

IRIC Says Transit of Commodities Through Iran Increased 5.22% In the First Eleven Months of the Current Iranian Calendar Year, as Compared to the Same Period of time In the Past Year

IRAN NEWS

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to **144,858** With **13** More Iranians Killed By the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

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Tehran, Moscow Discuss Delivery of Chemicals, Oil, Gas to Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) – Moscow and Tehran discussed the prospects for supplies of medical and oil and gas equipment, as well as chemical products to Iran, the press service of Russia's Economic Development Ministry reported on Wednesday.

The discussion took place during the fifth meeting of the Russian-Iranian working group on interregional cooperation.

"During the meeting, the participants discussed the prospects for cooperation between Moscow, St. Petersburg, Tatarstan, Lipetsk, and Chelyabinsk regions with the Iranian provinces on supplying chemical products, medical equipment, and equipment for the oil and gas industry to the Iranian market, as well as the establishment of local production workshops of Iranian companies on the territory of regional special economic zones," the statement said.

Deputy Minister of Economic Development Dmitry Volvach noted that the indicators of bilateral trade between Russia and Iran show steady growth. **See Page 7**

2 German Diplomats Expelled From Iran

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has designated two German diplomats as personae non gratae and ordered them to leave the country, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said Wednesday.

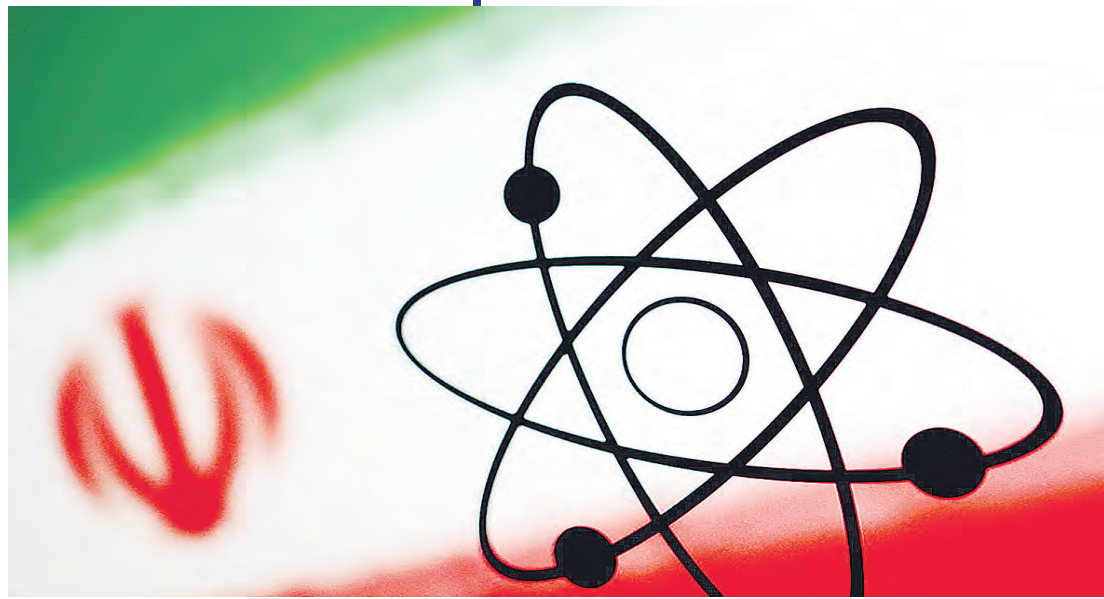
"The two German diplomats are being expelled due to their country's irresponsible interference in Iran's internal and judicial affairs," ministry spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said.

The decision came a week after a similar move by the German government. It expelled two employees of the Iranian Embassy in Berlin in response to a death sentence handed down to German-Iranian national Jamshid Sharmahd in Tehran.

Iran accused Sharmahd of being a member of a pro-monarchy group which has been blamed for a deadly bombing in 2008.

Sharmahd is accused of leading the Tondar group, which has been outlawed as a terrorist organization by the government.

Tehran Says Ambiguities In IAEA Report Resolved



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) has rejected accusations that the country is enriching uranium to 84 percent purity, asserting that there has been "no deviation" in the Islamic Republic's peaceful nuclear activities.

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks on Wednesday, after the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) said in a confidential quarterly report that it had detected particles of uranium enriched to 83.7 percent during an inspection of the Fordow nuclear facility on January 22.

"Regarding the 84% particle, which was a sample from the side of a tap in the process, the particle cannot be even seen with a microscope. What is important is the amount of material that is stored after production," he explained.

Eslami further said that the IAEA inspectors "observed the material that had come out of the process and found that its purity was not more than 60%."

"Our production line is 60%. They (the inspectors) also mentioned in their report that our production is 60%." Also in its report, the IAEA said "discussions are still ongoing" between the agency and Iran to determine the origin of the suspected particles.

Eslami noted that the discussions concluded that there was no specific deviation in Iran's nuclear program.

"Over the past two weeks, IAEA delegations traveled to Tehran, where they reviewed the cases regarding the non-compliance of the statement on centrifuges design and the declared particle. Expert discussions and visits ... wrapped up and it was found that there is no specific deviation," he said.

Iran's nuclear chief said that the upcoming visit to Tehran by IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi could potentially help break the stalemate in the talks aimed at reviving the US-abandoned 2015 nuclear deal.

Negotiations were already held with the IAEA deputy director general Massimo Aparo, Eslami further said, adding that Grossi will travel to Tehran in the next day or two to review the remaining issues.

Iran showed to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing the JCPOA with six world states — namely the US, Germany, France, Britain, Russia and China — in 2015. However, Washington's unilateral withdrawal in May 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Negotiations between the parties to the deal kicked off in Vienna in April 2021 in a bid to salvage the JCPOA. The discussions, however, have been at a standstill since August 2022 due to Washington's refusal to remove the sanctions and offer guarantees that it will not exit the agreement again.

Iraq's Energy Imports From Iran May Come to An End

LONDON (OilPrice) - Iraq's recent announcement to end its importation of gas within the next three years will be carefully watched by Washington, as it would also mean the end to Iraq's long-running dependence on Iran for gas supplies. In this context, when the U.S.-Iraq War ended in 2011, Washington wanted to keep open the possibility that it could rebuild its influence across the country, albeit in a more subtle way than had gone before. Part of this was to be done through acting essentially as Iraq's lender of last resort, giving money to each new prime minister of Iraq who came asking for it regularly every year. The other part was trying to allow for a gradual weaning off in Iraq's dependence on Iran for gas and electricity supplies - Iraq has historically been dependent on Iran for around 40 percent of its power needs. Washington hoped that by employing these two tactics, the historical broad and deep ties between Iraq and Iran might be reduced and that the U.S. might be able to reassert its presence in Iraq over time.

The problem with the U.S. plan to date has been that Baghdad and Tehran have always known exactly what Washington was up to and has been manipulating it from the start. This was most obviously done in the securing of waivers from the U.S. for Iraq to continue to import gas and electricity from Iran. These waivers were granted to Iraq even after the U.S. had reimposed sanctions on other countries for continuing to deal with Iran after Washington had withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action ('JCPOA') in May 2018.

The Iraq method was, and remains, the following: whoever is prime minister of Iraq that year goes to Washington (usually in the summer, as the Iraqis prefer the Washington climate during that period) to ask for a huge amount of money to bail out Iraq's budget. The budget needs bailing out — despite the huge oil and gas resources that Iraq has — principally because of the endemic corruption in the country. In return for the budget bailout and the granting of another 'short-term' waiver to import energy from Iran, the incumbent Iraqi prime minister promises the U.S. president that Iraq will gradually stop using Iranian energy imports for its power grid, as part of a broader initiative to reduce the power of Iran's political, economic and military proxies in Iraq. The U.S. then gives Iraq billions more dollars to bail out its budget and also grants it another waiver to import Iranian gas and electricity for a set period (ranging upwards from 30 days). The Iraqis then bank the money and continue to import as much Iranian energy supplies as it was before, if not more. **See Page 7**

Iran Urges Unconditional Removal of Sanctions Against Syria

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran urges immediate and unconditional removal of Western sanctions against Syria as means of helping Damascus ride out the aftermath of the hugely deadly and devastating earthquake that hit the Arab country earlier this month.

The Islamic Republic's Ambassador to the United Nations, Amir Saeed Iravani, made the remarks before a UN Security Council meeting on the situation in the Middle East on Tuesday.

The temblor that hit the country and neighboring Turkey on February 6, has so far killed more than 50,000 people on both sides of the border.

The disaster "has exacerbated the [Arab] country's already dire humanitarian situation, collapsing structures and basic services and severely affecting people's ability to meet their basic needs," Iravani said.

"Given the severity of the situation, humanitarian assistance must be scaled up and provided in an impartial and non-discriminatory manner, free of politicization or conditionality to ensure that the most vulnerable individuals receive the assistance they require," he added. **See Page 7**

Pakistani Delegation Due in Tehran

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - A delegation from Pakistan is due in Tehran soon for crisis talks to avert a possible \$18 billion fine to Pakistan for its part in delaying the transfer of Iranian gas.

Officials from the ministries of energy, finance and foreign affairs will meet with diplomats in Tehran to discuss the crisis.

Local Iranian media reported that Tehran has told Islamabad that it must complete its share of a pipeline to receive gas from the Islamic Republic by the spring of next year, otherwise it will face a penalty of \$18 billion.

The Iranian portion of the pipeline up to the border with Pakistan in eastern Iran is complete and was part of a 25-year deal to export Iran's natural gas signed between the two countries in 2009.

The project was supposed to be implemented by 2015, but international and US sanctions against Iran and Washington's pressure on Islamabad have prevented its implementation so far.

The two sides inked a revised deal in September 2019, when Iran agreed not to take the matter to the international courts if Pakistan completed the pipeline by 2024. As the deadline draws near and Iran's economy continues to depend on non-sanctioning countries such as Pakistan, fears for the fruits of the deal are growing.

Munich Conference Losing Importance in Absence of Tehran, Moscow

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - A senior Russian diplomat says the exclusion of Moscow and Tehran from the 2023 Munich Security Conference shows that the annual event is losing its significance in evaluating the current international situation and offering solutions to security challenges.

Russia's Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov made the remarks to Iran's Mizan Online news agency on Tuesday, days after the conference took place without Russian and Iranian representatives.

"This year, the Russian representatives and officials did not intend to participate in the forum. However, the mere fact that the organizers of the Munich Security Conference decided not to send invitations to Russia and Iran only confirms the diminishing value and importance of this conference," he said. "Moscow fully agrees with the assessments of its Iranian partners that the organizers of the event are trying to impose unilateralism on the international world order." **See Page 7**



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Nilesat Takes Sown Iran’s Press TV

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Press TV, the Iranian-backed news and documentary channel, has been taken down by Cairo-based Nilestat. The controversial Press TV channel started life in London in 2007 and is backed by state-owned media and broadcasting body IRIB (Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting). Its intention was to counter the news coverage from and for the Middle East from the likes of Al Jazeera. Press TV would normally argue an anti-Jewish bias and in favour of the Shi’a point-of-view (the dominant faith in Iran) and not the Sunni version of Islam. It has in the past broadcast to North America, Europe, the Middle East, Asia, and areas of Africa and Latin America.

Russia Interested in Importing Food From Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Interior Minister for Economic Affairs and Regional Development Coordination said Russia is very interested in supplying food from Iran.

Mohsen Koosheh Tabar made the remarks addressing the fifth webinar meeting of the working group on inter-regional cooperation between Iran and Russia which was held in the presence of Deputy Minister of Economic Development of the Russian Federation Dmitry Volvach.

The 13th government’s effort is to reinforce economic relations with neighboring countries by relying on economic diplomacy, Koosheh Tabar added.

He urged taking advantage of the opportunity of holding this joint meeting to improve economic and commercial relations between the two countries.

Referring to the determination of the two countries to strengthen economic and trade relations, he said: Fortunately, we are witnessing the expansion of the relations between the two countries, and there is a good motivation between the two sides to promote joint investment and cooperation.

He also pointed to the sisterhood agreement between Isfahan and St. Petersburg provinces, saying that this model of cooperation should be extended to other provinces.

Stressing the fact that Russia is very interested in supplying food from Iran, he said that there are various proposals in this field that can increase the activity and shipment of goods.

He emphasized the need to identify the common economic and commercial opportunities of the two countries, saying: One of the basic strategies is to use the capacity of the Caspian Sea to transport Russian goods to open waters through the Persian Gulf and the Sea of Oman.

He underlined activating the communication crossings as much as possible, such as the North-South crossing, to strengthen the trade relations between the two countries.

Koosheh Tabar referred to strengthening the marine transportation fleet and activating the businessmen of the two countries as other operational strategies to develop trade relations.



In the field of domestic consumption, transit, and export to neighboring countries, cooperation between Iran and Russia can play a vital role in line with the interests of both countries and improve the level of prosperity and security of the region.

He offered the Iranian Interior Ministry’s readiness to exchange business delegations and establish communication between economic activists, saying that cooperation with neighboring countries has an effective role in promoting regional stability and security.

Emphasizing developing a road map for the future economic relations between Iranian and Russian provinces aiming to further strengthen the economic relations, he said that the scope of exports in various areas can be increased due to the relative advantage of the Iranian provinces.

Iran is a country of four seasons and this is an important opportunity to attract Russian tourists, Koosheh Tabar said.

Strengthening trade relations with Russia by targeting 20 billion dollars worth of exports is a matter that all the provinces of the country should plan for.

Meanwhile, Volvach called for increasing trade between the private sectors of the two countries saying that Russia is interested in investing in Iran.

He emphasized the identification of commercial and economic capacities and opportunities of the two countries in the form of a working group.

He termed Isfahan-St. Petersburg joint work as a model of cooperation.

He described establishing joint factories as another capacity for developing economic cooperation.

IRGC Dismantles West-Linked Network

TEHRAN (MNA) – The IRGC Intelligence Organization of Bushehr province announced a network linked to one of the intelligence services of western countries has been identified in the southern province of the country.

In a statement issued on Wednesday, the IRGC Intelligence Organization of Bushehr said that one of the intelligence services of the western countries has identified and deceived a sports figure.

The statement added that after identifying a sports figure the foreign intelligence service provided him with the necessary training in the field of creating networks and making secure communications. According to the statement, the foreign intelligence service asked the sports figure to persuade the owners of the industry to strike and pave the way for illegal gatherings and riots.

Following the intelligence activities of the IRGC Intelligence Organization of Bushehr province, the network has been identified and destroyed.

Verdict of French Spies Has Not Yet Been Issued

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The spokesman of the Judiciary has said that the verdict of French spies has not yet been announced.

In response to the question about the French spies, Masoud Setayeshi said in his weekly presser: “The verdict has not been issued yet, and it will be announced in duo time.”

The two French citizens were not named and were arrested on charges of spying and measures against national security.

French Foreign Minister Catherine Colonna said in mid-November that two unnamed French nationals had been detained in Iran, bringing the total number of people from France held there to seven.

She made the announcement during Iran’s ongoing protests, which began in September and during which some western citizens were involved in.

Two French nationals, Cecile Kohler and her partner Jacques Paris were arrested in May. Iran charged them with spying and trying to foment unrest. Their visit to Iran had come while teachers were holding protests.

Interior Ministry to Investigate On Schools Poisoning

TEHRAN (IP)- Minister of Education said that an urgent meeting was supposed to be held led by the Ministry of Interior to investigate the issue of poisoning of girls in schools.

It is for several weeks that some kind of gas is being emitted with ting the girls’ schools in some parts of the country including Tehran, the capital, which has led to the poisoning of the students.

The cause of the incidents and those who are behind what is going on have not yet come clear.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, Yousef Nouri said that in the cabinet session, an urgent meeting was supposed to be held led by the Ministry of Interior to investigate the issue.

IRIB’s Mission Boosting Knowledge-Based Companies

TEHRAN (IP) - The Head of the Islamic Republic of Broadcasting Organization (IRIB) says the body is duty-bound to boost knowledge-based companies.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, Peyman Jebelli, CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting said that the news coverage of scientific and knowledge-based achievements of the governmental or private institutions is IRIB priority and our agenda.

Jebelli said: “We have made our utmost efforts to promote domestic messaging apps and we hope due to the prerequisites prepared for usage of domestic messaging apps by people, we witness expected achievement in this field.”

Young Iranian inventors in the field of Artificial Intelligence in knowledge-based companies, among other fields, have succeeded in launching products on the market that are even better than foreign examples.

Vice Majllis Speaker Says West Seeks to Sanction Resistance Axis

TEHRAN (IP) – Vice Majlis Speaker referring to that the trend in the West is seeking to sanction the axis of resistance, said that enemies are even afraid of the names of martyrs of resistance.

The commemoration of resistance media martyrs, with the presence of more than 200 people from the families of resistance media martyrs and media officials was held on Tuesday night in Majlis.

Ali Nikzad, the deputy speaker of Iran’s Parliament, in this ceremony said: “The western media campaign tried to destroy the Palestinian Cause, but this conspiracy was defeated by the leadership of Ayatollah Khamenei, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution.”

Nikzad emphasized: “All-round defense of Quds is a religious obligation and Iran supports and will continue to support the Palestinian Cause.

He added: “If the Westerners are true to their slogan of democracy, they should hold elections in Palestine so that the Palestinians can choose their own destiny.”

Nikzad went on to say: “If the West claims freedom of speech and freedom of the media, why don’t they allow Iran leader’s words to be broadcast in their media?

In another part of his speech, referring to the media war by the West, Nikzad said: “Iranian and Iraqi brothers won the war with ISIS, but after that the enemy tried to create schism in the country with media war and false narratives.”

In the continuation of this ceremony, the families of the media martyrs of Yemen, Iraq, Syria, Palestine and Afghanistan were honored. 219

Int’l Support for Iran Hosting of Afghan Immigrants Very Little

TEHRA (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said in Geneva international support for Iran’s hosting of Afghanistan immigrants has been very little and inappropriate, keeping in mind the increased expenses.

Amirabdollahian on Tuesday evening met with the heads and high-ranking officials of the international humanitarian organizations based in Geneva, including the UNHCR, the International Migration Organization, the Red Cross, and the UN Humanitarian Assistance Coordination Office altogether in a public meeting.

The meeting was after the Iranian foreign minister’s series of intensive meetings with world officials in Geneva, and in it he referred to the political and social status in Afghanistan, particularly during the past 18 months, which has led to unprecedented increased immigration of them to Iran.

“The Islamic Republic of Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan immigrants during the past four decades, and yet, unfortunately the extent of the international support has been quite inappropriate with the increased expenses in these years, and covered only a very little extent of the expenses for the purpose,” he added.

The top Iranian diplomat said that the new human catastrophes must not lead to forgetting the former one, such as the humanitarian aids for Afghanistan and as an aftermath, in that country’s neighbors.

Amirabdollahian said that the unilateral sanctions imposed by the US have left devastating effects on the financial supporters for shouldering the hosting expenses for the citizens of Afghanistan, and therefore, it is necessary that the international organizations will in order to prevent the negative effects of the sanctions, increase the international support for those refugees.

The international organizations’ heads in the meeting appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran’s cooperation with them and reiterated that the continuation of such cooperation is necessary.

They also promised to increase the efforts aimed at fair distribution of each country’s hosting share of the immigrants and to prevent the influence of the sanctions on humanitarian activities.

Iran, Lebanon Discuss Cultural Cooperation to Confront Enemies’ Media War

TEHRAN (IQNA) – High-ranking political officials from Iran and Lebanon have discussed ways to enhance cooperation to confront the joint enemies’ media warfare.

The topic was discussed during a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday between head of the Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) Hojat-ol-Islam Mohammad Mehdi Imanipour and Lebanese Minister of Culture Mohammad Wissam El-Mortada

The Lebanese official is in Tehran to attend an event to commemorate the media martyrs of the axis of resistance.

“Today, resistance has become a global trend,” Imanipour said, urging for increased cooperation in the cultural aspects of resistance.

“If we manage to give awareness to the public

opinion, resistance will naturally take form but this requires the art of promotion,” he added.

He also proposed holding a week of resistance movies in both countries.

For his part, El-Mortada said his body is trying to confront the propaganda waged by the enemy.

“We should build up media cooperation in the face of this common challenge because the enemy has concluded that it can draw no result from violence and arms,” he said.

He noted that the enemy is waging an economic and media war on Lebanon.

The “great battle” that both countries should prepare for is the war on raising people’s awareness, he said, adding that this required increased bilateral cooperation.

UN Unable to Confirm Claims on Iran’s 84% Enrichment

NEW YORK (IRNA) – A spokesman for the United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has said that the UN is unable to confirm allegations that Iran has enriched uranium up to 84% of purity.

Speaking to reporters in New York on Tuesday, Stéphane Dujarric said, however, that the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) may dispatch a delegation to Tehran this week to examine the claims.

He said that the UN has not changed its position with regards to Iran’s nuclear program, adding that Iran is supposed to comply with all the agreements it has signed with the IAEA and other international partners.

The IAEA released a confidential report to members of its Board of Governors on Tuesday, announcing that consultations are underway to clarify claims about 84% enrichment in Iran.

Iran has ruled out the allegations, saying that the issue has been raised to put pressure on the Islamic Republic.

Iran Planning Joint Drills With Indian Ocean Littoral States

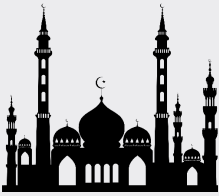
TEHRAN (MNA)- The commander of the Iranian Army Navy Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says that Iran is planning for holding a drill with the participation of Indian Ocean littoral states.

“We are planning to hold an exercise and we have invited all countries along the Indian Ocean to cooperate so that this exercise can be held this year with the participation of other countries. This exercise is held every year with the participation of Iran, China and Russia, and this year it will have other members from the region as well,” Admiral Irani said in an interview with the Iranian national TV last night, which was held to discuss his recent trip to Oman.

Referring to the recent visit of the Iranian Army Navy delegation to Oman, Rear Admiral Irani said that that important MoUs would usually are signed during these visits.

“One of our missions is defense diplomacy. Both countries are among the commanders of the meeting on the Indian Ocean littoral states, and a part of this trip was dedicated to the IONS meeting; In addition, we have regional relations,” the navy commander said, adding that the level of cooperation in ‘Indian Ocean Naval Symposium’ (IONS) must be enhanced and the members should have greater roles.

Iran and Oman hold a rescue exercise every year, with Iran and Oman sharing hosting the event on alternate years, according to him.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:16

18:18

05:08

06:31

53. They seek to be informed by thee: "Is that true?"

Say: "Aye! by my Lord! it is the very truth! and ye cannot frustrate it!"

54. Every soul that hath sinned, if it possessed all that is on earth, would fain give it in ransom:

They would declare (their) repentance when they see the penalty: but the judgment between them

will be with justice, and no wrong will be done unto them.

Surah 10. Jonah (53 - 54)

D-8 Urged to
Broaden List of
Preferential Trade Items

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

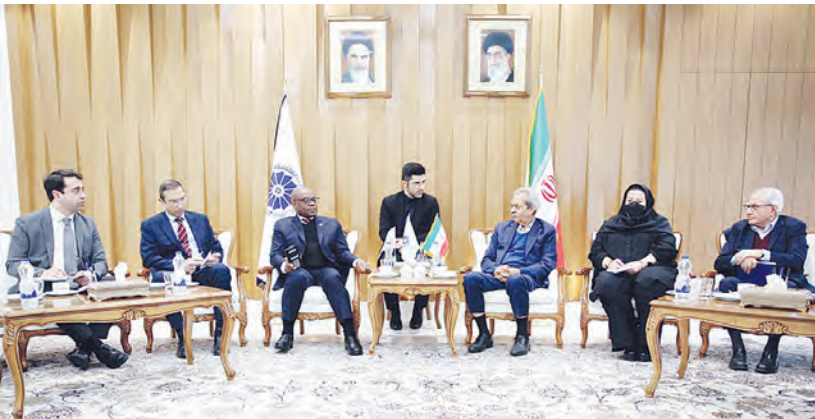
TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei in meeting with Secretary General of D-8 Organization for Economic Cooperation Mr. Isiaka Abdulqadir Imam urged the member states to broaden the number of items on the list of preferential trade and called for setting up a special committee for investment as well as taking actions for easing visa process for traders.

In the meeting, both sides exchanged views on implementing prerequisites of preferential trade among the D-8 member states and ways for increasing the level of economic cooperation in the group.

Mr. Imam, for his part, said that D-8 had good success in the field of implementing preferential trade, adding that of course the arbitration mechanism has been in suspension for years in order that the member states can reach joint agreement in their talks and for this reason, it was halted and D-8 members could not approve this mechanism in their own parliaments. He further said that but in June 2022, the group could establish the mechanism and soon the industry ministers of the group are to meet for approval and support of the arbitration mechanism.

He admitted that major economic activists in the private sector are unaware of the details of the final approval and they need to get acquainted and informed by the ICCIMA.

Imam expressed his dissatisfaction about the \$130b trade volume of the



D-8 members, adding that the target of the group is to increase the trade volume of D8 to over \$500b by 2030 and this target will be definitely materialized with proper implementation of preferential trade.

He then pointed to the activity of a Malaysian company for creating a platform for e-trade for presenting the products of the D8 and called for cooperation of ICCIMA with this company.

Imam also said that Nigeria will host the meeting of energy ministers of D-8 and private sectors of the member countries will also meet on the sidelines of the meeting.

Then Mr. Shafei, for his part, said that D8 have considerable capacities in economy, culture and human forces and said that despite having a population over one billion and GDP of 4 trillion dollars, this question has always been raised why D-8 with such a huge capacity for trade has low amount of trade among themselves.

He further said that preferential trade can unlock the internal economic relations and develop the volume of ties in D8. He added that the number of items on the list of preferential trade goods among the member states should broaden and the current list is restrictive and with its increase, D-8 can increase trade ties as what he expects.

He also said that as well as preferential trade, the member states should focus more on joint investment and called for the launch of a special; committee for investment to increase capabilities of the members for joint investment.

He also announced readiness of the ICCIMA for cooperation with Malaysian company and said that easing visa process for traders is necessary for broadening trade ties of the member states.

Iran Partaking in Moscow Exhibition
For Building and Finishing Materials

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The 4th International Exhibition for Building and Finishing Materials and Technologies of Moscow was inaugurated on Monday in presence of the Head of Iran Chamber of Cooperative (ICC), commercial attaches of both countries, Iran's ambassador to Moscow, officials of Mir Business Bank of Moscow and some construction sector officials of Russia as well as the head of Moscow's Head of Expo Center.

According to the public relations of the ICC, concurrent with this exhibition, some other events like the international exhibition of glass and conferences will be held on its sidelines and it is a good opportunity for interaction between construction activists of Iran with their foreign counterparts.

Different fields of building and finishing materials and technologies have put on display their achievements and products and some panel discussions have also been arranged for the sidelines of the event.

Iran Chamber of Cooperative is in charge of holding Iran's pavilion in the exhibition which will run until March 3.

Official Calls for Using all
Capacities of Trade With Afghanistan

TEHRA (IRNA)- Supervisor of Iran Trade Promotion Organization for the Indian Subcontinent said that in line with the program to expand trade exchanges with neighboring countries, Iran uses all its export and import capacity with Afghanistan.

Mohammad Sadeq Ghanmazadeh said that Iran-Afghanistan economic relations have experienced ups and downs, and instability in Afghanistan's politics and security in recent months has been another reason for changes in the volume of trade between the two countries.

Stressing the fact that Iran Trade Promotion Organization is sensitive to the current situation, he said that the body has planned a series of seminars aiming to review problems and to find solutions.

Iran Banana Imports From
India Sees Impressive Increase

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In the last nine years, Iran's banana import from India increased from a mere Rs 30m in FY2014 to Rs 4.07b in FY2022. Around 34 percent of bananas exported by India go to Iran. Iran overtook this position from UAE in FY2020. Until FY2020, the UAE was the largest importer of Indian bananas.

When Iran was caught in the middle of a geopolitical crisis and sanctions, India joined forces with the nation to protect their economic interests. This turned out as a real opportunity for Indian banana growers and exporters, as well as apple producers and exporters of Iran.

Today, Iran is the largest importer of Indian bananas. "Multiple factors are at play here. While initially, the geopolitical crisis made Iran look at India, today the quality and the price point India offers have made Iran opt for bananas produced in India," said Pankaj Khandelwal, chairman and managing director of INI Farms.

Iran to Open Trade Center
In South Africa Soon

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran is planning to open a trade center in South Africa in the near future, the country's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) announced in a statement.

"The Trade Promotion Organization of Iran intends to establish a trade center in South Africa in order to facilitate trade in the country's market and to introduce the production and export capabilities of Iranian companies to their South African counterparts," the TPO said in the statement.

TPO invited all the businessmen and traders interested in working in South Africa to fill out a registration form to get in touch with the mentioned center and get the necessary support and information.

Back in August 2022, Director-General of TPO's Africa Office Mohammad-Sadeq Qanadzadeh said TPO was planning to open seven new trade centers in African countries by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20).

"So far, three business centers have been established in Africa, and we plan to increase this number to 10 centers by the end of the year," Qanadzadeh said.

Earlier in June 2022, TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak said the country was taking the necessary steps to increase annual trade exchanges with African countries to \$5 billion by the Iranian calendar year 1404 (begins in March 2025).

Peyman-Pak said the trade with the mentioned countries is expected to reach \$2.5 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year.

Iranian Firm Unveils
Home-Made Polyurethane Foam

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian company has unveiled a home-made polyurethane foam for use in automobile seats, an initiative that is expected to enable the country to cut back on nearly \$450 million worth of imports per year.

The Iranian made foam was unveiled by Saipa Azin, a subsidiary of Iran's second largest carmaker Saipa, in a ceremony in Tehran on Tuesday.

The company said it had mastered the technology to produce the special polyurethane foam under a partnership with Karun Petrochemical Company (KRNPC) as the supplier of the raw material needed for manufacturing the foam.

The KRNPC's plant is located in southern Iranian port of Bandar Imam Khomeini. It is a leading supplier of the raw material needed for manufacturing various types of foams in Iran and in the West Asia region.

A report by the IRIB news said the company has supplied some 40 metric tons (mt) of its newly-developed KCS-20 product to Saipa Azin for manufacturing car seat foams.

Resistance Economy Is Currently One of
Successful Models for Food Security

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Etkā Organization in a press conference said participation of all related bodies for planning and success has been necessary and currently the resistance economy is one of the successful models in the world for food provision and security.

Dr. Morteza Aalami who is the CEO and head of board of directors of Etkā Organization said that the From Fajr to Fitr Scheme is underway in the basic goods sector in order that people have less concern about provision of basic goods during Nowruz and holy month of Ramadhan.

He then pointed to the significance of the food security and said that change in climate changes have made food security in the world face with serious warning, adding that water resources shortage, decline in the quality of soil as well as political and economic issues especially the sanctions have made the food security for our country more important than ever.

Aalami went on to say that participation of all bodies for planning and success is very necessary, adding that currently, resistance economy is one of the successful models in the world for food provision and guarantee



of food security. He further said that in this model, sustainability of production and protecting water resources are considered and in embeds self-sufficiency.

He then pointed to the storing basic goods and said that materialization of these goods needs reinforcement of the existing infrastructures of the country from the beginning of the production chain to its end.

Aalami said that of course one of the important axes of providing food security is the price of the basic goods items for the consuming community especially in the existing economic conditions that the incomes of the people have reduced their purchasing power.

He noted that the government has taken action for regulating the market that fair distribution of goods would be materialized nationwide and chain stores have responsibilities to provide the access of the people to those items and reduce the food concerns of the people. He said that in the "From Fajr to Fitr" Scheme, the organizers have tried to provide goods with the lost price in order that people can have access to their required goods.

Iran Self-Sufficient in Car Seat Foam Production

TEHRAN (Shana) -- Karun Petrochemical Company has made Iran self-sufficient in the production of the raw materials needed for production of the foam used in car seats.

Alireza Sedighizadeh, the CEO of Karun Petrochemical Company, during a ceremony to unveil the foam used in car seats on Tuesday, said Iran has various capabilities and a special look at self-sufficiency and innovation and today's event is the starting point for the cooperation of Iran's petrochemical and automotive industries.

The foam is produced by from KCS-20 that is supplied by Karun Petrochemical Plant.

Emphasizing the necessity of developing petrochemical complexes with liquid feedstock, he added: "Currently, the feedstock of 10% of petrochemical complexes in the country is liquid, and it is necessary for the petrochemical industry to move towards the development of these complexes because it is true that it has less production tonnage, but higher employment and value added will be achieved."

The CEO of Karun Petrochemical Company emphasized: "The most important parameter of a car is its quality, and the quality of the car seat is also very important."

People Getting Weaker Due to Rial Plunge

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian member of parliament has issued a stark warning about the rising inflation in the country. Kazem Delkhosh Abatari said people are becoming weaker and weaker as a result of soaring prices.

Abatari added that the citizens face a huge challenge as their livelihoods are dependent on the prices of the dollar and gold.

The lawmaker noted that officials want to resolve problems but this cannot be done by fighting.

According to Abatari, the branches or the government and state organizations cannot engage in a fight to solve the woes of citizens.

He also said the majority of Iranian MPs are on board to help President

Ebrahim Raisi solve the problems.

The Iranian rial has hit record lows against the US dollar in recent weeks. The dollar was fetching as much as 601,500 rials on Iran's unofficial market on Sunday and later dropped several thousand toms to hit 560,000+ rials.

Iranian officials have blamed this depreciation of the national currency on a conspiracy hatched by Iran's enemies.

President Raisi earlier said the adversaries failed to achieve their goals through rioting on Iranian streets and have now resorted to this plot to foment discontent among Iranian citizens so as to pit them against the Islamic establishment.

But Raisi's critics put the blame on mismanagement on part of the government.

Italy Migrant Shipwreck Toll Rises to 64

STECATO (Dispatches) - The death toll from a devastating shipwreck off Italy's southern coast rose to 64, while three men were in detention accused of human trafficking, officials said.

The "alleged smugglers" held following Sunday's shipwreck of a boat loaded with migrants heading for Europe included two Pakistanis and a Turkish national, a police spokesman told AFP.

Italy's coastguard on Tuesday morning recovered another body on the beach at Steccato, in the southern region of Calabria, bringing the death toll to 64, a spokeswoman for the fire service told AFP.

She said the number of dead was expected to further rise, although it was unclear how many people were on the boat.



Russians Tighten Noose On Ukraine's Bakhmut



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian forces pressed forward their weeks-long drive to encircle and capture the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, where the commander of Ukraine's ground forces described the situation as "extremely tense".

Taking Bakhmut, the scene of some of the war's bloodiest battles, would be Russia's first major prize in more than six months and open the way to seizing the last remaining urban centres in the Donetsk region, one of four Moscow claims to have annexed in its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin instructed the FSB security service on Tuesday to bolster security in the four regions - currently only partially controlled by his forces - and also to counter what he described as growing espionage and sabotage operations against Russia by Ukraine and the West.

He was speaking after a Russian regional governor said a drone had crashed near a natural gas distribution station on Tuesday in an apparent failed attack near the town of Kolomna, just 110 km (68 miles) southeast of Moscow.

Ukraine does not publicly claim responsibility for attacks inside Russia. If it was behind the Kolomna incident, it would be its closest attempted drone strike to the Russian capital since Russia invaded Ukraine just over a year ago.

Earlier, Russia's defence ministry also accused Ukraine of launching two attempted drone attacks against two southern Russian regions overnight but said they caused no damage.

Around Bakhmut, Russian troops, including mercenary fighters from the Wagner Group, are trying to cut the Ukrainian defenders' supply lines and force them to surrender or withdraw.

"Despite significant losses, the enemy threw in the most prepared assault units of Wagner, who are trying to break through the defences of our troops and surround the city," Ukraine's Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi said in a statement.

An unnamed soldier from Ukraine's 93rd Separate Mechanised Brigade, speaking on the Telegram messaging app as explosions boomed in the background, struck a defiant note: "February 28, the town of Bakhmut. The city is on fire, the enemy is pressing. Everything will be Ukraine..."

Russia's state-run RIA news agency released a video clip it said showed Russian Su-25 fighter jets roaring over Bakhmut. "We are glad they are ours," says a man in the clip identified as a Wagner fighter, adding the jets helped them "psychologically".

Ukraine's military said Russia was shelling settlements around Bakhmut, which had a pre-war population of around 70,000 but now lies in ruins after months of intense trench warfare.

"Over the past day, our soldiers repelled more than 60 enemy attacks," the military said early on Tuesday, including on the villages of Yadhidne and Berkshivka just north of Bakhmut.

A Reuters reporter who visited the area on Monday said he saw no sign of Ukrainian forces withdrawing and that reinforcements were arriving despite constant Russian shelling.

Ukraine's eastern front line resembles "a grinding slog" and Russia is not likely to be able to make significant territorial gains in the near term, the U.S. undersecretary of state for defense policy, Colin Kahl, said on Tuesday.

"So you may see small portions of territory change hands in the coming weeks and months. I do not think that there's anything I see that suggests the Russians can sweep across Ukraine and make significant territorial gains anytime in the next year or so," Kahl told a House of Representatives hearing.

Blinken Holds Talks With Central Asian Leaders

ASTANA (Dispatches) - U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken met leaders in Central Asia on Tuesday as Washington pursued deeper engagement with the region's former Soviet republics in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine a year ago.

Blinken's visit to the capitals of Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan was his first to the region as the Biden administration's top diplomat.

It came just days after the Feb. 24 first anniversary of Russia's invasion, which has tested Moscow's influence in a region that also includes Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Turkmenistan.



Mexico's President Calls Peruvian Counterpart a "Puppet"

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador has hit out at his Peruvian counterpart, Dina Boluarte, describing her as a "puppet" of oligarchs in the latest escalation of tensions between the two countries.

Relations between Mexico and Peru have been strained since December's removal of former Peruvian President Pedro Castillo. On Monday, Lopez Obrador continued his criticism of Castillo's arrest and imprisonment, calling the situation a "total farce" and a "great injustice".

He speculated that the "end goal" of Castillo's removal is "an oligarchy plundering the country's natural resources". "They need to have a puppet, a dummy governor of their own," Lopez Obrador told a news conference.

Castillo was removed from office by legislators late last year after he attempted to dissolve Congress. He was replaced by his then-vice president, Boluarte.

On Friday, Boluarte announced the "definitive" withdrawal of Peru's ambassador to Mexico after Lopez Obrador branded her government as unconstitutional. She also decided what she called Lopez Obrador's interference in "Peru's internal affairs and his repeated unacceptable questioning of the constitutional and democratic origins" of her government.

Boluarte said the two countries' relationship would continue at a business-only level. Earlier on Friday, the Mexican president said his country "will continue to support [Castillo] who was unjustly and illegally removed from office". On Saturday, Mexico's foreign ministry said it regretted Peru's decision to bring its ambassador home from Mexico.

The diplomatic spat started soon after Boluarte took office, with Lopez Obrador denouncing the impeachment and imprisonment of Castillo, who is in pre-trial detention for 18 months on charges of conspiracy and rebellion. Castillo has denied the charges.

Peru declared Mexico's ambassador to Lima "persona non grata" in December after Mexico granted asylum to Castillo's family.

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North Korea's Kim Calls for Unity to Boost Grain Production

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean ruler Kim Jong Un called for stronger public solidarity behind his leadership to increase the country's grain production significantly, state media reported, amid outside worries about the country's worsened food insecurity.

Foreign experts say North Korea is experiencing a serious shortfall of food in the aftermath of COVID-19 border restrictions and a reported push for greater state control over grain supply. The experts say they've seen no signs of mass deaths or famine due to the shortfall.

During a ruling Workers' Party meeting on Monday, Kim expressed his government's determination "to bring about a revolutionary turn in the agricultural production without fail," according to the official Korean Central News Agency.

"Nothing is impossible as long as the strong leadership system is established in the whole party and there is the united might of all the people," Kim was quoted as saying.

KCNA didn't elaborate on whether Kim presented any specific steps to boost grain production. Many observers say meaningful steps to produce more grain would require more purchases of fertilizer, pesticides and agricultural machinery, as North Korea devotes much of its scarce resources to advance its nuclear weapons program.

North Korea's chronic food shortage has likely deteriorated due to COVID-19 restrictions that

choked off its external trade, persistent U.S.-led sanctions and its own mismanagement.

According to South Korean assessments, North Korea's grain production last year was estimated at 4.5 million tons. In the previous decade, its annual production was an estimated 4.4 million to 4.8 million tons. South Korea's spy agency has said North Korea needs 5.5 million tons of grain to feed its 25 million people each year.

In past years, unofficial grain purchases from China offset about half the gap, but pandemic-caused curbs on border traffic has likely cut those transactions. Further worsening the situation was a decline in people's earnings and authorities' unsuccessful efforts to supply grain via state-run facilities while restricting private dealing at markets, according to Kwon Tae-jin, a senior economist at the private GS&J Institute in South Korea.

Most analysts say North Korea's current food shortage is nowhere near the extremes of the 1990s, when hundreds of thousands of people died in a famine. They say the meeting of the party's Central Committee was in part likely convened to promote Kim's image as a leader caring about his people at a time when he's locked in confrontations with the United States over his nuclear program.

The plenary session, which opened Sunday, was expected to last at least another day.



Tinubu Closes in On Nigeria Election Victory

ABUJA (Dispatches) - Provisional results from Nigeria's disputed presidential election



showed Bola Tinubu from the ruling party closing in on victory, a Reuters tally of votes in 33 of the country's 36 states and the federal capital Abuja showed.

Tinubu's potential victory extends the All Progressives Congress party's (APC) grip on power in Africa's top oil producer and most populous nation, though he inherits a litany of problems from outgoing President Muhammadu Buhari.

Nigeria is struggling with Islamist insurgencies in the northeast, armed attacks, killings and kidnappings, conflict between livestock herders and farmers, cash, fuel and power shortages and perennial corruption that opponents say Buhari's party has failed to stamp out, despite promises to do so.

With only 4 states left to declare, Tinubu was ahead with about 34% or 7.6 million of valid votes counted, making it highly likely he would be declared winner on Tuesday of the weekend election.

But opposition parties rejected the results as the product of a flawed process, which suffered multiple technical difficulties owing to the introduction of new technology by the Independent National Electoral Commission (INEC) and on Tuesday called on its chairman Mahmood Yakubu to resign.

Tinubu asked voters to elect him on his track record during his two terms as Lagos state governor at the turn of the century, during which he managed to reduce violent crime, improve the city's hellish traffic jams and clean up rubbish.

The 70-year-old has, however, sometimes appeared frail in public, slurring his speech and answering questions with platitudes, leaving some to doubt how effective he would be.

Atiku Abubakar of the main opposition People's Democratic Party (PDP) was trailing with 29% or nearly 6.4 million valid votes. Peter Obi of the smaller Labour Party got 25% or about 5.5 million votes.

Obi's campaign attracted young people and urban, more educated voters fed up with corrupt politics of the past.

Both parties and the smaller opposition ADC rejected the results.



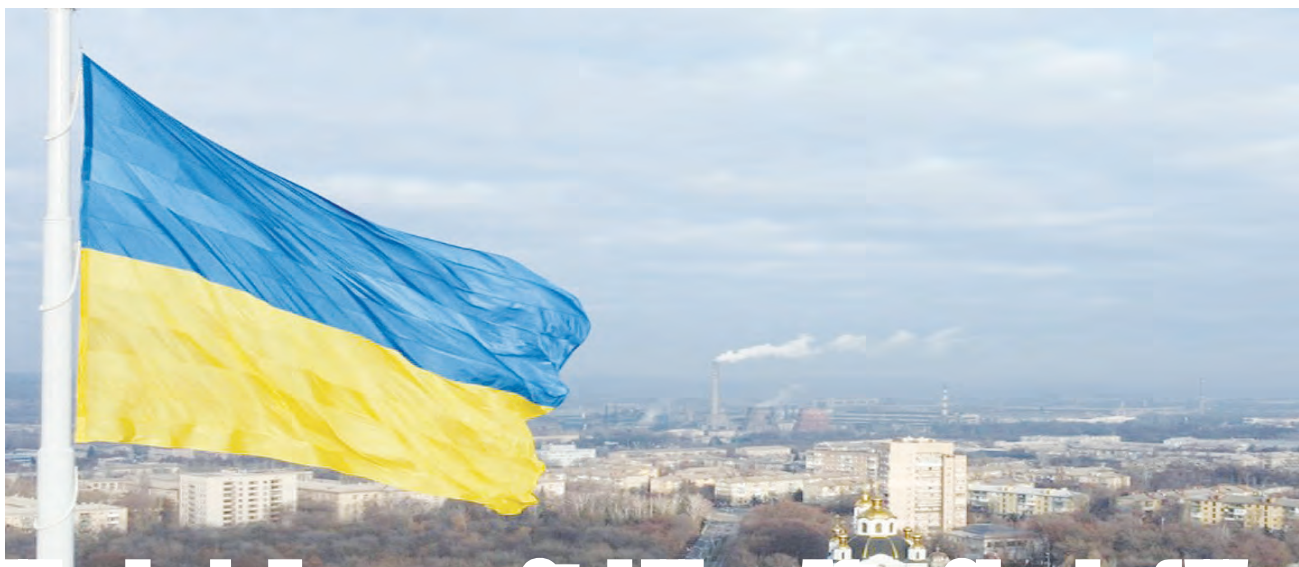
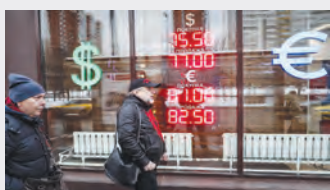
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Moscow Exchange to Start Trading Turkish Lira From March 1

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Moscow Exchange (MOEX) announced Monday to trade the Turkish lira and Hong Kong dollar as of March 1. MOEX said the launch of new contracts for the Turkish lira and Hong Kong dollar stemmed from a growing interest from clients in trading both currencies. Investors will have access to contracts expiring in June, September, and December 2023 and March 2024 for the Turkish lira and Hong Kong dollar futures.

"Currency futures are one of the most popular instruments with investors around the world, and our market is no exception. Over 50% of the volume of transactions in the derivatives market today is currency derivatives. These are convenient tools that allow you to implement various strategies on changes in exchange rates and hedge currency risks at low cost," said Managing Director for Derivatives of the Moscow Exchange Vladimir Yarovoy.



Ukraine's Economy Stabilizes After Shock of War

KYIV (Reuters) - When Russia invaded Ukraine a year ago, the shelves of the Novus supermarket chain in Kyiv quickly emptied as its supply chains - domestic and overseas - collapsed. Fresh produce became scarce and panic buying spread.

Oleksiy Panasenko, deputy director general for operations at the popular outlet, recalls how the business reeled before Novus, like many other large retail chains, managed to adapt.

"On the second day (of the war), there was already fighting on the outskirts of Kyiv," he told Reuters. "In February and March, our shops became more than a place to buy food: they were a place to meet, to communicate; so-called islands of stability."

And when Ukrainian troops forced Russia's army to retreat from the capital in the spring, the retail sector and the broader economy rebounded.

Data from Ukraine's European Business Association - which groups over 1,000 foreign and Ukrainian businesses - showed that by the end of May 47% of their members had fully restored operations and another 50% were working with some limitations.

But then missile attacks began in October, dealing Ukraine a hammer blow. Russia struck at power grids and sub-stations across the country, leading to outages during the freezing winter and hitting heavy industry hard.

The economy shrank by a third last year, the largest fall since Ukraine's independence from the Soviet Union in 1991. Before Russia's invasion, annual economic output had topped \$200 billion.

As the war enters its second year with no sign of slowing, the challenges are formidable. Reuters canvassed seven economists whose forecasts for 2023 ranged from a sizeable - though far less dramatic - decline of 5% in gross domestic product (GDP) to a small expansion.

Access to reliable power will be a major obstacle. While many businesses are finding ways to cope with war, those that cannot run on generators alone will struggle this year, according to the economists, two government officials and executives from two private companies.

ArcelorMittal Kryvyi Rih, Ukraine's largest steel mill, said its production was currently at about 25% of pre-war levels amid electricity blackouts.

"We see small and medium-sized businesses adapt fairly quickly to power shortages by purchasing generators, batteries, and other equipment, while infrastructure damage remains moderate," said Olena Bilan, chief economist at Dragon Capital investment house, whose forecast was the most negative among the economists surveyed.

"If this situation persists, the fall in GDP in 2023 will not be as significant as we expect. But our forecast also envisages an end of the war's hot phase at the end of third quarter of 2023," said Bilan.

She added that because of international support for Ukraine, it was "realistic" to expect its forces to continue to win back territory occupied by the Russians.

Russian President Vladimir Putin has said the war is going according to plan, and casts it as a "special military operation" to protect Russia's own security.

Ukraine's central bank predicts GDP will grow by 0.3% this year, while the economy ministry forecasts 3.2% growth.

China's Factory Activity Likely Continued to Grow in February

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's factory activity is expected to have continued to grow in February, a Reuters poll showed, suggesting that the flashes of domestic demand seen since the zero-COVID policy ended are now strong enough to rekindle upstream sectors.

Domestic orders and consumption drove output higher and saw economic activity in the world's second-largest economy swing back to growth in January, and economists expect manufacturers to have consolidated that position now that the country's COVID-19 epidemic has "basically" ended.

The official manufacturing purchasing managers' index (PMI) is expected to have improved to 50.5 in February, compared with 50.1 in January, according to the median forecast of 29 economists in a Reuters poll.

An index reading above 50 indicates expansion in activity on a monthly basis and a reading below indicates contraction. The official manufacturing PMI, which largely focuses on big and state-owned firms, and its survey for the services sector, will be released on Wednesday.

Despite COVID passing through the population faster than economists expected following the abandonment of the



Russian Banks Play Down Impact of Latest Western Sanctions

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian banks and politicians have played down the latest foreign sanctions on Russian lenders, promising speedy solutions to any problems with clients' foreign currency dealings.

The United States and Britain last week added several Russian banks to their sanctions list, while the European Union cut off more banks from the SWIFT global payments system, among them online lender Tinkoff and the private Alfa Bank, both on Russia's list of systemically important credit institutions.

Those sanctioned last week have responded in a largely relaxed manner, with some saying disruption will be limited and others restricting foreign currency transactions or suspending euro trading on brokerage accounts.

Tinkoff, owned by TCS Group Holding, said it was suspending euro trading, but that the measures would not affect its more than 26 million customers.

"We ... have developed an infrastructure solution that will allow clients to seamlessly transfer [foreign] assets to a new, non-sanctioned company within one to three weeks," its brokerage arm Tinkoff Investments said.

Russia's major banks have rallied after an initial hit from last year's Western sanctions and now jostle for business from the state, particularly a burgeoning defence budget, and big corporate accounts.

Analysts at the Finam brokerage said that "a lot of work has been done over the last year to reduce operational risks and create reserves". Sanctions have mostly hurt Russians wanting to travel abroad or hold foreign currency.

However, Dmitry Polevoy, head of investment at Locko-Invest, said restrictions on foreign currency payments had deprived the largest second-tier banks of a competitive advantage over the big state banks, adding:

"In the future, this could raise the issue of voluntary and compulsory consolidation of the sector."

Italy's Purchasing Power Halved Since Start of Russia-Ukraine War

ROME (Dispatches) - Purchasing power in Italy fell by 54 per cent over the last year, as high inflation, reduced trade and slower economic growth caused in part by the Russia-Ukraine crisis took their toll on the daily life of Italians, according to a new report published by Italian think-tank Nomisma.

The report, titled Changing World Observatory, did not cover data from any other European countries, Xinhua news agency reported.

Purchasing power is the measure of a country's wealth relative to what one unit of currency can buy in that country. A reduction in purchasing power means residents must pay more for the same amount of goods and services.

The new data exemplifies how the Russia-Ukraine conflict has dealt a new blow to the Italian economy, which were recovering from the economic slowdown caused by the Covid-19 pandemic. Energy prices have been rising, slowing industrial and agricultural production, impacting trade, and resulting in slower economic growth.

On the good side, Italy's economy grew 3.9 per cent last year, with most of the growth coming from the first half of the year, according to preliminary data from Italy's National Institute of Statistics (ISTAT).

However, this growth was overshadowed by an 8.1 per cent increase on average in the prices of goods and services during the same period, the report said. Including January (the most recent month for which data is available), prices increased by double digits year-on-year for each of the last four months.

Nomisma's report also found that 26 per cent of Italians feared not having enough income to last for a whole month, and the ability to save money for the future had decreased for 54 per cent of Italians in 2022.

On the whole, around one Italian in seven, some 14 per cent, said they earned less than they required to make ends meet, and a quarter of those surveyed said they spent all their money on essential purchases.

Nomisma's findings are based on a comprehensive survey conducted among a representative group of Italians aged between 18 and 65.

Though Italy is below average in terms of per capita gross domestic product for the eurozone, it has traditionally been in the top tier in terms of purchasing power since goods and services in the country are generally less expensive than in other eurozone states.

Japan's Factory Output Posts Biggest Fall In 8 Months

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's factory output shrank at the fastest pace in eight months in January as declining overseas demand took a heavy toll on key industries such as auto and semiconductor equipment.

In contrast, retail sales posted their fastest growth in nearly two years, separate data showed, highlighting the divergent paths between soft manufacturing and robust service-sector activity.

"Weak export-bound production and a recovery in consumption continue to be the two main focuses of Japan's economy," said Atsushi Takeda, chief economist at Itochu Economic Research Institute. He expects the new Bank of Japan leadership will be slow to tweak monetary policy amid the uncertainty.

Factory output fell 4.6% in January from a month earlier on a seasonally adjusted basis, government data showed on Tuesday. The contraction was much larger than economists' median forecast of a 2.6% decline and followed an upwardly revised 0.3% increase in December.

It marked the fastest decrease since May 2022's 7.5% fall, when China's COVID-19 lockdown disrupted Japanese manufacturers' supply chains.

Output of auto products slumped 10.1%, dragging the overall index lower while manufacturing of items such as production machinery and electronic parts dropped 13.5% and 4.2%, respectively.

Semiconductor-making equipment was down 26.8% as chip firms slowed their capital expenditure, while passenger cars fell 7.4% due in part to component supply bottleneck caused by heavy snow across Japan, a Ministry of Economy, Trade and Industry (METI) official told reporters.

The United States-led export control of chip equipment against China "has not had an immediate effect" on Japanese industrial production in January, the official added.

"The magnitude of the slowdown was partly due to the early start to the Lunar New Year this year, which started just 22 days after the turn of the calendar year," said Darren Tay, Japan economist at Capital Economics, adding production will rebound in February.

Manufacturers surveyed by METI expect output to rise 8.0% in February and gain 0.7% in March, the data also showed, although the official poll tends to report an optimistic outlook.

Separate data showed Japanese retail sales rose 6.3% in January from a year earlier, beating a median market forecast for a 4.0% gain and posting an eleventh consecutive month of expansion. It also logged the fastest growth since May 2021.

Massive Quakes Caused \$34.2b Damage to Turkey



ANKARA (Dispatches) - The two major earthquakes which hit Turkey on Feb. 6 caused about \$34.2 billion in direct physical damage, but total reconstruction and recovery costs facing the country could be twice as high, the World Bank said.

The bank estimates the earthquakes would also shave at least half a percentage point off Turkey's forecast gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 3.5% to 4% in 2023, Humberto Lopez, World Bank country director for Turkey, told reporters.

The situation in Syria, which was also affected by the quakes, was "really catastrophic", said Anna Bjerde, World Bank Group vice president for Europe and Central Asia.

Bjerde said the initial rapid damage assessment for Turkey of \$34.2 billion was equivalent to about 4% of its economic output in 2021, but that did not include indirect or secondary impacts on the growth of its economy or the most recent earthquake a week ago.

"Our experience is that reconstruction needs can run as high as two to three times the estimated direct physical damage," she said. The Feb. 6 earthquakes of 7.8 magnitude and 7.5 magnitude, the deadliest in modern Turkey's history, killed over 44,300 people.

The World Bank said the earthquakes had been followed by more than 7,500 aftershocks, creating the largest such disaster to strike Turkey in over 80 years.

The bank's Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) report estimates that 1.25 million people were made homeless by damage to their homes, or their complete collapse.

The heaviest damage occurred in 11 provinces in southern Turkey that have some of the country's highest poverty rates, and host more than 1.7 million Syrian refugees, or about half the total Syrian refugee population in Turkey, the report found.

The World Bank has provided immediate assistance of \$780 million for Turkey from two existing projects in the country, as well as \$1 billion in a new emergency recovery project.

FM to Visit Moscow In Near Future

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian will visit Russia in the near future, the ambassador of Iran to Moscow says. Kazem Jalali told Russian news sources that Amirabdollahian’s visit to Moscow will take place in March. Political relations between Moscow and Tehran are gradually developing and are getting stronger every day, he said in a video interview at the press center of Parlamentskaya Gazeta. “Our political relations are gradually developing and strengthening every day on the basis of us being neighbors as well as on our sharing similar approaches in the international arena,” the Iranian envoy said.



India’s Sinking Holy Town Faces Grim Future

JOSHIMATH (Dispatches) - Inside a shrine overlooking snow-capped mountains, Hindu priests heaped spoonfuls of puffed rice and ghee into a crackling fire. They closed their eyes and chanted in Sanskrit, hoping their prayers would somehow turn back time and save their holy — and sinking — town.

For months, the roughly 20,000 residents in Joshimath, burrowed in the Himalayas and revered by Hindu and Sikh pilgrims, have watched the earth slowly swallow their community. They pleaded for help that never arrived, and in January their desperate plight made it into the international spotlight.

But by then, Joshimath was already a disaster zone. Multistoried hotels slumped to one side; cracked roads gaped open. More than 860 homes were uninhabitable, splayed by deep fissures that snaked through ceilings, floors and walls. And instead of saviors they got bulldozers that razed whole lopsided swaths of the town.

The holy town was built on piles of debris left behind by years of landslides and earthquakes. Scientists have warned for decades, including in a 1976 report, that Joshimath could not withstand the level of heavy construction that has recently been taking place.

“Cracks are widening every day and people are in fear. We have been saying for years this is not just a disaster, but a disaster in the making... it’s a time bomb,” said Atul Sati, an activist with the Save Joshimath Committee.

Joshimath’s future is at risk, experts and activists say, due in part to a push backed by the prime minister’s political party to grow religious tourism in Uttarakhand, the holy town’s home state. On top of climate change, extensive new construction to accommodate more tourists and accelerate hydropower projects in the region is exacerbating subsidence — the sinking of land.

Located 1,890 meters (6,200 feet) above sea level, Joshimath is said to have special spiritual powers and believed to be where Hindu guru Adi Shankaracharya found enlightenment in the 8th century before going on to establish four monasteries across India, including one in Joshimath.

Visitors pass through the town on their way to the famous Sikh shrine, Hemkund Sahib, and the Hindu temple, Badrinath.

“It must be protected,” said Brahmachari Mukundanand, a local priest who called Joshimath the “brain of North India” and explained that “Our body can still function if some limbs are cut off. But if anything happens to our brain, we can’t function. ... Its survival is extremely important.”

The town’s loose topsoil and soft rocks can only support so much and that limit, according to environmentalist Vimlendu Jha, may have already been breached.

“You can’t just construct anything anywhere just because it is allowed,” he said. “In the short term, you might think it’s development. But in the long term, it is actually devastation.”

At least 240 families have been forced to relocate without knowing if they would be able to return.

Prabha Sati, who fled Joshimath in a panic last month when her home began to crack and tilt, came back to grab the television, idols of Hindu gods and some shoes before state officials demolished her home.

“We built this house with so much difficulty. Now I will have to leave everything behind. Every small piece of it will be destroyed,” she said, blinking back tears.

Authorities, ignoring expert warnings, have continued to move forward with costly projects in the region, including a slew of hydropower stations and a lengthy highway. The latter is aimed at further boosting religious tourism, a key plank of Prime Minister Narendra Modi’s Bharatiya Janata Party.

In 2021, Modi promised a prosperous decade ahead for Uttarakhand. It is dotted with several holy shrines and improving the state’s infrastructure has already led to a steady rise in pilgrims over the decades. Nearly 500,000 passed through Joshimath in 2019, state data shows.

“In the next 10 years, the state will receive more tourists than it did in the last 100 years,” Modi said.

A big Uttarakhand tourism draw is the Char Dham pilgrimage, one of the toughest in India. The route takes people to four, high-altitude Hindu temples. Pilgrims traverse challenging terrain, dropping oxygen levels and harsh weather between Badrinath,



Gangotri, Kedarnath and Yamunotri temples. In 2022, over 200 out of the 250,000 pilgrims died while making the journey. Authorities said the rise in visitors was straining existing infrastructure.

Already underway, the Char Dham infrastructure project, aims to make the journey more accessible via a 10-meter (32-foot) wide and 889-kilometer (552 miles) long all-weather highway as well as a 327-kilometer (203-mile) railway line that would crisscross through the mountains.

It is a controversial project with some experts saying it will exacerbate the fragile situation in the upper Himalayas where several towns are built atop landslide debris.

Veteran environmentalist Ravi Chopra called the project a desecration when he resigned from a court-ordered committee studying its impact. To create such wide roads, engineers would need to smash boulders, cut trees and strip shrubbery, which he said will weaken slopes and make them “more susceptible to natural disasters.”

Urban planning expert Kiran Shinde suggested a pedestrian corridor instead, noting these places were never meant for cars nor crowds numbering in the hundreds of thousands.

“The highway is the most disastrous thing to happen to the Char Dham,” said Shinde, a professor at Australia’s La Trobe University who has written on religious tourism. “Let people walk.”

Cracks continue to form. Located near a rail line construction site, Sangeeta Krishali’s home in Lachmoli, about 100 kilometers (62 miles) from Joshimath, has them. She fears for her safety: “It happened there, it can happen here, too.”

In Joshimath’s foothills, construction was paused on a road for the Char Dham project that would ferry tourists faster to the Badrinath temple after cracks emerged in people’s homes. Locals feared it was too late. A long, jagged crack running across one of the front walls in the famed Adi Shankaracharya monastery had deepened worryingly in recent weeks, said Vishnu Priyanand, one of the priests.

“Let places of worship remain as places of worship. Don’t make them tourist spots,” he pleaded. It’s not just the highways. For the past 17 years, Atul Sati, the Save Joshimath Committee member, has been convinced that a hydropower station located near his town could one day ruin it. He isn’t alone. In late January, hundreds of residents protested against the National Thermal Power Corporation’s Tapovan project. Posters reading ‘Go back NTPC’ are plastered across the town’s main market.

“Our town is on the verge of destruction because of this project,” Sati said.

Locals say construction blasts for a 12-kilometer (7-mile) tunnel for the station are causing their homes to crumble. Work has been suspended but NTPC officials deny any link to Joshimath’s subsidence. An expert committee is still investigating the cause, but state officials earlier blamed faulty drainage systems.

The state government announced interim relief packages, including compensation worth 150,000 rupees (\$1,813) to each affected family, said Himanshu Khurana, the officer in charge of Chamoli district where Joshimath is located. Various government agencies were conducting surveys to determine what caused the damage, he added.

Tehran, Moscow...
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“Our countries have a huge potential for the development of trade and economic ties. Last year, the volume of mutual trade increased by 20% compared to 2021. Plans for the near future include a maximum increase in mutual trade,” Volvach said as quoted by the press service of the Economic Development Ministry.

According to the Deputy Minister, in 2022, 78 Russian entities supported trade and economic ties with Iran. Among the main trading partners are Moscow, St. Petersburg, Rostov, Astrakhan, Saratov, Belgorod, Moscow and Krasnodar regions, the republics of Tatarstan, and Bashkortostan.

Iran Urges Unconditional...
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“In order to more effectively address Syria’s current humanitarian crisis, the international community must focus on lifting the inhumane unilateral sanctions.”

Syria has been a target of United States sanctions since 1979. The US and its Western allies imposed more such bans on Damascus after 2011, when the country found itself in the grip of rampant foreign-backed militancy and terrorism. The coercive measures intensified even further with Washington’s passing of the Caesar Act in 2019, which targeted any individual and business that participated either directly or indirectly in Syria’s reconstruction efforts.

The Iranian envoy reminded that the Western measures amounted to blatant violations of international law and the UN Charter, adding that the sanctions had made it more difficult for the Syrian people to access their needs and have constrained the ability of government institutions to deliver basic services and improve living standards.

In the face of overwhelming international criticism, the US moved on February 10 to issue a temporary sanctions waiver to allow earthquake relief funds to reach Syria.

Iravani, however, asserted that the exemptions were not sufficient, calling them “only an attempt to create the appearance of concern.”

“Therefore, it is not enough to offer words of solidarity without taking concrete actions. We call for the immediate, complete, and unconditional lifting of these unjustified sanctions,” he remarked.

The ambassador also condemned the continued plundering of Syria’s natural resources, primarily oil, and gas -- a trend that American occupation forces started under former US President Donald Trump -- at a time when the Arab nation could use every last bit of its national wealth.

Iravani cited Syria’s official statistics that have shown that such “criminal acts” had resulted in the theft of more than \$100 billion in Syrian national resources and wealth.

Turning to the issue of ongoing efforts at returning peace to the Arab nation, he noted that Iran would continue its endeavors within the “Astana format” to help “achieve long-term and sustainable normalization in and around Syria.”

Curse or Blessing? In Uganda, Oil Project Gets Mixed Reviews

KAMPALA (Dispatches) - On the teeming savannah of northwest Uganda, antelopes gaze beyond a metal fence as a giant rig is raised above cleared tracts of grasslands to make way for oil drilling.

Wide tarmac roads have replaced dirt tracks, a modern airstrip has been laid, and fancy hotels and shops have sprung up around the national wildlife park where the Tilenga mega-project is well under way. Oil is coming to this biodiverse but impoverished region on the eastern shores of Lake Albert -- and not everyone is pleased.

French oil giant TotalEnergies, which is developing the Tilenga oilfield, will learn on Tuesday if a court in Paris agrees with accusations that it trampled on human rights and the environment in pursuit of fossil fuels in Uganda.

From 2025, the company says, oil will be pumped from landlocked Uganda over 1,400 kilometres (870 miles) to the coast of Tanzania along what will be the world’s longest pipeline of its kind.

The project partly stretches into Murchison Falls National Park, a protected area.

Critics say it poses a poorly-assessed threat to one of Africa’s most fragile ecosystems and the livelihoods of tens of thousands of people.

On the ground, interest has largely focused on the economic impact from the arrival of Big Oil -- and the response is mixed.

TotalEnergies says Tilenga will create 7,000 jobs in the Lake Albert region, and some locals have benefited from land buyouts, scholarships, and development spurred by the project.

Others have landed in court for resisting the \$10 billion project, which includes the pipeline development and another oil field overseen by the China National Offshore Oil Corporation.

Emily Fwachan, who hails from Buliisa district where the Tilenga fields are located, sold five acres (two hectares) of land to TotalEnergies for a compensation package valued at 25 million Ugandan shillings (\$6,800).

The company built the 54-year-old a new home, and she used some of the cash to buy her son property and a motorcycle, help her daughter find work, and establish a bee farm to sell honey to oil workers.

“For me I got more benefits than problems,” Fwachan told AFP.

Munich Conference Losing...
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The Russian envoy also noted that the participants at the Munich conference, except those representing China and some other countries, allocated most of their time and speeches to praising each other and unilateralism.

“There was no competition between views or approaches at the Munich conference. It is obvious that the event is losing its importance, influence and added value in terms of examining the current international situation and exploring creative solutions for existing security challenges.”

The 59th edition of the security conference was held on February 17-19. Instead of hosting official representatives from governments in Tehran and Moscow, the forum hosted anti-Iran and anti-Russia figures.

Iraq’s Energy Imports...
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This ‘Baghdad Ballet’, as one source in the previous U.S. presidential administration used to call it, saw its fanciest moves under the ultra-smooth Mustafa al-Kadhimi. He had danced the usual dance with the U.S. so well that in May 2020 Washington gave him even more money than before and the longest waiver ever given – 120 days – to keep importing gas and electricity from Iran. Once the money had been banked and al-Kadhimi was safely back on home territory, Iraq signed a two-year contract – the longest to date – with Iran to keep importing gas and electricity from it.

In reality, Iraq could end its gas dependence on Iran relatively easily if it really wanted to. Iraq’s proved natural gas reserves total around 131 trillion cubic feet (Tcf), the 12th largest in the world, and there may be a lot more as the rate of exploration for gas reserves has not matched that for oil. Most of Iraq’s natural gas reserves are associated with oil in large oil fields in the south of the country and there have been occasional encouraging moves towards capturing this gas, rather than by just burning it off at the oil wells. For example, Baghdad signed up to the United Nations and World Bank ‘Zero Routine Flaring’ initiative - aimed at ending by 2030 the routine flaring of gas produced during the drilling of oil. At the time, Iraq flared the second largest quantity of gas in the world (after Russia) – some 17.37 billion cubic metres (bcm). At around the same time, Iraq’s Oil Ministry announced that it had signed a deal with U.S. engineering giant Baker Hughes to capture gas associated with oil from the Gharraf and Nassiriya oil fields.

The first stage of the Nassiriya plan, which would be similar for Gharraf, would involve an advanced modular gas processing solution being deployed at the Integrated Natural Gas Complex in Nassiriya to dehydrate and compress flare gas to generate over 100 million standard cubic feet of gas per (mmscf/d) of gas. The second stage would involve the Nassiriya plant being expanded to become a complete natural gas liquid (NGL) facility that would recover 200 mmscf/d of dry gas, liquefied gas and condensate. All this output would go to the domestic power generation sector, with Baker Hughes stating previously that addressing the flared gas from these two fields would allow for the provision of 400 megawatts of power to the Iraqi grid. The project, if Baker Hughes were allowed to just get on with it, would take around 30 months to be implemented. Similar development plans could then be rolled out for other major gas capture sites, which back in 2018 and 2020 included Halfaya (300 mmscf/d), and Ratawi (400 mmscf/d) in the first instance.

Synergies could then be developed with the only major gas project that has made significant progress in Iraq over the years, the Basra Gas Company (BGC) project, orchestrated by British oil and gas giant, Shell, which owns a 44 percent stake in venture. The BGC was designed specifically to enable Iraq to increase its energy independence and to achieve economic diversification by capturing currently flared gas from the fields of Rumaila, West Qurna 1, and Zubair in the first phase. By 2019/2020, the BGC had reached a peak production rate of 1,035 mmscf/d, the highest in Iraq’s history and sufficient gas to generate approximately 3.5 gigawatts of electricity – enough to power three million homes. The BGC is also responsible for currently supplying around 70 percent of Iraq’s liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) and for enhancing Iraq’s export capabilities, which helped the country to become a net exporter of LPG from 2017. Back in June 2022, BGC exported its first semi-refrigerated liquefied petroleum gas shipment, from the BGC Umm Qasr jetty, as part of plans to boost the country’s LPG exports.

West Ham Suffer Fabianski Injury Blow

LONDON (Dispatches) - West Ham United will be without Lgoalkeeper Lukasz Fabianski for a lengthy spell after he suffered a fractured cheekbone in the Premier League win over Nottingham Forest.

“He’s got a fractured cheekbone and eye-socket,” manager David Moyes, speaking ahead of Wednesday’s FA Cup fifth-round tie at Manchester United, told a news conference.

“We don’t quite know whether it’ll be operated on or healing itself, or a time-span at the moment.”

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Thiago Silva Has Knee Ligament Damage

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea revealed that Brazilian Lcenter-back Thiago Silva suffered knee ligament damage during the 2-0 Premier League defeat at Tottenham at the weekend.

Silva, 38, had to leave the pitch in the first half of the Blues’ defeat.

Chelsea have not said how long the former Paris Saint-Germain and AC Milan defender will be sidelined, but his absence is another setback for under-pressure manager Graham Potter who has just two wins from the club’s last 15 games in all competitions.

Randle, Quickley Shine as Knicks Sink Celtics



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Julius Randle and Immanuel Quickley combined for 46 points as the in-form New York Knicks upset the Boston Celtics 109-94 in the NBA.

Randle and Quickley finished with 23 points each as the impressive Knicks extended their winning streak to six games at Madison Square Garden.

The New York victory bumped the Celtics out of the top spot in the Eastern Conference standings, lifting the Milwaukee Bucks into first place.

Six Knicks players finished the game in double figures after New York took control of the contest early on to lead almost from start to finish. The Knicks moved up to fifth place in the East after the win.

New York pulled 20 points clear midway through the second quarter and retained a comfortable advantage throughout.

A miserable night for Boston ended with Jayson Tatum being ejected with four minutes remaining for a second technical foul.

Tatum -- the hero of Boston’s pulsating victory over Philadelphia on Saturday -- endured a frustrating outing, making just six-of-18 from the field.

Malcolm Brogdon led the Boston scorers with 22 points.

Elsewhere, Jimmy Butler scored 23 points as the Miami Heat sent the Philadelphia 76ers spinning to a second straight defeat with a 101-99 victory on the road.

A superb defensive effort from Miami saw the potent Sixers offense – which has been averaging 114 points this season -- restricted to fewer than 100 points.

At the other end, Butler provided offensive guile and came up clutch in the final two minutes, giving Miami a 100-99 lead with a remarkable driving reverse layup shortly before drawing a foul and two free throws that put the Heat into a winning position.

In addition to his 23 points, Butler finished with 11 rebounds, nine assists and four steals.

Kyrgios Withdraws From Indian Wells

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Australian star Nick Kyrgios has withdrawn from next month’s ATP/WTA Indian Wells Masters after failing to recover in time from knee surgery, organisers said.

The world number 19 has not appeared on the tour since playing in Tokyo last October following his run to the US Open quarter-finals the previous month.

The 27-year-old underwent knee surgery in January to repair a torn left meniscus following his withdrawal from the Australian Open.

Kygios’s manager Daniel Horsfall later described the surgery as a “great success” and indicated the temperamental star was targeting a return at Indian Wells.

Kyrgios reached the quarter-finals at Indian Wells last season, losing in three sets to Rafael Nadal.

US media reports added on Monday that Kyrgios had also withdrawn from the Miami Open, which follows immediately after Indian Wells.

Kyrgios, who reached the Wimbledon final last season, escaped a conviction earlier this month after admitting in a court in Canberra to assaulting his then-girlfriend Chiara Passari in early 2021.

Pogba Is Back In Juve Squad

TURIN (Dispatches) - Juventus midfielder Paul Pogba could make his long awaited return to the pitch in the Serie A clash against Torino today after recovering from a number of injuries, manager Massimiliano Allegri said.

The France international had an operation on a damaged meniscus in September and also missed the World Cup in Qatar with the national team.

The only time Pogba has been part of the squad this season was as an unused substitute in the 2-0 loss against Monza on January 29.

“Pogba will be called up for the derby and will play if necessary. He doesn’t have much playing time in his legs, but more than enough,” Allegri told reporters.



Richard Gasquet, part of the winning team in 2017, unites with 2013 winner Alize Cornet for the hosts, with Switzerland represented by Olympic champion Belinda Bencic and Leandro Riedi.

Alcaraz Lined Up for Returning Hopman Cup

NICE (Dispatches) - Spain’s Carlos Alcaraz will team up with Paula Badosa in this year’s Hopman Cup, the mixed tournament returning to the calendar for the first time since 2019.

World number two Alcaraz, 19, and Badosa, 22nd in the WTA rankings, will face five other teams in the July 19-23 event in France.

Event organizer Iva Majoli told a press conference the three other teams would be announced “in the coming weeks”.

Teams are split into two groups of three on the clay courts at Nice with rubbers consisting of two singles and a mixed doubles.

First staged in 1989 it moves to the French riviera from its former traditional home in Perth, Australia.

The USA hold the most titles with six, while the Swiss were the winners of the last edition four years ago.

The competition is named in honor of Harry Hopman, the late Australian tennis player and coach who helped guide his country to 15 Davis Cup titles between 1938 and 1969.

Germany to Bring In New Faces

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A number of newcomers will feature in the Germany squad for the international matches against Peru and Belgium in March, coach Hansi Flick said as the team rebuild with an eye on the Euro 2024 tournament on home soil.

The Germans, who suffered their second consecutive group-stage World Cup exit in Qatar in December, will be hoping to lay the foundations this year for a successful tournament in Germany in 2024. “We will make sure to have some new players with us,” Flick said. “It will be interesting to see some of the youngsters.”

“We want to use the team from now until the Euros to test young players,” he said.

Germany host Peru on March 25 and then Belgium three days later.

Several young players have already earned their Germany caps and are almost certain of a spot in the 2024 squad, including Jamal Musiala, Florian Wirtz, Karim Adeyemi and Youssoufa Moukoko among other.

Many more are expected to showcase their talents in the coming months as Flick looks to build a battleworthy team to make amends for their recent tournament debacles.

Four-time world champion Germany also crashed out of the Euros in 2021 in the Round of 16.

Germany have also had dwindling attendances in recent years with the national team far from selling out stadiums at home for their matches.

“It is about delivering the performance at the right time. It is important to see that the team is passionately fighting and giving something back to the fans,” Flick said.

“Whoever wants that can be with us on the road to Euro 24,” Flick said.



Rublev Avoids Early Upset in Dubai

DUBAI (Dispatches) - No. 2 seed Andrey Rublev of Russia fell behind 5-2 in the opening set before storming back for a 7-5, 6-2 triumph over Serbia’s Filip Krajinovic in the first round of the Dubai Duty Free Tennis Championships in the United Arab Emirates.

Krajinovic broke Rublev’s serve in his first service game to help build the early advantage, but Rublev won the final five games of the set before cruising in the second, winning 26 of 29 first-service points (89.7 percent) and converting four of six break-point opportunities.

No. 7 seed Alexander Zverev of Germany rallied to beat Czech opponent Jiri Lehecka 4-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Alejandro Davidovich Fokina of Spain, Tallon Griekspoor of the Netherlands, wild card Thanasi Kokkinakis of Australia, Lorenzo Sonego of Italy and Russian qualifier Pavel Kotov also won their opening matches.

Argentine qualifier Juan Manuel Cerundolo upset No. 7 seed and fellow countryman Pedro Cachin 6-4, 3-6, 6-3 in the first round of the clay-court tournament in Santiago.

Cerundolo coped with Cachin’s nine aces by winning 39 of his 46 first-service points (84.8 percent).

Defending champion Pedro Martinez of Spain also bowed out early, as German qualifier Yannick Hanfmann handled business in their match 6-2, 6-0.

Chile’s Alejandro Tabilo pulled out a 6-0, 6-7 (4), 7-6 (5) win over Spain’s Jaume Munar for the right to face top-seeded Lorenzo Musetti of Italy in the second round.

The three seeded U.S. players in action all won their opening-round matches in Acapulco, Mexico.

Third-seeded Taylor Fritz outlasted U.S. countryman John Isner 3-6, 6-3, 6-4.

Sixth-seeded Frances Tiafoe downed Japan’s Yoshihito Nishioka 7-6 (6), 6-4, finishing with a 9-2 edge in aces.

Seventh-seeded Tommy Paul closed out Ecuador’s Emilio Gomez 6-1, 7-6 (4).

