlin has had to extend the life of its remaining nuclear plants by a few months, temporarily reactivate coal-fired power plants and open new liquefied natural gas (LNG) terminals.

After months of scrambling for new energy sources, Scholz recently proudly proclaimed that Germany is now “independent from Russian gas”.

While the energy transition appeared to be going better than thought, on the military front, Berlin was struggling.

Overhauling a military that had suffered from decades of under-investment was proving tough at a time when Germany is battling not only to renew its own military gear but also send huge quantities to Ukraine.



Scholz’s strong speech on the planned army revamp “has been relativised with time because it took too long for Germany to really back Ukraine including with military equipment and weapons,” said Marie-Agnes Strack-Zimmermann of Scholz’s junior coalition partner the Greens.

“In a crisis like this, you have to take responsibility courageously and not just react when the pressure increases in Germany and internationally,” she told AFP.

Although Scholz has repeatedly said that Germany would lend Kyiv any necessary support in its bid to repel Russia, his decisions on sending heavy armaments from missile launchers to tanks only came after much agonising.

In his recent speeches, Scholz hints at what may be holding him back.

Announcing his decision to send Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine, Scholz underlined in the Bundestag that “there are many citizens who are worried about such a decision and the dimension that it could bring”, as he urged them to trust him.

Ukrainians are being trained on Germany’s Leopard 2A6 tank -- but Germany spent months agonising on how much military hardware to send KyivUkrainians are being trained on Germany’s Leopard 2A6 tank -- but Germany spent months agonising on how much military hardware to send Kyiv

Not only are there fears of an escalation in the conflict, there are also many Germans, especially in the former East, who remain reluctant to directly oppose Moscow.

Others are wary of Germany’s new bid at re-arming itself or as a weapons supplier to Ukraine.

At the Munich Security Conference last weekend, several thousand protesters turned up in the southern German city to demonstrate against armament support for Kyiv.

Earlier this month, far-left politician Sahra Wagenknecht and feminist Alice Schwarzer launched what they called a “peace manifesto” criticizing the government’s approach to the conflict.

Calling for “an end to the escalation of arms deliveries to Kyiv” and “the opening of negotiations with Moscow”, they have also invited like-minded Germans to join them at a demonstration in central Berlin on Saturday.

Energy Firms Not Doing Enough to Cut Methane



PARIS (Dispatches) - Oil and gas companies are not doing enough to cut methane emissions, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said, despite high energy prices making abatement measures mostly pay for themselves.

In its latest annual Global Methane Tracker report, the IEA found that emissions from the energy sector rose slightly last year to 135 million tonnes, to just below the record set in 2019.

“Our new Global Methane Tracker shows that some progress is being made but that emissions are still far too high and not falling fast enough — especially as methane cuts are among the cheapest options to limit near-term global warming,” said IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol. “There is just no excuse.”

Methane is responsible for around 30 percent of the rise in global temperatures since the Industrial Revolution. As it has a faster and more powerful impact than carbon dioxide reductions, methane emissions may prove the best way to limit short-term global warming and rapidly improve air quality.

The energy sector accounts for around 40 percent of total methane emissions attributable to human activity, second only to agriculture, and cost-effective solutions are available.

“We estimate that around 70 percent of methane emissions from fossil fuel operations could be reduced with existing technology,” the IEA said in the report.

While fossil fuel operations are reducing the amount of methane emitted per unit of energy and leaks into the atmosphere, overall emissions are still rising.

This despite steps to reduce emissions which largely pay for themselves.

“Based on the record gas prices seen around the world in 2022, we estimate that about 80 percent of the options to reduce emissions from oil and gas operations worldwide could be implemented at no net cost,” said the IEA.

Gas Shortage Exposes Fragile South Asian Economies to More Pain

LAHORE (Dispatches) - With a little over a month to go for peak shopping season during Ramadan, the head of Pakistan’s retail industry body is shutting between meetings, pressing officials to relax orders that forced malls to shut by 8.30 p.m. to save energy.

More than 40% of annual retail sales occur in the 30 days of the holy month, and malls are packed between 8 p.m. and 10 p.m., Tariq Mehboob, also the chief executive of Pakistani menswear franchise Royal Tag, said in a letter to the government.

Fear in the retail sector highlights how a shortage of imported gas has cut power output and hit the economy in Pakistan, just as it reels from soaring inflation and a sliding currency. Bangladesh faces the same issues.

Both countries are scrambling to avoid a repeat of massive power cuts they faced last year, but industry officials and analysts say the crisis is likely to worsen this year because of a sharp drop in imports of liquefied natural gas (LNG).

Pakistan and Bangladesh are heavily dependent on gas for power generation, but have had to slash their imports of LNG after prices rocketed on a surge in Europe’s demand to replace Russian supplies following the Ukraine war.

“High spot LNG prices and dwindling domestic production will mean that Pakistan will continue facing issues with ramping up gas-fired power generation,” said Poorna Rajendran, LNG consultant at FGE.

“We expect power outages to worsen in 2023,” he said.

Despite LNG prices having fallen from last year’s record highs, the superchilled fuel is still expensive for South Asian buyers as their currencies have weakened sharply, making it hard for them to boost LNG imports this year.

Pakistan relies on gas for a third of its electricity output, but is grappling with dwindling foreign exchange reserves to pay for energy imports.

Ship tracking data from Kpler shows Pakistan’s LNG imports in 2022 fell 17% from the previous year to a five-year low.

As a result, in the first 11 months of 2022, Pakistan’s gas-fired power production fell 4.4%, even as overall generation rose by 1.8% to 129 gigawatt hours (GWh), data from energy think tank Ember showed.



Total power output fell well short of generation capacity and demand due to fuel shortages, analysts and government officials said, resulting in blackouts for hours every week in the second half of last year.

A key problem is that the older oil-fired power plants are inefficient and cost more to run than gas-fired plants, Pakistan Energy Minister Khurram Dastgir Khan said.

Power production costs were 1.25% higher than they would have been had sufficient LNG been available during the year ended June 2022, Reuters calculations based on data in the energy ministry’s annual report show.

However generation costs have likely jumped further since July, as officials say peak shortages intensified last summer due to lack of LNG. Currently only two of the country’s four LNG dependent plants are running.

“Summer is going to be difficult like most summers, because we walk this thin line between affordability and availability,” Dastgir told Reuters in an interview.

A similar trend could be expected in Bangladesh, where gas fuels more than two-thirds of electricity generation, said Raghav Mathur, an analyst at consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

Bangladesh’s LNG imports in 2022 fell 14% from the previous year, according to Kpler, which drove down power output while demand was rising.

As a result, last year Bangladesh resorted to cutting power on 85 of the 92 days ending Oct. 30, a Reuters analysis of data from the country’s grid operator shows. That compares with just two days of forced outages between January 2019 and July 2022.

Outages have rocked commercial operations, hitting lucrative garment industry exports to clients such as Walmart, Gap Inc and H&M and Zara.

“It has become difficult to sustain the garment industry,” Bangladesh Garment Manufacturers and Exporters Association said in a letter to the government last month, asking for regular power and gas supply and lower gas prices.

LNG prices are unlikely to ease enough to help Bangladesh and Pakistan, with analysts expecting a rebound in Chinese purchases to push prices up in 2023.

Sanction...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the EU press release, Iran’s Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaeili, Minister of Education Yousef Nouri, the deputy commander and spokesperson of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), a number of MPs, members of the police and judiciary in various parts of the country, as well as prison wardens are among the individuals listed.

The 27-nation bloc also imposed sanctions on the co-founders of EU-listed Ravin Academy, an Iran-based cyber security company.

European Union’s fresh sanctions against a number of Iranian entities and individuals were illegal and “another failed miscalculation” by the bloc, an Iranian ambassador reacted to it.



“The so-called EU sanctions list has no basis in int’l law. It’s just another failed miscalculation,” Iran’s Ambassador to Vienna Abbas Baqerpour said in post on his Twitter account on Tuesday.

The envoy said that the EU’s move to impose sanctions on the head of Iran-Austria (and Iran-Germany) friendship group, despite his outstanding efforts, indicates a “serious deviation from the principle of dialogue.”

Of course the Islamic Republic of Iran does not expect EU or the U.S. to abide by law because everybody knows that it was the U.S. who left the JCPOA without getting any due punishment, and in a bizarre move it was the Islamic Republic of Iran who was blamed by the West for an offence which has been committed by the U.S.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since its first days of emergence has been struggling with different types of sanctions imposed by the U.S. and sometimes by other Western countries, and the new round of the sanctions by EU is nothing new and Iranians can handle it but the recent sanctions showed that the world is suffering from the sanction pandemic and there is no country immune to this disease which is a big threat to integrity and independence of countries.

So European states are recommended not to follow the footstep of their lord, the U.S., in hostility against Tehran by resorting to such sanctions because Iran is strong enough to overcome such cruel and unfair actions of the West and this will be proved soon.

EU is also better to show its independence on political decisions rather than following blindly the path of the U.S. and Israel who are sworn enemies of Tehran as the Islamic Republic of Iran can be a reliable partner in all fields for Europe if its interests are respected because Iran is an independent country and will not tolerate any bully and interference in its domestic affairs.

Iran Slaps...

FROM PAGE 1

The ministry further denounced the bloc and Britain for their “interference in the Islamic Republic’s internal affairs,” their “propagation of falsehood and misinformation about Iran.” It also condemned them for their cooperation with the American sanctions against the country, which amounted to “economic terrorism.”

The statement considered the EU and the UK’s facilitation of acts of terrorism and destruction against the Iranian nation as their “violation of international commitments in the field of fighting terrorism.” It also condemned their collaboration with the anti-Iran sanctions as an “egregious contravention of fundamental principles of human rights that are mentioned in the United Nations Charter.”

According to the ministry, Iran’s reciprocal measures mandate the prohibition of the issuance of visas for those sanctioned and the prohibition of their entry into the Islamic Republic. The measures also order bank accounts and asset freeze against the designated individuals and entities.

The counter-sanctions list features 15 current and former European officials, including France’s Minister for Gender Equality, Diversity, and Equal Opportunities, Isabelle Lonvis-Rome; French Minister Delegate for Industry, Roland Lescure; President of the Central Council of Jews in Germany, Josef Schuster; Director at Europe Israel Public Affairs, Alex Benjamin; President and Chief Executive Officer (CEO) of Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, Jamie M. Fly, and head of Germany’s National Command and General Space Operations Division, Major General Michael Traut as well as three German parliamentarians and two European Parliament lawmakers.

It also names 13 European entities, including the European Coalition for Israel, the Center for Information and Documentation Israel, Christians for Israel, the Eurospike arms company, and six German military industry companies. The list further features eight British individuals, including Assistant Commissioner for Specialist Operations within the Metropolitan Police Service, Matthew Jonathan Jukes; member of the Board of Directors at The Jewish Chronicle, Alan Jacob, and six military officials.

Duplantis to Skip Euro Indoor Athletics in Turkey

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Swedish pole vault world record-holder Armand Duplantis will not defend his title at next month's European Indoor Athletics Championships in Istanbul, the Swedish Athletics Association said.

The 23-year-old star was among five athletes eligible to compete at the games who have decided not to participate, the association said in a statement.

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Azpilicueta Discharged From Hospital After Head Injury

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea captain Cesar Azpilicueta has been discharged from hospital, three days after suffering concussion in his side's Premier League defeat by Southampton, the club said.

The Spaniard was inadvertently kicked in the head by Southampton's Sekou Mara during the second half and was carried off the Stamford Bridge pitch on a stretcher. "The club's medical team are closely monitoring Cesar's condition, adhering to the important concussion protocols in place to ensure his safety," a statement read.

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SPORTS

THURSDAY FEBRUARY 23, 2023

Real Madrid Thrash Liverpool; Napoli Win at Frankfurt

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Vinicius Junior and Karim Benzema scored twice as Real Madrid produced another stunning Champions League fightback from 2-0 down to thrash Liverpool 5-2 in the first leg of their last 16 tie at Anfield yesterday.

Darwin Nunez and Mohamed Salah had given the hosts a perfect start in a repeat of last season's Champions League final.

But Vinicius struck twice to level by half-time and, after Eder Militao had given Carlo Ancelotti's men the lead, Benzema's double put the holders well on the way to the quarter-finals.

"We suffered a lot early on, you can't start games like that, but fortunately the team had a cool head," said Madrid boss Carlo Ancelotti.

"Up front today we were very efficient. Every time we broke the press of Liverpool we were able to create chances."

Defeat compounds a disastrous season for Liverpool after coming so close to an unprecedented quadruple of trophies last year.

Jürgen Klopp's men are languishing in eighth in the Premier League and now appear to have no realistic chance of silverware this season.

"I think Carlo thinks the tie is over and I think it is too in the moment," said Klopp. "In three weeks we will get to the game and take our chances."

"We go there and try to win the game. Whether it is possible, I don't know, but we will try."

Madrid's 1-0 victory when the sides met in Paris last May was overshadowed by chaotic scenes outside the Stade de France that put the lives of fans at risk.

The Liverpool support responded by drowning out the Champions League anthem with a chorus of boos, while a series of banners in the Kop stand took aim at UEFA and the French authorities.

Once the action got underway, the players produced the spectacle expected of a clash between two clubs with a combined 20 European Cups.

"Obviously we didn't expect to start like we did but at 2-0 down I thought about the City game in last year's semi-final in the hope that we could do the same," added Ancelotti.

"It turned out even better."

Vinicius was the match-winner in last season's final and now has five goals in four appearances against Liverpool.

Meanwhile in Frankfurt, goals from Victor Osimhen and Giovanni Di Lorenzo gave dominant Napoli a comfortable 2-0 victory at 10-man Eintracht Frankfurt in their Champions League last-16 first leg.



Napoli, bidding to reach their first quarter-final in the competition, went ahead when in-form Nigeria striker Osimhen, who has now scored 10 goals in his last nine games across all competitions, tapped in at the far post after 40 minutes.

Frankfurt were reduced to 10 men just before the hour and Napoli captain Di Lorenzo soon doubled the visitors' advantage in the 65th from a superb backheel assist by the tricky Khvicha Kvaratskhelia, who made amends for his first half penalty miss.

"I am happy with the performance," Napoli coach Luciano Spalletti said. "From the start the team played with character, took control of the game and did what we wanted to do."

"We probably had the chance to score an extra goal that could have been useful for us. I still think it is 50-50 for qualification, because there is still a game to be played."

"We need the utmost humility because when you face a team convinced you have an advantage you can then end up dealing with unexpected situations. Arrogance is the biggest enemy."

Error-prone Frankfurt had Randal Kolo Muani red-carded for a foul in the 58th minute and were no match for the Italians who were sharper from the start and hit the post in the 34th through Hirving Lozano.

They earned a penalty immediately after as Frankfurt's Aurelio Buta kicked Osimhen in his effort to clear the ball.

Georgia forward Kvaratskhelia, who with Osimhen has a combined total of 32 goals in all competitions this season for the Serie A leaders, failed to beat Kevin Trapp from the spot.



D OHA (Dispatches) - Down three match points late in the third set, Great Britain's Andy Murray rallied to beat Italy's Lorenzo Sonego 4-6, 6-1, 7-6 (4) in the first round of the Qatar ExxonMobil Open.

Murray served at 4-5 in the third set, fell behind 15-40 in that game, saved both match points, then faced another break point in the same game and again survived.

Sonego led 3-0 in the decisive tiebreaker before Murray won the next six points to pull away.

With the tournament's top four seeds receiving first-round byes in the 28-player draw, seventh-seeded Alejandro Davidovich Fokina was the top seed in action. The Spaniard beat France's Constant Lestienne 6-4, 6-3.

Other first-round winners were Great Britain's Liam Broady and Australians Jason Kubler and Christopher O'Connell.

Switzerland's Stan Wawrinka registered the only two service breaks of the match while beating Belgium's Zizou Bergs 6-4, 6-7 (6), 6-4 in the first round at Marseille, France.

Wawrinka got the only break in the opening set in the final game and the only break of the third set in the first game. The three-time Grand Slam champion saved all seven break points on his own serve.

In the opening day's only other two main-draw matches, Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik came from behind to beat Serbia's Filip Krajinovic 5-7, 6-3, 6-4, and Benjamin Bonzi topped Luca Van Assche 7-5, 7-5 in an all-French clash.

Real Madrid's Magician Amancio Dies at 83

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid legend Amancio Amaro nicknamed 'the magician' has died at 83 the club announced.

Joining Los Blancos from Deportivo La Coruna in 1962, the right winger lifted nine league titles and one European Cup at Madrid before retiring in 1976.

Amancio scored 155 goals in 471 games for Madrid, before going on to coach the team in the 1984-85 season.

"Together with Paco Gento, Amancio led the Real Madrid side that came after the one which won five consecutive European Cups, and represents the values that have forged the history of our club," said Madrid in a statement.

"He will be remembered by all Madridistas and by all football fans as one of the great legends of this sport."

Amancio also played a key role for Spain in their 1964 European Championship victory.

In 2022, Amancio was appointed honorary president of Real Madrid, after the death of his former team-mate Paco Gento.

Zverev Finally Playing Pain-Free After Injury Nightmare

D OHA (Dispatches) - Alexander Zverev said he was finally playing without any pain and enjoying his tennis again after a serious ankle injury and subsequent complications derailed his 2022 season.

Zverev, 25, had surgery to repair damaged ankle ligaments following an injury he sustained during his French Open semi-final against Rafa Nadal in June last year.

The German's return was further delayed in September after he suffered from a bone edema. After returning to competitive action in December, Zverev lost in the second round of the Australian Open last month and Rotterdam last week.

However, the 2020 US Open runner-up said he was now free of his injury problems.

"I don't have it in the back of my mind. A few weeks ago I used to still get signals from my foot," Zverev told reporters in Doha. "It's in the right direction, and I feel like I can play pretty freely now."



Torres has been behind Ousmane Dembele and Raphinha in coach Xavi Hernandez's pecking order in recent months.

"I fell into a bottomless well, I did not know how to get out," Torres told Catalan media, referring to the end of last season. The Spain international said he became obsessed with scoring goals and ended up playing in a different way than normal.

Torres Saw Psychologist After Falling Into "Bottomless Well"

B ARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona forward Ferran Torres turned to a psychologist for help escaping "a bottomless well", he said.

The former Manchester City winger has struggled for form this season and fallen out of favour, but played superbly in his team's 2-0 win over Cadiz on Sunday in La Liga.

They earned a penalty immediately after as Frankfurt's Aurelio Buta kicked Osimhen in his effort to clear the ball.

Georgia forward Kvaratskhelia, who with Osimhen has a combined total of 32 goals in all competitions this season for the Serie A leaders, failed to beat Kevin Trapp from the spot.

After a disappointing end to the season with Barcelona, Torres suffered a foot injury last summer in pre-season that set back his efforts to establish himself under Xavi.

"It was in that moment that I decided to work with a psychologist," continued the 22-year-old.

"I did not have confidence and everything affected me. It was a very bitter experience, but that the same time also one of the best, because now I feel stronger."

Torres excelled against Cadiz as the league leaders restored their eight-point advantage on Real Madrid, in his first La Liga start since November.

"There are weeks when I don't go to the psychologist and others when I go three times," added Torres.

"We don't always talk about football, we also talk about my private life."

Barcelona next face Manchester United in the Europa League play-off second leg on Thursday at Old Trafford, following a 2-2 draw last week at Camp Nou.

Australia Aligned With Other Nations on Russia, Belarus Athlete Ban

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - The Australian government said it was aligned with 34 other nations on the call for the International Olympic Committee (IOC) to ban Russian and Belarusian athletes from its competitions, despite not being marked as a signatory to the statement.

The British government issued the joint statement on Monday on behalf of "more than 30 like-minded nations", which held a summit addressed by Ukraine President Volodymyr Zelenskiy this month.

Australia was a signatory to two statements on the matter which were agreed by "35 like-minded nations" last year but was the only one of those countries not represented in Monday's new pledge.

A spokesman for the Australian Sports Ministry told Reuters that Australia's absence was an administrative error and that the government was in accord with the sentiments expressed in the statement.

The statement followed the IOC's recent proposal to develop a pathway for athletes from Russia and its ally Belarus to compete at next year's Paris Olympics as neutral athletes despite the ongoing war in Ukraine.



Laporta Hits Back at "Obsessed" Tebas

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona president Joan Laporta hit back at La Liga chief Javier Tebas amid the controversy over his club's payments to a refereeing executive.

Tebas claimed Laporta should resign if he could not explain Barcelona's reported seven million euros (\$7.46 million) in outgoings between 2001 and 2018 to a company belonging to former refereeing technical committee (CTA) vice-president Jose Maria Enriquez Negreira.

Barcelona initially said Negreira was being paid for reports and advice on referees, which are now compiled internally.

Laporta confirmed that before criticising Tebas.

"Some had already warned us that it seemed Tebas was pushing a reputational campaign against Barça and against me," Laporta told reporters at Camp Nou.

"The mask has come off, he continues with his obsession with Barca, with his fear of our club." Laporta recalled Tebas, when legal adviser to Alaves in 2005, tried to report former Barcelona forward Lionel Messi for playing without the correct documentation.

The Barcelona president also said his club's unwillingness to sign La Liga's deal with CVC and determination to found a European Super League also played a role in his "obsession" with the Catalan club.

