

Iranian Military Forces During the Guardians of Velayat Sky-1401 Air Defense Drill Unveiled Subterranean Tunnels Used for the Storage of Air Defense Missile Systems

IRAN NEWS

Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi Says President Ebrahim Raisi During His Visit To Bushehr Province Is Going to Inaugurate the Phase 14 of the Giant South Pars Gas Field in the Coming Days

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2 DOMESTIC

Army, IRGC Launch Large-Scale Drills



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Iran, Zimbabwe Ink Pharmaceutical Deal



> SEE PAGE 3

Iran Warns Against Any IAEA BoG's Possible Unwise Decision

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian foreign minister urged the United Nations' nuclear watchdog to abandon the politicized approaches, warning against any possible unwise decision by the IAEA Board of Governors' upcoming meeting in March.

Speaking at the High Level Segment of the Conference on Disarmament in Geneva, Hossein Amirabdollahian said that the current situation of JCPOA is the product of US policies and miscalculations. Past experiences have taught Iran to become engaged in the new round of negotiations with more care and sensitivity

See Page 7

Enemies Blamed for Recent Chaos in Forex Market



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – The government spokesman says the recent fluctuations in the national currency's value were triggered concurrently with the enemy's frustration with the failure of the foreign-backed riots that erupted in the country in September.

Ali Bahadori-Jahromi defended the Raisi administration's performance in stabilizing the currency market before the recent fluctuations, adding, however, that the exchange rate began to spike due to the enemy's plots.

"This administration created relative stability in the currency market for about one year and three months. But, the foreign currency exchange rate has increased since [November], coinciding with the enemy's disappointment with the street riots," he said.

See Page 7

4 INTERNATIONAL

UN Chief Points to Massive Rights Violations In Ukraine



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Lillard Erupts for 71 In Blazers' Win



> SEE PAGE 8

Gazprom CEO Due in Tehran To Push Through \$40b Deal

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Gazprom CEO Alexey Miller was expected to arrive in Tehran on Tuesday to meet Iran's oil and gas officials and discuss the future of cooperation between the two sides.

Ahead of the trip, Miller met Iran's Ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali in Moscow Monday and discussed issues of energy cooperation, Gazprom announced in a press release.

"Today, a working meeting was held between the Chairman of Gazprom's Board of Directors, Alexey Miller, and Kazem Jalali, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the Russian Federation," it said.

See Page 7

CEO of Shadegan Steel Co. Explains Plans of Company and Challenges Ahead

Green Production in Shadegan Steel Company



Shadegan Steel Company is one of the eight important steel projects of the country which has been built in two phases; the first phase of this complex has come on stream with an annual production of 800,000 tons, and on the whole, 8,800 billion Rial have been spent for its launch. Hossein Kohzad, CEO of Shadegan Steel Company, on the sidelines of the third specialized exhibition on the localization of parts, equipment and consumables in the steel industry and in a press conference explained the performance of this steel plant and said: "Shadegan Steel Co. was one of the eight comprehensive study projects of the country which was built with the aim of creating jobs and eliminating deprivation in Shadegan region. The groundbreaking of Shadgan Steel happened in 2005, and in 2013, Khuzestan Steel Company purchased 65% of its shares, and the remaining 35% of its shares belong to IMIDRO. In 2016, Shadegan steel direct recovery unit was launched and its steelmaking expansion plan with a capacity of 800,000 tons of billets is underway." Kohzad further noted: "The main mission of this plan was to create employment in the deprived area of Shadegan."

Correct placement of Shadegan Steel Co.

He further stated about water industries: "According to the development plan, water consuming industries were supposed to be set up in the south of the country near the sea, but this process was not followed and the concentration of steel companies shifted towards the center of the country and desert areas, which are now for water supply to these units, the water pipeline has been transferred from the Persian Gulf to these areas which costs a lot. Contrary to this issue, Khuzestan Steel Co. and Shadegan Steel Co. are properly positioned due to their proximity to open water and do not face any particular problem in the field of water supply. But due to the water restrictions in Khuzestan, we signed a contract with the provincial water and wastewater company to transfer the urban wastewater treatment plant to the factory and supply all the water required in this way." Kohzad continued by stating that

the priority of recruitment in Shadegan Steel Company is the native human resources, and stated: In the field of employment, despite direct and indirect forces and current projects, about 1,600 people are working in Shadegan Steel Company. Currently, 73% of the workforce of this unit are native of Shadegan and 99% are native of Khuzestan province." He went on to clarify: Considering that the Shadegan area was not industrial before and did not have an efficient industrial workforce, we have seriously pursued the issue of education and skill training with technical and professional cooperation in order to train the specialized workforce in order to attract young people with the required skills for employment.

Localization in Shadegan Steel Co

He touched upon the localization in Shadegan Steel Co. and said: In the major direct reduction units, the equipment has been localized and we have localized many parts in the past years. Only two main equipment have not been localized so far, one of them is compressors and, in this regard, an agreement has been made for 4 PERD projects with the support of National Steel Company, and localization of centrifugal compressors from Siemens was handed over to one of the domestic manufacturers which are specialist in it. The CEO of Shadegan Steel Company, referring to the characteristics of the company, stated: Shadegan Steel's plan due to its strategic location and proximity to the exclusive dock of Khuzestan Steel Company in Imam Khomeini

Port is accessible and its transportation is easy.

In response to the question whether the result of PERD technology in Shadegan Steel Co was positive, Kohzad explained: One of the characteristics of PERD technology, which is considered Iranian technology, is the reduction of energy consumption compared to Midrex technology. Normally, direct regeneration plans consume about 115 kilowatts of electricity per ton of production, which is less than 105 kilowatts consumed in the pad unit. This year, our 10-month average consumption has reached 102 kilowatts. In this field, we have achieved good results in Shadegan Steel. Of course, one of the actions that should be taken into account at the country level in the field of PERD technology is that the technology of this technology, which is "MMA" company, maintains its relationship to support this technology and its development with the companies that have used this technology. He pretended that this did not happen. Complaining about the lack of localization of steelmaking despite the good capacities for this in Khuzestan province, he stated: In 2001, Khuzestan Steel made an effort and built the first steelmaking unit locally, and since that year, we have not seen this happen again. Although there is a high capacity for steelmaking and this work is easier than direct restoration, but unfortunately, no measures have been taken to localize steelmaking. Of course, we have received a promise from the National Steel Company and the IMIDRO to start a movement in this field with the cooperation of Khuzestan Steel.

Production of green steel, the priority of Shadegan Steel

He listed one of the concerns of Shadegan Steel to protect the environment and said: In this regard, we intend not only to not harm the environment around the factory, but we also emphasize on preserving and strengthening it. In this regard, we have signed a contract with a consulting company so that we can receive the green steel certificate. So far, evaluations have been carried out by the environment of Khuzestan province and the measuring companies approved by Khuzestan Steel. Shadegan steel is within the permissible limits in terms of dust and polluting gases around it, and we have not caused any pollution in terms of water pollution either.

Social responsibilities of Shadegan Steel

Kohzad further noted: Considering that one of the most important goals of creating industrial districts and companies is to create collection networks and build sewerage treatment plants, industrial and sanitary wastewater, based on this, the project of constructing industrial and sanitary wastewater in the complex of Shadegan Steel Company with the aim of treating industrial and sanitary wastewater of the complex and its reuse is under construction, which we hope to put into operation by the first quarter of next year. He continued: Also, the actions of Shadegan Steel will not cause any damage to the Shadegan Wetland. Even in a conference where we hosted 7 steelmakers of the country, we visited this wetland, which emphasized the tourism potential of this wetland. Also, in this regard, we met with the head of cultural heritage of Shadegan and requested that they provide us with a comprehensive plan in the field of wetland tourism issues so that we, in turn, can provide support in this area in order to create employment in the field of tourism as well. He continued: In addition to these measures, we have held a tender for the construction of the parts needed by Shadegan Steel under the condition of establishing a workshop in Shadegan Industrial Town. A subsidiary company of Khuzestan Steel won the tender and the construction of this workshop will begin soon. We hope that employment will also be obtained from this performance. The CEO of Shadegan Steel continued: We also invite individuals and companies for the workshop of making work clothes. Mahshahr region is also close to us and this clothing workshop can also be used for this region. Kohzad also said about the other social responsibilities of Shadegan Steel: the implementation of the online monitoring system, the project of forest creation and the construction of green space, the warehouse of mechanized spare parts and the construction of the electric substation are among the other social responsibilities of this company that have been carried out so far.

Communication with knowledge-based companies

The CEO of Shadegan Steel Industry also said about the interaction of Shadegan Steel with knowledge-based companies: Shadgan Steel has been one of the leading companies in relation to the interaction of knowledge-based companies. In the context of the Internet of Things (IoT) program, which is the topic of the day, we held a tender and we

have agreed with two knowledge-based companies to be able to take advantage of the capacities of the Internet of Things with the aim of integrating the processes in the organization from the low levels to the business layer processes. Kohzad also mentioned the action of waste recycling and said: We are also taking actions with a knowledge-based company to recycle waste.

Shadegan Steel Co. development plans

Kohzad also mentioned the development plans of Shadegan Steel and said: We have an 800 thousand ton sponge iron unit and a steelmaking unit with a capacity of 800 thousand ton billets in progress, which is 80% progressed and we hope it will be put into operation next year. Other projects such as the addition of a 1,200,000 ton wide slab unit are among our plans. It is also supposed to increase the capacity of the direct recovery unit from 800 thousand tons to one million tons by carrying out reforms. The plan of 360 megawatt power plant, the construction of a lime plant and the development of branding units are other development plans of Shadegan Steel. He further noted that Khuzestan Steel ranks second in the country's production and has drawn a long-term vision for itself to produce 6 / 13 tons of steel, and in this perspective, Shadegan Steel is going to allocate 15% of this share by producing 2 million tons of steel.

The challenge of supplying iron ore

He also said about the challenge of supplying raw materials: supplying iron ore and concentrate is one of the challenges of steelmakers in the country. In the steel chain, in addition to energy restrictions, the issue of supplying iron ore to steelmakers is also a major challenge; Of course, Khuzestan Steel Holding has taken good measures to supply raw materials. At present, SIMIDCO Company supplies the raw materials we need from mines in the northeast of the country and mines in Sangan.

Energy constraints

The CEO of Shadegan Steel also pointed out the energy limitations in steelmaking and said: Although the gas consumption of the country's steel industry is below 5%, in the field of limiting the consumption of electricity and gas, there is no wall shorter than steelmaking. In the current year, these restrictions have been applied to steelmakers. Due to the fact that Shadegan Steel is a sub-category of Khuzestan Steel, with the arrangements made, most of the pressure of these restrictions was placed on Khuzestan Steel. Of course, some restrictions were imposed on this steelmaking, but it did not cause any serious damage to Shadgan steel production. Referring to the production capacity of Shadegan Steel, Kohzad said: Last year, despite the restrictions on electricity and gas consumption, we were able to exceed the factory's nominal capacity and reach the production of 807,000 tons. This year, despite the restrictions on energy consumption, we have recorded more production than last year, and by the end of the year, we will surpass last year's production.

Iran, Tunisia FMs Stress Importance of Boosting Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Tunisian counterpart Nabil Ammar spoke on the phone on Monday, discussing a host of issues. The two top diplomats stressed the importance of expanding relations between their countries. The phone conversation took place after Nabil Ammar was appointed as Tunisia’s foreign minister by President Kais Saied on February 7. Amirabdollahian congratulated him on taking the job.

Army, IRGC Launch Large-Scale Drills

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran’s Armed Forces have launched a large-scale military exercise featuring the country’s domestically-developed air defense missile systems, radars, electronic warfare devices, communication systems and an integrated air defense network.

The joint aerial maneuvers, attended by air defense divisions of the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and codenamed Modafean Aseman Velayat 1401 (Guardians of Velayat Sky 1401), kicked off in the country’s northwestern, western and central areas on Tuesday morning. Second Brigadier General Amir Farajpour said the deployment of air defense systems, with special significance given to their mobility and agility, was carried out at the first stage of the drill. Farajpour explained that the measures were taken in accordance with the principles of passive defense in order to deceive the mock enemy. Also, secure and multi-layered communication was established among defense systems, command and control centers, and the country’s integrated air defense network in order to adopt proper decisions in case of a threat. Farajpour said the exercise covers two-thirds of the Iranian airspace, adding that manned and unmanned aircraft of the Army and IRGC conducted reconnaissance sorties over the area, before detection and combat systems carried out tactical and defensive operations against the mock enemy aircraft. The senior Iranian military official noted that control and command centers are using active and passive radar systems capable of signal and electro-optical monitoring of the exercise area, and missile air defense systems will use artificial



intelligence and decision-making techniques as they discover a hostile target to launch an appropriate attack. Farajpour underlined that the entire detection, reconnaissance, interception and missile systems that the Army and IRGC air defense units are employing in the drill are homegrown, and have been manufactured by Iranian defense specialists. “Formation of secure layers of air defense in order to protect the Islamic Republic of Iran’s airspace, besides comprehensive defense of critical centers of the country are among the objectives of the exercise. Air defense units and operational forces of the Army and the IRGC are skillfully and intelligently undertaking the tasks round the clock under the operational auspices and control of the country’s joint air defense base,” he added. Iran’s Armed Forces regularly hold military maneuvers to elevate their preparedness and military prowess. The drills also serve as a warning message to the enemies against any act of aggression against the Islamic Republic.

Commander Warns U.S. Support for Any Israel’s Moves Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian military commander has warned that any US-backed measure by the Israeli regime against the Islamic Republic would imperil the lives of American occupation troops in the region. Major General Gholam-Ali Rashid, commander of the Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, raised the alarm on Monday as he elaborated on the large number of drills and technical exercises by the Iranian Armed Forces throughout the year to counter potential threats facing the country. “The Khatam al-Anbiya Central Headquarters, the Chiefs of Staff of the Armed Forces, the [Iranian] Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) monitor any threatening actions by the Zionist regime against the interests and national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran [which are carried out] in coordination with the United States. The [Iranian] Armed Forces will give a decisive response to such actions,” Rashid said. Stressing Iran’s intelligence forces are fully aware of the covert actions of these two enemies of the Iranian nation and their cooperation in operational, tactical and technical areas, Rashid said, “We warn the Americans that any support for the measures taken by the Zionist regime against Iran means endangering the lives of US soldiers in the region.” The senior commander added, “Any country cooperating with the Zionist regime to threaten Iran’s national security will pay for its actions, and our strong Armed Forces will mount powerful attack on the origin of any aggression as well as all coordinating centers and bases, and the airspace used to take those actions.” Iran’s Khatam al-Anbia Air Defense Base announced in a statement on Saturday that Iran’s Army and the IRGC would later in the day stage joint air defense maneuvers aimed at bolstering defense against enemy threats to the country’s skies. The drills served as a warning message to the enemies against any act of aggression.

Iran, Armenia Agree on Establishing Techno-Vocational Cooperation

YEREVAN (IP) - The Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare of Iran and the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of Armenia reached an agreement regarding the establishment of a joint center for technical and vocational cooperation. Iran and Armenia have many connections due to the long-standing relations between the two countries; This positive history has been effective in various aspects of the relations between the two countries despite the existence of some problems caused by regional tensions. For this reason, Armenia enjoys a good position in economic and trade relations with Iran among the neighboring countries. Iran’s Deputy Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare, Gholamohsein Hosseininia, in a meeting with Armenia’s Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs, Ruben Sarkisian, in Yerevan, explaining Iran’s skill training capacities, said that the necessary preparation for the development of bilateral interactions in the field of technical and vocational education between There are two countries. Emphasizing the strategic view of the Iranian government in establishing smart diplomacy in interaction with neighboring countries, Hosseininia added that Iran is ready to exchange educational experiences and exchange trainers in order to hold specialized courses in Armenia. The deputy minister of cooperatives, labor and social welfare of Iran stated that technical and vocational education in Iran has a good position in the upper laws and a wide organization is foreseen to realize it, and stated that there are more than 600 government education centers throughout Iran 11,000 free technical and vocational schools and 6,000 trainers in the public sector are among the capacities of the Technical and Vocational Education Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran. Ruben Sarkisian, the Deputy Minister of Labor and Social Affairs of Armenia, also pointed to the quality of educational products and the expertise of Iranian trainers in setting up skill training workshops and emphasized developing a special agenda for the development of cooperation with the Islamic Republic of Iran.

FM, UN Human Rights Chief Meet in Geneva

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has held a meeting with the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Türk on the sidelines of the 52nd session of the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Switzerland. During the meeting held early on Tuesday, Amirabdollahian and Türk discussed issues of mutual concern in the field of human rights. The Iranian minister reiterated Iran’s fundamental position on the issue of human rights and responded to some points raised by Türk about the rights situation in Iran. He also pointed to the violation of the rights of the Iranian people because of the oppressive and inhumane sanctions imposed by the United States. The two sides emphasized the need for continued dialogue and cooperation between Iran and the UN on the issue of human rights.

Arabs-Syria Rapprochement Positive Step Toward Islamic Solidarity

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says a recent visit by Arab parliament speakers and senior legislators to Syria is a positive step toward Islamic solidarity, emphasizing that dialogue and regional approaches can solve the woes in the region. “The recent progress in relations between Arab countries and Syria, including the visit by Arab parliamentary delegations to Damascus to express solidarity with Syria following the recent devastating earthquake, in addition to being a realistic approach, is a positive step toward Islamic solidarity,” Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani tweeted on Tuesday. He added that regional countries will be able to resolve their problems through “dialogue and regional mechanisms” if they act realistically, adopt an independent national stance, and pay no heed to the demands of the hegemonic powers. The high-profile Arab lawmakers arrived in Damascus on Sunday amid attempts by certain countries, above all Iraq, to restore Syria’s membership in the Arab League, more than a decade after it was suspended from the 22-member bloc. Egypt’s Foreign Minister Sameh Shoukry also arrived in Damascus on Monday in the first such visit by a top Egyptian diplomat since the foreign-sponsored militancy erupted in Syria more than a decade ago.

President Raisi Awards Khwarizmi Festival Laureates

TEHRAN (MNA) – The 36th Khwarizmi International Festival and Khwarizmi Youth Award winners were awarded by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi. Delivering a speech at the ceremony, President Raisi stated, “The continuum of knowledge, research, innovation, and technology ensures sustainable development in the country.” Considering science and technology as the basis of the country’s authority, the Iranian president called for developing research in these fields. There are no boundaries to science and technology, Raisi said, adding, “Therefore, our interaction with all nations and governments in the world should be for interaction in the transfer of knowledge and technology.” The Khwarizmi International Award is a research award given annually by the President of Iran. The awardees, 10 senior researchers, and 10 young researchers are selected by the Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology.

Pirouz, Iran’s Rare Cheetah Cub, Dies



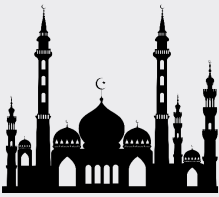
TEHRAN (IFP) - Pirouz, Iran’s popular Asiatic cheetah cub, dies at a veterinary hospital due to kidney failure, dealing a blow to hopes of saving the endangered species. Born around 10 months ago, Porouz was admitted to the Central Veterinary Hospital due to kidney failure last Thursday, but died after undergoing dialysis. Hospital director Omid Moradi offered an apology over the failure to save the animal despite efforts by his medical team. Two other cubs born with Pirouz had died shortly after birth, but Pirouz survived at a time when only a dozen members of the species remain alive. The world’s fastest land animal, cheetahs once stalked habitats from the eastern reaches of India to the Atlantic coast of Senegal. They are still found in parts of southern Africa but have practically disappeared from North Africa and Asia.

Iran Pursuing Active Neutrality In Ukraine War

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s ambassador to Spain has underscored that the Islamic Republic has taken up the policy of active neutrality in dealing with the Russia-Ukraine conflict. Hassan Ghashghavi, who was invited by Head of Centre for National Defence Studies (CESEDEN) Lieutenant General Francisco de Paula Bisbal Pons to participate in a meeting with commanders and officers of the center, said that Tehran calls for instant cessation of the confrontation via peaceful negotiations and diplomatic tools. As to Iran’s foreign policy, the ambassador explained issues such as the Iranian nuclear program, Iran’s influence and presence in West Asia, the relationship with Saudi Arabia, developments in Syria and Yemen as well as the war in Ukraine in the eyes of the Islamic Republic. Iran seeks active neutrality in the face of the Ukraine war and urges all sides to resolve differences through talks and diplomatic solutions, Ghashghavi noted. Arguing that the enrichment of uranium is much cheaper than fossil fuel powerplants, he said that the West neglected their commitments under the previous agreements in particular in constructing nuclear powerplants and supplying Iran, and failed to provide Tehran with legal assurances for supplying fuel for powerplants and research reactors, which are the main reasons behind the country’s decision to go after the enrichment program. Along with Spanish commanders, 22 officers from Germany, Argentina, Brazil, South Korea, Chile, the United States, France, Egypt, Gabon, Guatemala, Italy, Jordan, Mali, Mexico, Peru, Portugal, Britain, and Tunisia took part in the meeting.

Iran Slams Zionists’ Crimes Against Palestinians

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has condemned recent attacks by the Zionist regime and their settlers on the defenseless Palestinian people. Kanaani categorically censured brutal attacks by the Zionist settlers on the defenseless Palestinians in Hawara town and the suburbs of Nablus in the West bank, when the Zionists set fire on Palestinians’ houses and assets. He described the criminal acts by the Zionists committed in the continuation of cold blood massacre of Palestinians in Nablus and Jenin during recent weeks as a blatant example of structural and state-run terrorism, calling on the international community to react in effective and deterrent ways to halt the terrorism by the Apartheid regime. The extremist and criminal behavior of the fake Zionist regime and their incomppliance with any agreement and commitment showed that the legitimate resistance in the face of the Zionist occupiers and their aggressive acts is the only option to be chosen by the Palestinian people and the resistance groups, the spokesman argued.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:16

18:17

05:09

06:33

51. "Would ye then believe in it at last, when it actually cometh to pass? (It will then be said): 'Ah! now? and ye wanted (aforetime) to hasten it on!'"

52. "At length will be said to the wrong-doers: 'Taste ye the enduring punishment! ye get but the recompense of what ye earned!'"

Surah 10. Jonah (51 - 52)

Iran, Zimbabwe Ink Pharmaceutical Deal

IRANN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Zimbabwe have signed a memorandum of understanding in pharmaceutical, medical equipment, medical education and health systems management fields which are expected to boost bilateral collaboration in the health sector.

Despite the illegal sanctions imposed on Iran, the country has made great advancements in the pharmaceutical sector and manufactures 97% of its medicines; hence Zimbabwe is looking forward to tapping into the country’s expertise for manufacturing the bulk of essential medicines in line with its national pharmaceutical strategy.

Iran’s Minister of Health and Medical Education Bahram Einollahi is confident ties between Zimbabwe and Iran will be of great benefit to the two countries.

“The support of your country on different platforms has shown that you are a good friend. Good things are happening in our bilateral relations. Further prospects are very high,” he said.

“There is a lot of untapped potential on both ends, hence we need to operationalize these capacities so that we have fruitful relations. We need to enter into serious business so that we deepen our ties. Iran is one of the top

countries in terms of healthcare in the Middle East.”

Zimbabwean Vice President Constantino Chiwenga said the country is looking forward to the implementation of the memorandum of understanding, Financial Tribune reported.

“The medical equipment we saw will make a huge difference to our healthcare system. Cancer is a challenge for Zimbabwe hence these cancer machines will be very useful. We are interested in mobile hospitals. As you are aware, we have been hit by major disasters, so they are handy. Overall, my delegation noted the importance you attach to research,” Chiwenga said.

In line with its National Pharmaceutical Strategy, Zimbabwe has been developing various strategies to ensure the country becomes self-sufficient in terms of medicines and the partnership with Iranian companies is expected to be a step toward achieving this target.

Iran 11-Month Petchem Exports Hit \$15b

TEHRAN (IP) - The director of planning and development of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) announced the export of \$15 billion of petrochemicals in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21.

Hassan Abbaszadeh said on the sidelines of the 9th Petrochemical Industry Excellence Award: “The total export of the petrochemical industry last year was \$15 billion, of which \$12.7 billion was deposited in the NIMA system.”

The price of Nima currency used to be 4200 toman, which has recently increased to 28500 toman.

Importers are supposed to receive dollars for 28,500 toman to import goods such as flour, cooking oil, chickens, eggs, and sugar among other things.

Abbaszadeh added: “While the total export of petrochemical products in 11 months of this year was about \$15 billion, more than 90% of which was supplied in the NIMA system, and petrochemical companies still adhere to meeting their hard currency obligations.”

According to Abbaszadeh, some petrochemical companies are required to supply their products in the domestic market and are not allowed to export, such as Tondgouyan Petrochemical Plan, which is the only producer of polyethylene terephthalate in the country and because of domestic demand, supplies all products in the domestic market. Therefore, it is necessary for such companies to get help from other companies to meet their hard currency needs in order to buy parts, spare parts, or catalysts.

Iran-Pakistan Transactions Hit \$2b

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s Consul General Hassan Nourian has said that bilateral trade between Pakistan and Iran has reached \$2 billion in the last 10 months, while the target was set at \$5 billion.

“However, due to the absence of a banking channel, trade activities have faced difficulties,” he said during his visit to the Korangi Association of Trade and Industry, The News reported.

KATI President Faraz-ur-Rehman, Deputy Patron-in-Chief Zubair Chhaya, Senior Vice President Nighat Awan, former presidents Farukh Mazhar, Shaikh Fazal-e-Jalil, and First Consul of Iran Masoud Kian Bakhsh, among others, participated in the event.

Iranian consul general further said that the visa policy has been relaxed and six new border markets have been established to promote trade with Pakistan.

“Progress is also being made in barter trade and in this regard, all the preparations are complete on Iran’s side, while on Pakistan’s side, the Federal Board of Revenue is developing software that will make barter trade possible,” he added.

Nourian noted that there are friendly and brotherly relations between Pakistan and Iran, but unfortunately trade between the two countries has not developed as it should have. He said that all obstacles to the free trade agreement between the two countries have been removed, after which trade in 600 products would be possible between Iran and Pakistan.

He said that the trade delegation of Iran had a successful visit recently after which a memorandum of understanding was signed with the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan.

The Iranian CG said that under the agreement with Pakistan, the National Logistics Cell has been allowed to access the European market through Iran.

Earlier, KATI President Faraz-ur-Rehman said, “We are happy that several agreements have been concluded with the Iranian trade delegation. However, due to the global crisis, there has been a big difference in trade.”

Faraz-ur-Rehman said the absence of a banking channel was a major hurdle that needed to be solved urgently.

The KATI president said the shortage of petroleum products and gas in Pakistan could be met by Iran.

“There is a need to promote barter trade between the two countries,” he added.

Iran, Brazil Need to Boost Trade Exchanges

ABADAN (IRNA) - The Brazilian ambassador to Iran underlined that it is necessary that Tehran and Brasilia expand the level of economic exchange between Brazil and Iran.

Laudemar Gonsalves de Aguiar Neto addressed reporters on the second day of his trip to Abadan, Khuzestan Province, saying that the level of trade ties between the two countries is not satisfactory and that it should boost.

Brazil is seeking to improve the level of economic cooperation with Iran, he said, adding that Brasilia plans to pave the way for connecting economic operators of both countries.

According to the envoy, holding a trade meeting in the Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture of Abadan is one of the missions of the joint chamber of commerce of Iran and Brazil, which will bring positive results.

The authorities of Abadan intend to prepare a memorandum of understanding, he said, noting that Brazil is eager to cooperate with the Iranian side in different fields of agriculture, tourism, oil and petrochemical industries, sports, and fisheries.

Yasin Kavepur, the mayor of Abadan, said that the grounds for the collaboration between his city and Brazilian cities are ready, so the two sides can expand cooperation in cultural, sports, and economic arenas.

A memorandum of understanding on calling Abadan and Santos sister cities was signed and the two cities are now prepared to ink an official agreement in this regard.

The Brazilian ambassador met with different officials and visited a refinery, a petrochemical facility, the oil sector, the agricultural capacities, and a football team during his two-day stay in Abadan.

Iran Discovers Its First Lithium Ore Deposit

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has announced the discovery of its first lithium ore deposit amid extensive exploration activity in the country’s metals and mining sector.

A senior official in the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT) said that the deposit located in the western province of Hamedan contains some 8.5 million metric tons of lithium ore.

Ebrahimali Molabeigi, who leads MIMT’s exploration department, said more lithium ore deposits are expected to be discovered in Hamedan, a province highly rich in clay deposits which is a source of lithium.

Molabeigi expressed hope that Iran could reach a cost-effective method of production from the newly-discovered lithium deposit as he insisted that demand for the metal is rising in the global markets.

Iran has introduced measures to expand its mining and metals sector in recent years as part of plans to diversify its economy away from oil revenues.

Increased activity in the sector has generated billions of dollar worth of hard currency revenues for the country while creating hundreds of thousands of new jobs for its youth.

Iranian Satellites to Soon Stabilize in LEO

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology says the country will soon be able to stabilize its satellites in the LEO orbit by launching a system of operational satellites.

Issa Zarepour said at the 21st International Conference of the Iranian Aerospace Association: “We will soon achieve the technology of satellite stabilization in the LEO orbit.”

The satellites that are located at a relatively small distance from the earth’s surface are called low earth orbit satellites or LEO. The maximum height of this type of satellite is between 320 and 800 km from the earth’s surface.

Previously, Omid, Rasd, and Navid satellites were also launched into space with Iranian launchers and were successfully put into orbit, but they had a short orbital life. Stabilization in this layer requires the launch of an operational satellite with an orbital life of more than 3 years.

The Minister of Communications added: The government’s view of the space industry is a strategic one, and this industry can solve many of the country’s problems.

He said: The country’s ten-year space roadmap is completely clear and this will lead to progress.

Referring to the country’s space achievements, Zarepour said: We had 6 space launches last year.

In the end, pointing out that data collected by the satellites can be used in many fields, he added: We hope to be an exporter of space services in the near future and to be able to provide stabilization services for small and semi-heavy satellites in the LEO.

Arfa Iron and Steel Co. Joins Steel Chain

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Arfa Iron and Steel Company on February 25 and concurrent with its 18th foundation anniversary officially became mining company and with investment in the exploration sector it entered the upstream chain of steel production.

The public relations of the company in a statement sat that Arfa Company with winning the tender for iron exploration investment package in Hormozgan Province which includes 6 licenses for exploration officially entered the upstream industries of steel industry.

With the existing potential, it is hoped that beginning of exploration operation in this area would lead to the rise in the exploration rate in the country and introducing new and promising reserves for completing the chain of raw material provision in this industry.

CEO of KSC Visits Production Lines

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khorasan Steel Complex Company (KSC) accompanied with his assistants and managers visited on Monday different production lines of the company like pellet, direct reduction, steel making and rolling units.

According to reports, Eng. Javanbakht during his visit of the production lines got required reports from his deputy on exploration some reports, and mentioned some points for immediate removal of hurdles and problems in way of production and expressed hope that with conducting massive repairs and overhaul in the past months and wit resumption of energy supply, the company would witness once again the previous shining performances and bounce back to its real position in the country.

Javanbakht also net the tireless staff of the company in the industrial site as the personnel directly could talk with the CEO of the company and speak out their problems and demands.

Iran Trade With PG States Registers 15% Rise in Value

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran’s exports, excluding crude oil, to the six Persian Gulf countries reached 38.93 million tons worth \$14 billion during March 21, 2022-Jan. 20, while imports stood at 11.14 million tons worth \$15.17 billion.

Iran traded 50.08 million tons of goods (excluding crude oil exports) worth \$29.22 billion with the Persian Gulf’s six littoral states, namely Iraq, Kuwait, Qatar, the UAE, Bahrain and Saudi Arabia, during the first 10 months of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2022-Jan. 20), registering a 0.08% and 15.43% year-on-year rise in terms of weight and value respectively, latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration show.

The UAE was Iran’s top trade partner among the countries under review with 20.27 million tons (up 5.48%) worth \$19.77 billion (up 17.42%). It was followed by Iraq with 24.33 million tons (down 9.97%) worth \$9.08 billion (up 10.47%) and Kuwait with 4.57 million tons (up 62.98%) worth \$181.01 million (up 32.45%).

Iran’s non-oil exports to the six countries hit 38.93 million tons worth \$14 billion during the period, to register a 2.9% and a 23.91% increase in terms of weight and value respectively.

Erdogan Asks for Forgiveness Over Quake Rescue Delays

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan asked for forgiveness over rescue delays while visiting one of the areas hit hardest by the deadly earthquake earlier this month.

Erdogan, who is seeking another term as president after two decades in power, has received strong criticism from earthquake survivors in Adiyaman in the southeast.

In the last election in 2018, Erdogan handily beat his secular opposition rival in that province.

“Due to the devastating effect of the tremors and the bad weather, we were not able to work the way we wanted in Adiyaman for the first few days. I apologise for this,” Erdogan said.



Turkey's Talks With Sweden, Finland to Resume on March 9

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said talks with Sweden and Finland over their NATO membership bids would resume on March 9, although he said Sweden had still not fulfilled its obligations under a memorandum signed last year.

Turkey in January cancelled talks with Sweden and Finland on their applications after a Danish far-right political politician burned a copy of the Koran outside the Turkish embassy in Stockholm.



UN Chief Points to Massive Rights Violations in Ukraine



GENEVA (Dispatches) - Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine has triggered “the most massive violations of human rights” in the world today, the head of the United Nations said, as the war pushed into its second year with no end in sight and tens of thousands dead.

The Russian invasion “has unleashed widespread death, destruction and displacement,” U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres said in a speech to the U.N.-backed Human Rights Council in Geneva.

After failing to capture Kyiv in the opening weeks of the invasion on Feb. 24 last year and suffering a series of humiliating setbacks during the fall, Russia has stabilized the front and is concentrating its efforts on capturing four provinces that Moscow illegally annexed in September — Donetsk, Kherson, Luhansk, and Zaporizhzhia. Ukraine, meanwhile, hopes to use battle tanks and other new weapons pledged by the West to launch new counteroffensives and reclaim more of the occupied territory.

Guterres said “attacks on civilians and civilian infrastructure have caused many casualties and terrible suffering.”

The intense fighting for territory in eastern Ukraine was in sharp focus Sunday at a Ukrainian field hospital treating wounded from the intense battle for the city of Bakhmut, which is devastated. A constant flow of battered and exhausted soldiers came in on stretchers.

Anatoliy, the chief of the medical service, said his team treats dozens of soldiers every day and barely has time to eat. “My medics work practically non-stop. Before the full-scale invasion we had 50-60 wounded in a nine-month rotation, and now sometimes we have more (than that) in one day,” he told The Associated Press. He provided only one name for security reasons.

Guterres' remarks came as the Ukrainian military said that Russia launched attacks with exploding drones on several regions of the country from late Sunday until Monday morning, killing two people.

Meanwhile, Belarusian opposition activists claimed a military air base outside Belarusia's capital that hosts Russian warplanes came under attack Sunday by Belarusian guerrillas.

BYPOL, an online messaging app channel run by the activists, and several other online resources operated by the Belarusian opposition, said an A-50 early warning and control aircraft was seriously damaged in the attack at the Machulishchy base near Minsk.

The activists provided no evidence to support the claims, which couldn't be independently verified. Belarusian and Russian officials made no comment, but Belarusia's President Alexander Lukashenko urged top military and security officials on Monday to tighten discipline.

Russia used the territory of its ally Belarus to invade Ukraine a year ago. Belarus continues to host Russian troops, warplanes and other weapons.

Guterres, in his Geneva speech, cited cases of sexual violence, enforced disappearances, arbitrary detention and violations of the rights of prisoners of war documented by the U.N. human rights office.

He decried how the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, now 75 years old, has been “too often misused and abused.”

“It is exploited for political gain and it is ignored, often, by the very same people,” Guterres said. “Some governments chip away at it. Others use a wrecking ball.”

“This is a moment to stand on the right side of history,” he told the council, the U.N.'s top human rights body. Russia withdrew from its seat last year amid a surge in international pressure over the war in Ukraine.

UK PM Strikes Northern Ireland Deal With EU

LONDON (Dispatches) - British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak struck a new deal with the European Union on post-Brexit trade rules for Northern Ireland on Monday and said it would pave the way for a new chapter in London's relationship with the bloc.

Standing alongside European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen at a news conference in Windsor, Sunak said the two sides had agreed to remove “any sense of a border” between Britain and its province - a situation that had angered politicians on both sides.

The agreement marks a high-risk strategy for Sunak just four months after he took office. He is looking to secure improved relations with Brussels - and the United States - without angering the wing of his party most wedded to Brexit.

He immediately won plaudits from business groups who welcomed the easing of trade rules, and a promise from von der Leyen that she would be willing to allow British scientists to join a vast EU research program if Sunak can get the deal past his party.

The success of the deal is likely to hinge on whether it convinces the Democratic Unionist Party (DUP) to end its boycott of



Tinubu Ahead in Nigeria Election as Opposition Parties Reject Vote

ABUJA (Dispatches) - Nigeria's ruling party candidate Bola Tinubu was ahead in the vote count after Saturday's presidential poll, a Reuters tally of provisional results in 15 of 36 states showed on Monday, but opposition parties walked out of the counting process citing concerns of fraud.

The tally of provisional electoral commission results showed Tinubu, of the ruling All Progressives Congress (APC) party, was ahead with about 4.26 million votes, against Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) with about 3.26 million votes.

Outsider Peter Obi of the smaller Labour Party was in third place with about 1.77 million.

The election has been fraught with logistical and technological difficulties that resulted in the failure, in many places, to upload results directly from each polling unit to its website, as the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) had promised to do to guarantee transparency.

There is no legal requirement to do so, but the failure of the electoral commission to live up to its promise meant results had to be collated manually inside ward and local government counting centres as in previous polls.

“INEC's lack of efficient planning in critical stages and effective public communication reduced trust in the process,” the European Union observer mission said in a statement. Commonwealth observer mission chief Thabo Mbeki also criticized INEC for its failure to upload the results.

INEC had uploaded results from just 66,167 polling units out of a total of 178,846, its website showed.

“We take full responsibility for the problems and regret the distress that they have caused the candidates, political parties and the electorate,” the commission said in a statement. Opposition parties remained unsatisfied.

“The electoral process has been rigged ... and we are completely disassociating ourselves from it,” PDP Atiku's campaign manager Melaye Dino said at the INEC results centre in Abuja. Obi's Labour party was equally scathing.

China Says U.S. Endangered Peace With Taiwan Strait Fly-Through

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China accused the United States of “endangering” peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait after a U.S. military plane flew through the sensitive waterway, with the U.S. Navy responding that it had been in international airspace.

Beijing has been incensed by U.S. military missions through the narrow strait, most frequently of warships but occasionally of aircraft, saying China “has sovereignty, sovereign rights and jurisdiction” over the waterway. Taiwan and the United States dispute that saying it is an international waterway.

The Eastern Theatre Command of China's People's Liberation Army said its forces closely monitored the P-8A Poseidon maritime patrol and reconnaissance plane, which is also used for anti-submarine missions, as it flew through the strait which separates China from Taiwan.

“The U.S. side's actions deliberately interfered with and disrupted the regional situation and endangered peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait. We firmly oppose this,” it said in a short statement.

“Theatre forces remain on high alert at all times and resolutely defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity.”

The U.S. Navy's 7th Fleet said the aircraft had flown in international airspace and that the United

States will continue to fly, sail, and operate anywhere international law allows including within the Taiwan Strait.

“By operating within the Taiwan Strait in accordance with international law, the United States upholds the navigational rights and freedoms of all nations. The aircraft's transit of the Taiwan Strait demonstrates the United States' commitment to a free and open Indo-Pacific,” it added in a statement.

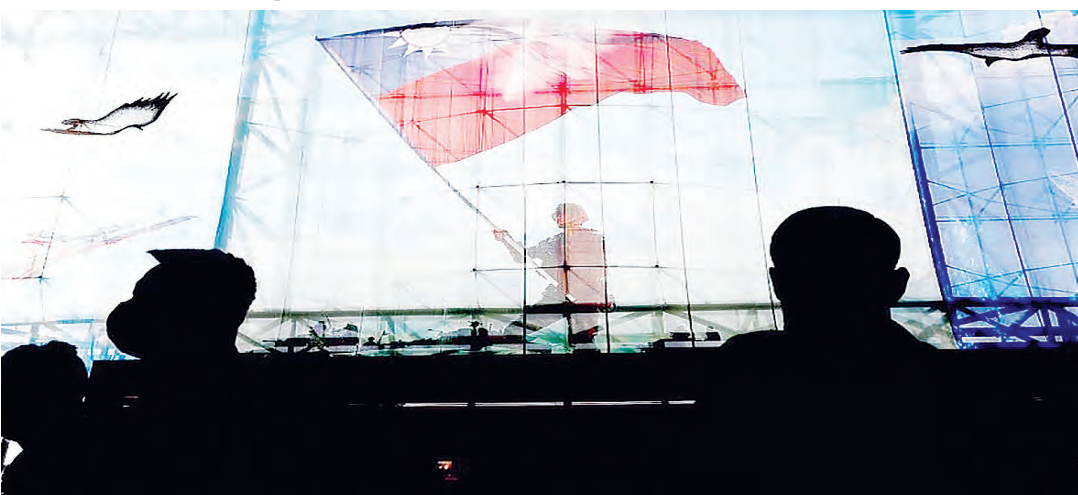
Taiwan's defence ministry said the aircraft had flown in a southerly direction through the strait.

Taiwan's forces tracked the aircraft as it flew through the strait, the ministry said, noting the situation was “as normal”. It did not elaborate.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has stepped up its military activity near the island in the past three years as it seeks to try to force Taiwan to accept Beijing's sovereignty.

Taiwan's government says only the island's people can decide their future and it will not give in to threats.

Washington is Taiwan's most important international backer and seller of arms despite the absence of formal diplomatic ties, and U.S. support for the island is a constant irritant in Sino-U.S. relations.



UN Raises \$1.2b to Help Millions in War-Torn Yemen

GENEVA (Dispatches) - The United Nations raised around \$1.2 billion to deliver aid this year to millions of people going hungry in war-ravaged Yemen, amid hopes that a fragile truce could foster a lasting peace.

The figure was far short of the \$4.3 billion sought from donors at a pledging conference in Geneva, but the UN hoped the figure could reach \$2 billion by the end of the week.

It was the seventh donor conference for Yemen in seven years -- but the UN hopes the next such gathering could focus on rebuilding the broken country rather than staving off hunger.

“We've had 31 pledges announced today and these pledges come to just about \$1.2 billion,” UN humanitarian chief Martin Griffiths said in closing the conference. “If we can make it \$2 billion by the weekend, that would be great.”

The UN says more than 21.7 million people -- two-thirds of Yemen's population -- need humanitarian assistance this year. Its appeal aims to reach the 17.3 million most vulnerable among them.

Erin Hutchinson, the Norwegian Refugee Council's Yemen chief, said the world had “abandoned Yemen at this crucial crossroads” by pledging only a quarter of the amount needed.

“This is woefully inadequate and gives the signal that some humans are less valuable than others,” she said.

Many countries demanded an end to Huthi-imposed rules that force women, including female aid workers, to be accompanied by male guardians, hampering the delivery of aid.

Yemen has been wracked by a devastating war since 2014, pitting Huthi rebels against the internationally recognized government, supported by a Saudi-led military coalition.

Since then, the war has caused hundreds of thousands of deaths, both directly and indirectly, and pushed the nation to the brink of famine.

A truce that began on April 2 last year expired on October 2, but many of its provisions have held.

“After years of death, displacement, destruction, starvation and suffering, the truce delivered real dividends for people,” UN chief Antonio Guterres told the conference.



How Italy's Generous Green Homes Scheme Turned Wicked

ROME (Dispatches) - An Italian scheme to make homes more energy efficient has been wildly popular, but the government is seeking to rein in its "out of control" costs amid fears it could send the deficit soaring.

The "superbonus" scheme, which can be used for anything from insulation to solar panels, new boilers and windows, was introduced in May 2020 to boost the economy after the coronavirus lockdown.

Environmentalists were skeptical about its benefits but Italians rushed to take advantage of the program, in which the state paid 110 percent of the cost of making homes greener, with the subsidy delivered via a tax credit or tax reduction.

As intended, it boosted the construction sector -- but it has so far cost the state 61.2 billion euros (\$64.8 billion), according to the finance ministry.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whose coalition government took office in October, said last weekend the situation was "out of control".

She said the scheme had led to fraud worth nine billion euros, while the tradeable nature of the tax credits had "generated a sort of parallel currency, and that parallel currency risks having a devastating impact on the budget".

Finance Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti went further, describing it as a "wicked policy".

Lorenzo Codogno, a former chief economist at the Treasury, told AFP that attempts now to quantify the impact of the scheme on Italy's strained public finances could be "a wake-up moment for financial markets".

He warned Italy's deficit could be revised up substantially, while both the construction sector and the government "could have liquidity problems".

Italy's deficit was an estimated 5.6 percent of GDP last year and set to fall to 4.5 percent in 2023, but revised figures potentially incorporating the superbonus scheme are due out on March 1.

The superbonus scheme was introduced by former premier Giuseppe Conte, whose populist, environmentalist Five Star Movement led the coalition government at the time.

It allowed homeowners to either deduct the cost of work from their taxes over several years or sell the tax credit to their builder, who would sell it to a bank, which would then claim the money from the state.

Angelica Donati, the president of national constructors' association ANCE, told AFP the bonus had been "fundamental in the aftermath of Covid-19, both for reviving the Italian economy as well as restarting the construction industry".

The construction sector grew by 21.6 percent in 2021, helping fuel Italy's post-pandemic boom.

But the scheme generated much more work than originally forecast and banks stopped buying credits last year, leaving some construction companies in the lurch.

Meloni's government has already sought to restrict the subsidies, reducing the superbonus from 110 percent to 90 percent last year.

Then last week it put a sudden stop to the use of the tax credits as it tries to work out how to unfreeze existing credits for an estimated 19 billion euros' worth of work that has been carried out but not yet paid for.

ANCE said some 25,000 construction companies were at risk of folding.

Superbonus users can now only receive money back from the state via tax breaks -- but that mostly benefits those on higher incomes.

The government is looking into possible alternatives to the credit system. Climate campaigners hope it will also change the bonus' scope.



Thai Farmers Tap Into Sustainable Rubber Industry

SURAT THANI (Dispatches) – By the light of a head torch, Wanida Hityim deftly strips bark from a rubber tree, collecting the milky latex as she explains why she's among a small number of Thai farmers trying to work more sustainably.

As the world's largest producer of natural rubber — supplying more than a third of global stocks in 2021 — Thailand's policies have stimulated massive deforestation, plummeting biodiversity and soaring soil erosion.

The vast majority of the kingdom's plantations are still worked conventionally, but a few farmers like Wanida are abandoning pesticides to try and lessen their impact on the environment.

And while money is her bottom line, Wanida also sees the small-scale benefits of turning to greener methods. "This place even has worms in the soil," she said of her 1.5-hectare (3.7-acre) plot in the southern province of Surat Thani, home to about 500 trees.

"Plantations that use pesticides wouldn't have nature like this because the chemicals they use would just ruin the soil," the 41-year-old told AFP.

Wanida is one of a few Thai farmers to have received the international non-profit Forest Stewardship Council (FSC) certificate, which encourages the sustainable use of forests.

FSC is not without its critics. Grant Rosoman, a senior advisor to Greenpeace International, warned it is vulnerable to industry pressure and manipulation.

"All certification schemes have problems with auditors which are paid by clients, the companies," Rosoman told AFP.

"There is a financial conflict of interest between who is paying and the auditor."

Adopting more sustainable methods has enabled Wanida to sell her rubber at a higher price, earning her around \$650 a month instead of \$550.

Thailand exported nearly \$6 billion of rubber in 2021, the vast majority of it produced by small-scale farmers who sell to middlemen — so financial incentives are key to changing methods.

"When I talk about sustainable development for the first time, people look at me with a smile and a big question mark on their face," said Maiprae Luyen, co-founder of Agriac, a rubber intermediary set up in 2019 to promote good practices among farmers in southern Thailand.

The firm works with roughly 1,000 small farmers — 60 per cent of them women — many of whom previously thought environmentally-friendly methods were a "burden", said Maiprae.

But they were convinced by both the financial returns — Agriac offers a three baht bonus per FSC-approved kilogram (2.2 pounds) sold — and also the ecological benefits, she said.

Later she pointed to the cracked soil of another rubber plantation in Surat Thani, the result of unsustainable "chemical products".

"It's time that people start to understand that the value of things is not defined by price tag," she said. "It's the right time, the right message."

But Agriac farmers are just a few leaves in the forest of Thailand's rubber industry: Only 2 per cent of the nation's roughly 3.2 million hectares of plantations are worked under FSC guidelines.

In December the European Union agreed to ban the import of rubber deemed to contribute to deforestation, a move hailed as a milestone by green groups.

But the impact of this change on Thailand will be limited, said Krungsri Bank analyst Chaiwat Sowcharoensuk, because China — which accounts for almost half of the kingdom's market — does not prioritize sustainability.



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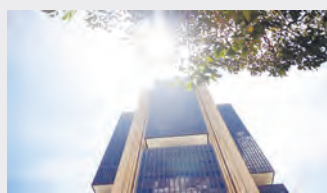
Brazil Bank Lending Down for the First Time

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Outstanding loans in Brazil decreased by 0.3% in January, according to central bank data on Monday, marking the first decline in a year.

The result suggests a slowdown that is likely to gain momentum in a scenario of high borrowing costs following the aggressive monetary tightening implemented by the central bank to curb inflation.

Outstanding loans fell to 5.3 trillion reais (\$1 trillion) in January, with loans to companies decreasing by 2.4%, while credit to families rose by 1.1%.

Over the past 12 months, total credit expansion was 13.6%, down from 14.0% in the previous month.



Economists Forecast Smaller Fall in UK Output in 2023

LONDON (FT) - The UK economic outlook for this year has improved, with analysts forecasting a smaller contraction in output than they had previously because of falling energy prices and better than anticipated business and consumer sentiment.

In December and January, economists expected gross domestic product to drop 1 per cent this year, according to data from Consensus Economics, which polls leading forecasters.

However, the data for the week of February 20 shows that economists are upgrading their forecasts. The average forecast involves a 0.6 per cent fall in GDP in 2023.

The UK recorded better economic news last week. The latest S&P Global/Cips flash composite purchasing managers' index showed British business activity rebounded in February after six months of declining output.

Consumer confidence in February reached its highest level in almost a year, according to research group GfK. And official data about the public finances showed chancellor Jeremy Hunt was on course to net a windfall of £30bn after the UK recorded a surprise surplus in January.

While the cost of living crisis is far from over, and the Bank of England could raise interest rates further to curb inflation, there has been a sharp fall in wholesale energy prices, which soared after Russia's full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022.

The UK wholesale gas price is now below £1.30 a term, half the price of mid-December and down from a peak of £5.95 last August.

Liz Martins, economist at HSBC, said that given the better economic news and falling energy prices "it is now plausible that there is no recession at all".

"That would be a remarkable result given the scale of the energy shock and monetary tightening that we have had," she added.

Allan Monks, economist at JPMorgan, estimates the economy will expand by 0.4 per cent this year, partly owing to lower energy prices.

Ellie Henderson, economist at Investec, said "the fall in energy prices is the sunshine on a cloudy day" for the economy because it eased pressure on businesses and households.

Lower wholesale gas prices mean the government's cap on household energy bills has become less expensive for ministers.

It has fuelled expectations that Hunt may not proceed with plans to raise the cap from its current annual level of £2,500 to £3,000 in April.

Susannah Streeter, analyst at Hargreaves Lansdown, said that for businesses, the fall in gas prices should "mean an easing off of punishing input prices, which should enable them to limit hikes passed on to customers".

More than three-quarters of business leaders are confident about their companies' prospects in 2023, according to a new survey published by the Boston Consulting Group. Some analysts, including Citigroup, expect inflation to return to the BoE target of 2 per cent in the second half of 2023. The central bank anticipates inflation of 4 per cent in the fourth quarter.

Argentina in Talks With IMF to Ease Reserves Targets Amid Drought

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches)- Argentina's government is in final talks with International Monetary Fund officials to ease foreign exchange reserves targets for 2023 under the country's \$44 billion program, two sources close to the matter told Reuters.

The move comes as the South American commodities exporter is facing the worst drought in 60 years, which has pummeled soy, corn and wheat crops, compromising already weak foreign exchange reserves.

Discussions include the impact of the drought on 2023 goals for net reserves, said an Argentina economy ministry adviser who asked not to be named because the talks were ongoing.

Talks are now focused on agreeing on exact figures, said one of the sources. An Argentine government source, who asked not to be named because discussions are private, said talks are ongoing but nothing is defined yet.

Officials for the Economy Ministry declined to comment.

A spokesperson for the IMF said that the Fund's staff and the Argentine authorities are discussing the fourth review of the program, and it will communicate the outcome of those discussions in due course.

A group of representatives from Argentina's central bank and Economy Ministry arrived in Washington this week for the fourth review of the extended fund facility program approved in March 2022, after a failed bailout four years earlier.

Meanwhile, Economy Minister Sergio Massa met with IMF Managing Director Kristalina Georgieva on the sidelines of the Group of 20 meetings in Bengaluru, India.

The talks to change the central bank net reserves targets for this year are pre-emptive, as the country did meet its end-December 2022 net reserves targets, another source added.

The world's top exporter of soy oil and meal is also facing a rise in import costs of energy and fertilizers due to the war in Ukraine, adding pressure to much-needed dollar reserves.

These discussions come shortly after the country decided in January to start a debt buyback of its overseas debt of up to \$1 billion. Earlier this month, IMF official Nigel Chalk said that Argentina shouldn't undermine targets to rebuild its "scarce" foreign currency reserves.

Net reserves today stand at around \$4.4 billion, according to calculations from Buenos Aires-based brokerage firm PPI Inversiones.

Under the latest review, Argentina had been set the target of net reserves to increase by \$5.5 billion at the end of March and \$9.8 billion at the end of the year.



China Ramps Up Coal Plant Approvals Despite Emissions Pledge: report

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China last year approved the largest expansion of coal-fired power plants since 2015, according to a study published Monday, despite its vow to begin phasing down use of the fossil fuel in just three years.

The coal power capacity that China began building in 2022 was six times as much as that in the rest of the world combined, the report by the Centre for Research on Energy and Clean Air (CREA) in Finland and the Global Energy Monitor (GEM) added.

"China continues to be the glaring exception to the ongoing global decline in coal plant development," GEM research analyst Flora Champenois said.

"The speed at which projects progressed through permitting to construction in 2022 was extraordinary."

China is one of the world's biggest emitters of the greenhouse gases driving climate change, such as carbon dioxide (CO2).

President Xi Jinping has pledged that China will peak its CO2 emissions between 2026-2030 and reduce them to net zero by 2060, moves seen as essential for keeping global temperature rise well below two degrees Celsius.

The report warned that even if Beijing sticks to those commitments, the current coal power expansion will make meeting them "more complicated and costly". A total of 106 GW of new coal power projects were approved in 2022 -- the equivalent of two large coal plants per week -- it said.

Plants accounting for around a third of that capacity have already begun construction, with some gaining permits, securing financing and breaking ground "within a matter of months".

Singapore's «Big Three» Banks Deliver Profit Hat-Trick

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - All three of Singapore's local banking giants registered record profits in 2022 as higher interest rates benefited the Southeast Asia-oriented lenders.

2022 was a challenging year for the financial sector, characterized by negative market performance across asset classes and a dealmaking slump. Nonetheless, Singapore's so-called «big three» banks -- DBS, OCBC and UOB -- managed to buck the trend to deliver a hat-trick in profits.

Higher interest rates acted as the proverbial rising tide to lift all boats. Local and regional economic resilience offset credit troubles elsewhere. Digital business featured highly.

Net interest income surged at DBS (40 percent increase), OCBC (31 percent) and UOB (31 percent) as continued economic momentum in the region coupled with higher rates drove loan revenues higher.

This was the primary contributor to record profits as all three lenders were not immune to the broader market woes that drove non-interest income, like fees and commissions, lower.

One of the major advantages often being touted in Asia is its economic diversity and how this allows for regional resilience in different scenarios. This was in play in 2022 as various markets played a role in the bottom lines of the big three banks.

The Singapore home market was the key profit contributor for all in 2022. At OCBC, net profits climbed 44 percent to S\$1.2 billion (\$890 million) in Malaysia where it fully acquired Horizon Asset Management in 2021 and launched private banking services in 2022. DBS saw profits in its Hong Kong unit grow more than 21 percent to over S\$1.4 billion.

While all three banks saw improved profits in Greater China, they were also hit by economic challenges in the mainland which was a sore point for many balance sheets worldwide. For example, Asia-focused British lenders HSBC and Standard Chartered both saw significantly higher credit impairment charges that were, in part, attributed to China's commercial real estate sector.

UOB saw a 78 percent increase to S\$100 million in loan-related allowances for Greater China. At DBS, stage 3 expected credit losses from Greater China ex-Hong Kong markets increased 139 percent to S\$148 million.

All non-performing loan ratios also stayed flat or improved.

Another shared feature was highlights related to digitalization and its business contributions.

India's Economic Growth Appears to Be Very Fragile

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's economic growth appears to be 'very fragile' and it may fall short of what the country needs to meet the aspirations of its growing workforce, RBI Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) member Jayanth R Varma said on Sunday. In India, Varma said he expects inflation to remain high in 2022-23 but come down significantly in 2023-24.

"However, growth appears to be very fragile, and monetary tightening is compressing demand," he told PTI.

Explaining further, he said rising EMI payments increases the pressure on household budgets and dampens spending, and exports are struggling in the face of global factors.

While noting that high interest rates make private capital investment more difficult, Varma said the government is in fiscal consolidation mode, thus reducing the support to the economy from this source.

"Because of all these factors, I fear that growth may fall short of what we need to meet the aspirations of our growing workforce given our demographic context and income level," he said.

The Reserve Bank of India (RBI) has projected India's economic growth at 6.4 per cent for 2023- 24. Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth is estimated at 7 per cent in 2022-23, according to the first advance estimate of the National Statistical Office (NSO). The Economic Survey 2022-23 projected a baseline GDP growth of 6.5 per cent in real terms for the next fiscal.

Varma , currently a professor at the Indian Institute of Management, Ahmedabad said he sees global inflationary pressures dissipating in the months ahead as the supply shocks from the pandemic and from the Ukraine war gradually resolve themselves.

"The world is learning to live with the war," he said, adding that. at the same time monetary tightening is putting growth at risk across the world.

Replying to a question on high inflation, Varma said 2022-23 is a year of high inflation due to various supply shocks as well as the delay in monetary tightening during the second half of 2022-23.

"However, I expect inflation to come down significantly in 2023-24. I anticipate a gradual glide path that brings inflation down close to the target," he said.

The RBI lowered the consumer price inflation (CPI) forecast to 6.5 per cent for the current fiscal from 6.7 per cent. India's retail inflation in January was 6.52 per cent.

To a question on the Reserve Bank hiking the short-term lending rate, Varma opined that the balance of risks has shifted towards growth rather than inflation, and in this context, a pause is more appropriate.

While observing that rates are high enough for the MPC to wait and see how the situation evolves, he said, "In the unlikely event of inflation remaining stubbornly high, further rate hikes could be considered at that point of time."

South Korea Feb Exports To Fall at Milder Pace



SEOUL (Dispatches)- South Korea's exports likely fell in February for a fifth straight month, dragged down by weak China-bound shipments, a Reuters survey showed on Monday, although the pace of the decline would ease thanks to favourable calendar effects.

Outbound shipments were expected to have fallen 8.7% in February from a year earlier, according to the median estimate of 19 economists in the survey, compared with a 16.6% drop in January, which was their worst decline since May 2020.

It would extend their run of year-on-year losses to a fifth straight month, but would mark the second-slowest pace of decline in the streak after 5.8% in October.

"Semiconductor exports are likely to continue their declining trend amid falling prices and sluggish demand, while exports to China fall by a double-digit percentage despite hopes for an increase in demand with its reopening," said Chun Kyu-yeon, an economist at Hana Securities.

"In line with the slowdown in the global manufacturing cycle, South Korea's exports are expected to log negative growth rates through the first half of this year."

There were 22 working days in February, two days more than a year before as the Lunar New Year holiday landed in February last year. This year it was in January.

In the first 20 days of this month, South Korea exported goods worth 2.3% less than a year earlier. Exports to China, South Korea's biggest trading partner, dropped 22.7%, outweighing gains in U.S. and EU-bound shipments.

Also distorted by the shift in the Lunar New Year holiday, the country's imports likely grew 4.0% in February from a year earlier, according to the survey, after falling for two straight months in January and December, by 2.8% and 2.5%, respectively.

“Camel and Miller” to Vie At French Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Directed by Abdollah Alimorad, the animation collection titled “Camel and Miller” is scheduled to be screened at the 2023 Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema in France.

The “Camel and Miller” animation collection consists of 3 animations named “The White-Winged”, “No Substitute”,

and “The Farmer and The Robot”.

These three works are produced with the theme of “Nature, Environment and Animals” and are about the relationship between technology, development, and pollution of the earth.

The 2023 Vesoul International Film Festival of Asian Cinema kicked off on Tue, Feb 28, 2023, and will end on Tue, Mar 7, 2023.



Iran, Kazakhstan, Armenia Rank With Turkey as High-Risk Eurasian Earthquake Zones



paper published in 2017 under the Earthquakes without Frontiers project determined that “active faults pose a significant threat to Almaty, since the city is built directly on top of currently deforming structures”.

At the time of the earthquake 112 years ago – the epicentre of which was over the border in Kyrgyzstan (as shown above) – most of the region’s inhabitants lived in yurts. They are relatively resistant to earthquakes and are unlikely to cause deaths if they collapse. Almaty is located in the foothills of the northern Tien Shan mountains that form part of a broad zone of deformation associated with the continuing collision between the Indian Plate and the Eurasian Plate.

Main geological structures around Kyrgyzstan’s Issyk Kul lake, with zones of surface faulting associated with the 1911 Kemin earthquake shown in yellow (Credit: MikeNorton, cc-by-sa 3.0).

Detailed work has gone into assessing the city’s exposure to earthquakes – high-resolution satellite data, for instance, has been used to make elevation models across Almaty, with faults identified from small changes in the height of the surface.

Spitak, Gyumri and Vanadzor

One marked consequence of Armenia’s 1988 Spitak earthquake was the shutting down under public pressure of the country’s Metsamor nuclear power plant (NPP) by the Soviet Union.

The plant, located around 75 kilometers (47 miles) from the earthquake epicenter, experienced only minor shaking but it was closed for more than six years. On its reopening in 1995, ordered after severe energy shortages, the government promised solutions were in place that would provide sufficient resistance to quakes. Not everyone is convinced.

The source of the earthquake was a fault rupture 40 km south of the Caucasus Mountains, a mountain range created by the convergence of the Arabian and Eurasian tectonic plates.

An earthquake and engineering team from the US visited and concluded that building inadequacies were the primary reason why the strong (but not huge) earthquake was so deadly. The tremors destroyed 130 factories, causing a local unemployment crisis.

Ashgabat

Though the October 1948 earthquake in Turkmen capital Ashgabat was of a 7.3 magnitude, little is known of its impacts. Strict Soviet censorship imposed at the time means that even today the estimates of the number of casualties vary from 10,000 right up to 110,000, almost 10% of the Turkmen SSR’s then population.

Almost all brick buildings collapsed, freight trains were derailed and the city’s aerodrome landing strip was cracked. The mother of Turkmenistan’s future first post-independence president, Sapamurat Niyazov, was killed, leaving him an orphan, as his father died during WWII.

Brazil Allows Iranian Flotilla to Dock in Rio de Janeiro

RIO DE JANEIRO (Dispatches) - The government of Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has allowed a flotilla comprised of two Iranian warships to dock in Rio de Janeiro, ignoring mounting pressure from the United States to bar them.

The Iranian Navy’s Makran and Dena warships, which together form the Islamic Republic’s 86th flotilla of military vessels, berthed in Rio on Sunday, the port authority was quoted by Reuters as saying in a statement.

Vice Admiral Carlos Eduardo Horta Arentz, the deputy chief of Brazil’s Naval Staff, approved the Iranian ships to dock in Rio between February 26 and March 4, following Lula’s recent visit to Washington.

On January 28, Rear Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani, the Iranian Navy’s second-in-command, had said that the vessels were sailing along Latin America’s western shores and were to drop anchor in Rio within a few days.

According to Western media outlets, Brazil had initially delayed docking of the ships as the country’s president was flying to Washington to meet with US President Joe Biden.

Earlier in February, US Ambassador to Brasilia, Elizabeth Bagley urged Brazil not to allow the ships to dock, saying, “We firmly believe those ships should not dock anywhere.”

However, despite Washington’s calls, the South American country allowed the ships to dock in Rio after Lula ended his trip.

The United States has been very upset with the presence of the Iranian warships on Brazilian shores and elsewhere in Latin America, which Washington considers its backyard.

Dena is a Mowj-class warship that joined the Iranian Navy in June 2021. The military vessel is reportedly equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes, and naval cannons.

The 86th flotilla is expected to break the record for the distance an Iranian flotilla has ever sailed in international waters. It set sail from southern Iran in early fall with the purpose of circumnavigating the world.

Its trip to Brazil appears to be part of a mission that is destined to take the flotilla to the Panama Canal.

Enemies Blamed for... FROM PAGE 1

Bahadori-Jahromi noted that the currency volatility is aimed at creating economic insecurity, dissuading investment, and halting economic growth.

In recent months, he went on to say that, Iran’s oil sales and exports have increased with the non-oil trade balance turning positive. “Yet, even if we don’t sell oil, the country’s foreign exchange needs will be met.”

“Almost always, the supply of [foreign] currency ... has been more than its demand. Given these conditions, the price should naturally come down, but it is increasing in the free market because of the creation of expectations as well as media and psychological hype,” he added.

He further said that attracting investments by the Iranians abroad in the knowledge-based area is one of the economic potentials the administration has focused on.

Speaking in his weekly press conference, Bahadori Jahromi said that from the beginning of the Raisi administration in September 2021, over \$409.2 million of investment was realized in 25 projects.

Industry, services, agriculture, utility, gas, transportation, mining, and construction sectors were the areas of investment.

Bahadori also reported a 2.5 increase in both domestic and foreign investment in the current administration’s first year compared to the previous administration’s last year of governance.

The spokesman added: “Only in the first year [of the current administration], 338 projects worth \$10.2 billion have been ratified to carry out, of which 294 projects worth \$5.950 billion have been finalized put in operation.”

Iran’s Government Spokesman stated that Raisi’s administration is fully ready to support Iranian citizens living abroad to return to the country anytime they want.

Bahadori-Jahromi inresponse to a question said:”There are zero barriers to Iranians returning to the country and resuming their activities, in case they have no private plaintiffs.”

He further remarked that facilitating packages are prepared by Iran’s Foreign Ministry such as “Mikhak” and “Porsesh” to offer services for Iranian citizens intending to return to the country.

Gazprom CEO Due... FROM PAGE 1

In July last year, Gazprom and the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) signed a memorandum of understanding worth around \$40 billion on strategic cooperation. It was signed on the day Russian President Vladimir Putin arrived in Tehran for a summit with his Iranian and Turkish counterparts.

The MoU, among other things, refers to the following areas: development of Iranian gas and oil fields, carrying out transactions with natural gas and oil derivatives, realization of large and small projects related to liquefied petroleum oil gas, construction of gas pipelines and scientific and technological cooperation.

Iran’s Deputy Minister of Petroleum Ahmad Asadzadeh said then Russia will begin developing six oil and two gas fields in Iran, adding that Gazprom offers a “promising” opportunity to transport gas through Iran to neighboring countries, including Pakistan and the Persian Gulf countries.

According to Iran’s Oil Ministry’s Shana news agency, Gazprom will help NIOC in the development of the Kish and North Pars gas fields and also six oil fields. Gazprom will also be involved in the completion of liquefied natural gas (LNG) projects and construction of gas export pipelines.

At the beginning of November 2022, the vice president of the Russian government, Alexander Novak, announced that Gazprom would soon agree on the technological parameters of the projects in Iran.

Iran Warns Against... FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian diplomat also urged the International Atomic Energy Agency to abandon the political approach as the technical solution is very close. “In recent days, the Agency’s technical delegation’s traveled to Iran, and we have also invited the Agency’s Director General to visit Iran. If the agency abandons its political approach, we are very close to a technical solution.”

Following is the full text of his speech:

I congratulate you for assuming the presidency of the Conference on Disarmament.

I have the honor to speak on behalf of the Islamic Republic of Iran before the High Level Segment of this august body.

Today, taking concrete measures for global disarmament is a fundamental necessity. Without concrete steps toward the elimination of Weapons of Mass Destruction, especially nuclear weapons, strengthening international and regional peace and security would not be realistic.

Eight decades after the use of nuclear weapons, despite all international efforts, the goal of nuclear disarmament remains elusive.

For that reason, it is regrettable that the international community’s call for nuclear disarmament and the compliance of the Nuclear Weapon States with their disarmament obligations has not been realized. Despite their unequivocal legal obligations, the Nuclear Weapon States, have continued the expansion of their nuclear weapons.

Regrettably, Nuclear Weapon States, instead of honoring their disarmament obligations, have developed and produced new generations and modernized their nuclear arsenals, which have undermined NPT and threatened international peace and security.

The main problem is that some Nuclear Weapon States believe that NPT is binding solely for Non-Nuclear Weapon States and not for themselves. Nonetheless, the gravity of the dangers and threats posed by nuclear weapons, requires that nuclear disarmament, as one of the main pillars of NPT, should be the top priority of the international community and the most urgent task before the Conference on Disarmament.

Iran, as a victim of the WMD along with the peace-loving nations, firmly believes that the only absolute guarantee against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is their total and irreversible elimination, and pending the realization of that goal, the Non-Nuclear Weapon States have the right to be assured against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons.

In the same vein, for the realization of the goal of a world free of nuclear weapons, a treaty on the prohibition of fissile materials would only be useful if it would cover previous stockpiles, apply non-discriminatorily to Nuclear Weapons States with an effective verification mechanism and will not prevent Non-Nuclear Weapon States from their peaceful nuclear activities.

The establishment of nuclear weapons-free zones is a fundamental step toward nuclear disarmament and peace and security. The initiative of a Middle East nuclear-free zone, which was initiated by Iran, has been effectively blocked for many years by the Zionist regime. The Israeli regime with the support of the US keeps accumulating all kinds of WMD without being a party to any international legally binding disarmament instruments and without being subject to any accountability, safeguards, or verification mechanism.

{Since its inception, this law-breaking regime has committed all international core crimes, including aggression against all its

neighbors, war crimes, crimes against humanity, and occupation of the territories of several neighboring countries. This terrorist regime has assassinated several innocent nuclear scientists and has, time and again, threatened to attack safeguarded peaceful nuclear facilities of my country. If this regime commits such foolish aggression, it will pay a heavy and unbearable price.}

The Islamic Republic of Iran calls for the start of negotiations on a binding treaty to ban an arms race in outer space. Outer space should be the domain of peace and cooperation for the development and well-being of humankind.

Starlink, with the support of the US, has started its illegal operation within the territory of Iran. Iran reserves its right to take any necessary measures against any threat to its sovereignty and territorial integrity.

The Islamic Republic of Iran’s nuclear program is fully peaceful and will remain so forever. Iran is determined, as confirmed till now, to remain fully committed to its obligations under its comprehensive safeguards agreement. Iran warns against any possible unwise decision by the IAEA Board of Governors’ upcoming meeting in March. Iran reserves its right to give an appropriate response.

Just in recent past days, two IAEA technical teams visited Iran and we invited the director general of the IAEA to visit Iran. We will be very close to a technical solution if the IAEA abandons its politicized approaches.

The current status of the JCPOA is the product of US policies and miscalculations. Our past experience taught us to become engaged in the new round of negotiations with more care and sensitivity. The few remaining issues could be addressed easily. Therefore, without any preconditions and through goodwill and determination of all parties and within the framework of the negotiations held until now, the final steps of the talks can be taken. The US needs to have the will and strength to conclude the lengthy talks. We remain ready to continue until the conclusion of the agreement.

I would like to seize the opportunity to reiterate our position on the Ukraine Crisis. As a victim of war, threat, and unilateral sanctions, our principle position is respect for the Charter of the UN and international law, including non-use of force or threat to force, territorial integrity, and sovereign equality. Iran denounces war and unilateral sanctions and its absolute preference is the peaceful settlement of disputes through dialogue and diplomacy.

In particular, Iran condemns the Cold War era hegemonic mentality and unilateralism. Iran is conveying its deep regret for the continuation of the war and is reaffirming its neutral position.

The time for genuine diplomacy to be activated is now in order to end the conflict and all unilateral actions rather than advertising and fueling the war, as well as accusing others baselessly.

Finally, I would like to reiterate that the UN, its disarmament machinery, multilateralism, and diplomacy should have a central role in our common efforts.

The international community is in desperate need of constructive dialogue in order to prevent further deterioration of the international disarmament architecture. Due to its unique role as the single multilateral negotiating forum on disarmament, the CD can significantly contribute to international peace and security.

Lewandowski May Miss Copa del Rey Clasico

MADRID (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski is a doubt for Barcelona's Clasico Copa del Rey semi-final first leg clash with Real Madrid after the club confirmed he had a hamstring strain. "Lewandowski has a strain in his left hamstring," said Barcelona in a statement, without specifying the length of his expected absence. Barcelona face Madrid at the Santiago Bernabeu on Thursday in the first leg of the cup tie, already without injured duo Pedri and Ousmane Dembele.

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Dubai Victory Lifts Krejckova Into WTA Top 20

PARIS (Dispatches) - Barbora Krejckova was rewarded for her victory in Dubai, where she beat the top three players in the world, with a return to the Top 20 after climbing 14 places in the new WTA rankings released. The 27-year-old Czech, who won the French Open in 2021, is up to No. 16 following her remarkable performance in Dubai. In successive matches, she came back from losing the first set 6-0 to defeat world No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka of Belarus in the quarterfinals, the American world No. 3 Jessica Pegula in the semis and then, in straight sets, Iga Swiatek in the final.

8 IRAN NEWS

SPORTS

WEDNESDAY MARCH 1, 2023

Lillard Erupts for 71 In Blazers' Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Damian Lillard put on a memorable show and established career highs of 71 points and 13 3-pointers to lead the Portland Trail Blazers to a 131-114 victory over the visiting Houston Rockets.

The 71 points tie for eighth most in NBA history. Donovan Mitchell of the Cleveland Cavaliers also scored 71 earlier this season. Only Hall of Famers Wilt Chamberlain (five times, high of 100), Kobe Bryant (81) and David Thompson (73) have scored more points in an NBA game. Lillard scored 41 of his points before the break, the most first-half points by a player in franchise history.

Jerami Grant added 13 points and Nassir Little scored 11 for Portland, which connected on 54.5 percent of its field goal attempts and was 20 of 39 from 3-point range.

Alperen Sengun had 17 points and 10 rebounds and Jae'Sean Tate also scored 17 points for Houston, which has lost nine straight games and 29 of its last 33.

Lakers 111, Mavericks 108

Anthony Davis scored 30 points with 15 rebounds and LeBron James added 26 points as visiting Los Angeles won the battle of dynamic duos with a victory over Dallas.

The Mavericks had Luka Doncic and Kyrie Irving on the court together for the fourth time, but fell to 1-3 with the newly-formed partnership. Doncic scored 26 points with nine rebounds, while Irving had 21 points and 11 assists.

Dallas failed to protect a 27-point first-half lead while losing for the fourth time in its last five games. After the Mavericks pulled within 109-108 on a 3-pointer from Justin Holiday with 6.5 seconds remaining, the Lakers' Dennis Schroder made two free throws for the final margin, with Irving missing a half-court shot at the buzzer.

Nuggets 134, Clippers 124 (OT)
Nikola Jokic had 40 points, 17 rebounds and 10 assists, Michael Porter Jr. had 29 points and 11 rebounds, and host Denver beat Los Angeles in overtime.

Jamal Murray scored 21 points and added 12

Bucks 104, Suns 101

Jrue Holiday scored 33 points, Brook Lopez recorded 22 points and 13 rebounds and Milwaukee rallied despite playing without Giannis Antetokounmpo, picking up its 14th consecutive win in a decision over visiting Phoenix.

Antetokounmpo was a scratch from the lineup, stemming from exiting Milwaukee's win over the Miami Heat on Friday with a quad contusion. Despite playing without the 31.2 points-per-game scorer, the Bucks led Sunday's rematch of the 2021 NBA Finals for the entirety of the second and third quarters -- but never by more than 11 points.

Devin Booker led the Suns with 24 points. Deandre Ayton scored the last of his 22 points on a layup with 5:47 remaining, giving the Suns their biggest lead. Ayton also grabbed a team-high 11 rebounds and blocked three shots.

Cavaliers 118, Raptors 93

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 of his 35 points in the first half, and host Cleveland defeated Toronto for the first time in four games this season.

Mitchell shot 13-for-21 from the field, including 8-for-12 from 3-point range. Jarrett Allen added 23 points and 11 rebounds as the Cavaliers ended their three-game losing streak. Darius Garland added 18 points and 11 assists.

Murray Pulls Out of Dubai Due to Recurring Hip Injury

LONDON (Dispatches) - Andy Murray has withdrawn from the Dubai Tennis Championships this week due to a recurring hip issue, tournament organizers said.

The 35-year-old, a three-times Grand Slam champion, is no stranger to hip problems and was on the verge of retirement in 2019 after having surgery the previous year.

However, he got his career back on track after another operation and stormed into his fourth ATP final since returning to the tour at last week's Qatar Open where he was beaten by Daniil Medvedev.

"We regret to inform you that Andy Murray is unable to participate in this year's tournament," Dubai organizers said in a post on Twitter. "Andy has been dealing with a recurring hip injury that has unfortunately forced him out of Dubai."

Murray said after his defeat by Medvedev that he would have to manage his body better, especially after physically demanding matches.

"At my age and with some of the issues that I've got, I do have to be mindful of those things. I cannot just keep going until something happens," Murray said. "I need to be a bit smarter with that."

Murray's pullout from Dubai comes a day after fellow Briton Emma Raducanu, the 2021 U.S. Open champion, withdrew from the Austin Open in Texas due to tonsillitis.

Fury Defeats Paul In Saudi Showdown

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Jake Paul suffered the first loss of his fledgling boxing career as he was edged out by Tommy Fury at the Diriyah Arena, with the British reality TV star scoring a split decision win against the American social media star.

Watched by luminaries such as Fury's half-brother and current WBC heavyweight champ Tyson, former champion Mike Tyson and soccer player Cristiano Ronaldo, who recently joined Saudi club Al Nassr, Paul's considerable shortcomings were highlighted as Fury picked him off over eight rounds.



Djokovic Ready for Return in Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic said he was now playing without pain after recovering from a hamstring injury as he prepares to return to the ATP Tour in Dubai this week following his record-extending 10th Australian Open title last month.

Djokovic suffered a three-centimeter hamstring tear en route to winning the Adelaide warm-up event before claiming his 22nd Grand Slam title at Melbourne Park to go level with Rafa Nadal. The 35-year-old Serb said his Dubai participation was in doubt until a few days ago but he had passed all his fitness tests.

"Had a couple of weeks of no tennis. The last few days it's really getting as much practice

as possible to get myself back in shape to be able to compete at a high level," Djokovic said. "I haven't felt pain on the court for a week. I'm getting closer to 100 per cent. Still not there in terms of the game and how I feel on court. But the important thing is there's no pain. I don't have a hindrance in the way I move on the court."

"After every injury it takes time for mechanisms to be balanced, for adjustments to be done on court. It takes time to find that groove of moving effortlessly and not thinking about if something's going to happen. I don't have those thoughts."

Djokovic begins the Dubai tournament having entered his 378th week as world number one, surpassing Steffi Graf as the player with the most weeks at the top of the sport.

"It's surreal to be that many weeks number one, to match Graf - one of the all-time greats," Djokovic said. "Just being amongst these legendary names is flattering. I'm proud of it."

Klinsmann Named Coach of South Korea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Jurgen Klinsmann, who won the World Cup as a player and led Germany to the semi-finals as coach, has been appointed head coach of South Korea, the country's football association said.

The 58-year-old will arrive in Seoul next week and be in charge for a friendly against Colombia on March 24, the KFA said, adding he had a contract until 2026.

The former Germany, Bayern Munich and United States coach succeeds Paulo Bento, who took the Koreans to the last 16 of the World Cup in Qatar, where they were beaten 4-1 by Brazil.

"I am very happy and honoured to be the head coach of South Korea's national football team," Klinsmann said, according to a Korea Football Association statement.

"I am well aware that the Korean national team has been constantly improving and producing results over a long period of time," he said. He added that he was "honored to be following in the footsteps" of former South Korea coaches, including Guus Hiddink and Bento.

"We will do our best to achieve successful results in the upcoming Asian Cup and 2026 World Cup," Klinsmann said.

South Korea are led on the pitch by skipper and forward Son Heung-min. Klinsmann had a long and decorated career as a striker, playing for clubs such as Inter Milan, Tottenham Hotspur and Bayern Munich.

He scored 47 goals in 108 appearances for Germany and won the World Cup with them in 1990.

In 2004, Klinsmann succeeded former strike partner Rudi Voeller as coach of the German national team, his first position in management. He led Germany to third place in the 2006 World Cup on home soil, before taking over at Bayern and then the United States.



Messi Beats Mbappe to FIFA Best Prize

PARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi won The Best FIFA men's player prize for 2022 on the back of his World Cup triumph with Argentina and Spain's Alexia Putellas retained the women's award at a ceremony in Paris.

Messi beat his Paris Saint-Germain teammate, and World Cup final rival, Kylian Mbappe to the men's gong with Ballon d'Or winner Karim Benzema having been the other contender to claim the prize.

It is the second time that Messi has won the honour inaugurated by FIFA in 2016 after football's world governing body split from Ballon d'Or organisers France Football.

The award, which is voted for by national team coaches and captains, journalists and also fans, recognises a year in which the former Barcelona star crowned his glorious career by leading Argentina to victory at the World Cup.

Messi scored twice in an epic final in Doha as Argentina beat France on penalties despite Mbappe netting a hat-trick for Les Bleus in a remarkable 3-3 draw.

He also claimed the Golden Ball for the best player at the tournament, although Mbappe was the top scorer with eight goals, one more than Messi.

"This year was just mad for me, to be able to achieve my dream that I had fought so hard for. In the end I got it and it was the most beautiful thing that has happened in my career," Messi said of his World Cup win as he collected his award.

"It is a dream for every footballer but something that very few can make come true," added Messi, who was sat in the Paris theatre in between Mbappe and his wife Antonella Rocuzzo.

He took the prize just 24 hours after combining with Mbappe to lead PSG to a 3-0 win against Marseille in Ligue 1.

