

Iran's Deputy Defense Minister for International Affairs Says That the Islamic Republic of Iran Is Ready to Strengthen the Iraqi Armed Forces By Delivering Weaponry and Assisting Its Military Industries

IRAN NEWS

Director of Lebanon's Al-Manar TV Channel Ibrahim Farhat Has Called on Media Outlets That Are Close to the Resistance Front To Be Ready for an Expansion of the Enemy's Hybrid War

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Agreements With IAEA In Line With Majlis Strategic Law

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the latest agreements reached between Tehran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) during a visit by the agency's head comply with the strategic law passed by the Iranian parliament.

Behrouz Kamalvandi made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Iran's official IRNA news agency, which was published early Sunday.

Issuing a statement on Saturday, Iran and the IAEA affirmed they had agreed to take steps to enhance cooperation and expedite the resolution of outstanding safeguards issues between the two sides.

The statement was released at the end of a two-day visit to Iran by IAEA Director General Rafael Mariano Grossi, during which he met with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and head of the AEOI Mohammad Eslami.

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Inflation Rate Will Definitely Lower Next Year



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Economy and Finance says the inflation rate will be downward next year and the main task of the government and the Central Bank is to lower the inflation rate.

Speaking in the first national conference of Qarz Al-Hasaneh (Loan without interest) in Tehran, Ehsan Khandouzi said that the main task of the government and the Central Bank for next year is to reduce the inflation rate comparing to this year and expressed hope the forex market faces lower fluctuation next year due to handing over authorities to the bank.

He went on to say that while the banks have more than a five percent delay in payments, this rate in "loan, Without Interest from the banks of the Islamic Republic of Iran is half a percent, which is lower than the common rates in the world."

"Loan, Without Interest", as a recommended duty in Islam, has always had a special place in the economic cycle of the Islamic Republic of Iran," he added.

The first national conference on "Loan, Without Interest", titled "Explaining the position of loan, without interest in Iran's economy," was held on Sunday with the presence of the Minister of Economy and other central bank officials.

Khandouzi while referring to the inclusiveness of banking as one of the pillars of justice in the country, said: any part of the economy that is more efficient will benefit from the loan, and with more transparency in this matter, the society will also trust it.

He once again called for popularizing the economy and more participation of the public and said that economy whose roots do not return to the public support will not remain sustainable and sustainability of economy is the outcome of the public participation in the economic activities and social progresses of the people. He noted that one of the strategies of the government is to strengthen the dimensions of social justice and people's economy.

Khandouzi also urged Majlis not to increase the ceiling of the budget and it will lead to interaction between Majlis and the government and it will help the government to control the engine of inflation like the past year.

Tehran, Islamabad Negotiating Free Trade Agreement

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan are negotiating a free trade agreement with the aim of boosting their mutual trade to a targeted five billion dollars per year, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said.

Speaking in a televised program on Sunday, Mohammad-Sadeq Qanadzadeh put the two countries' trade at \$2.2 billion in 2022, saying that Pakistan is one of Iran's main strategic trade partners in the region, IRIB reported.

According to Qanadzadeh, the main draft of the FTA has been prepared and reviewed by the governments of the two countries and the two sides are currently working on a list of commodities to be included in the agreement.

"This is a time-consuming and specialized process that involves all related institutions and organizations. Therefore, although the FTA is on our serious agenda, it will take some time to be finalized as we are still working on the technical aspects," the official said.

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Iran's Wheat Production Rises 28% in 2022

TEHRAN (MNA)- Wheat production in Iran has increased by 28 percent in 2022, putting the Islamic Republic in 13th place among the world's top producers of the strategic grain, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO)'s latest Food Outlook report.

Based on the said report, Iranian farmers managed to produce 13 million tons of wheat in 2022, 2.9 million tons more than the figure for the previous year in which the total production stood at 10.1 million tons, IRNA reported.

According to FAO, Iran was the world's 14th largest wheat producer in 2021.

The organization has also predicted that Iran will produce 13 million tons of wheat in 2023, which will not change compared to 2022.

Despite concerns about the impact of the Ukraine war on the world's agricultural production in 2022, the world's wheat production this year increased by two percent compared to the previous year and reached 794 million tons. In 2021, the total wheat production in the world was estimated at 778 million tons.

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Iran Buying Sri Lankan Tea Slows Down

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Iran has stopped purchasing tea from Sri Lanka as a result of its own economic crisis that has led to the Iranian authorities bringing to a halt the issuing of licenses for the import of varied goods including tea.

Colombo Tea Traders Association Chairman Jayantha Karunaratne pointed out that Iran has stopped issuing licences and currencies to its importers due to their own economic reasons.

The tea industry in Colombo believes this might be a temporary halt as the purchasing has stopped now for about a month.

Mr. Karunaratne also said that there is also an investigation being carried out regarding one importer who is said to have obtained all the allocations made for procurement of tea based on wrong information being given to the Iranian authorities.

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Iran Opens Trade Center, Permanent Exhibition in Kabul

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's trade center and permanent exhibition of Iranian products was inaugurated in Kabul on Sunday, the Iranian Embassy in Afghanistan announced.

In a tweet, the embassy mentioned the purpose of opening this center is to take a fundamental step in the development of trade relations between the two countries of Iran and Afghanistan.

The embassy added that this center will be a place for Afghan businessmen to familiarize themselves with Iranian products.

The development of exports to Afghanistan with the establishment of a permanent trade center for Iranian goods in Kabul is the beginning of a new chapter in the economic relations between the two countries.

On January 31, Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) held a conference on Iran-Afghanistan business opportunities, during which the capacities of trade with Afghanistan were introduced and some solutions were proposed to resolve the problems created by the government change in Afghanistan.

Speaking at this event, Deputy Industry, Mining, and Trade Minister Mohammad Mousavi said the trade between Iran and Afghanistan has reached \$1.5 billion in the first nine months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21- December 21, 2022). The official expressed hope that Opening trade centers in Afghanistan would increase the level of trade between the two neighbors.

Mousavi further invited the businessmen of the two countries, especially the Iranian industrialists, to take part in Afghanistan's infrastructure projects.

Neutralization of IAEA BoG Anti-Iran Resolution Not Easy Task

TEHRAN (MNA) - A senior Russian diplomat says that the anti-Iranian resolution of the Board of Governors of the International Atomic Energy Agency was a strategic irresponsible mistake and its neutralization is not an easy task.

"The removal of cameras from the Iranian nuclear installations was a pretty significant result of #E3 and #US-sponsored resolution of the #IAEA Board of Governors on #Iran. The neutralization of this strategic irresponsible mistake is not an easy task," Russia's permanent representative to international organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov wrote in a tweet on Sunday.

His tweet came in response to a tweet of "50% more inspections of Fordow and reinstallation of nearly two dozen cameras that Iran removed last year are pretty important achievements of @rafaelmgrossi's visit to Tehran."

Ulyanov in another tweet also said, "Some #IAEA member states always leak sensitive information. This isn't the fault of the Agency's Secretariat. With a great degree of probability, we can identify those member states who leak confidential information in order to complicate discussions in the IAEA Board of Governors."

Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi traveled to Tehran after Western reports claimed that IAEA inspectors had found 84% enriched uranium in Iran - an allegation Tehran has rejected.

During his visit, he held talks with the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami, Iranian President Ebrahim Raeisi and Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Saturday.

Speaking in a joint press conference with Eslami, the UN nuclear agency chief said any military attack on nuclear facilities is outlawed, responding to US and Israeli threats to target those in Iran.

In a meeting with Grossi in Tehran on Saturday, President Raisi said Iran has had the highest level of cooperation with the agency based on its goodwill gesture.

Pointing to Grossi's negotiations with Iranian officials in Tehran, the president expressed hope that the IAEA will act based on professional and fair behavior and the principle of neutrality to announce realities regarding Iran's peaceful nuclear activities and the country's adherence to regulations.

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U.S. Does Not Deserve to Defend HR

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani in a message highlighted the US support for the apartheid regime in South Africa, saying that the United States does not deserve to defend human rights and democracy.

"There was a time the US was backing the apartheid regime in South Africa, the CIA helped it arrest Mandela," Kanaani wrote on his Twitter account on Sunday.

"Today, it is a strategic ally and supporter of apartheid and Zionist regime. The US does not deserve to defend human rights and democracy," he added. "It does not believe in them at all."

Youths Most Important Capital of Country

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi called the enthusiasm and participation spirit of the young as a valuable asset for the country and emphasized the government's efforts to support the young, especially in the matter of their marriage, employment and housing.

Speaking in the meeting of the Supreme Youth Council, which was held at the same time as the birthday of H.H. Ali Akbar (PBUH), and Young People's Day, President Raisi described the youth as the most important capital for the present and future of the country and emphasized the government's greater efforts to support the young, especially facilitating marriage by providing easy access to jobs and housing.

The President called the formation of dialogue centers with the young to open their mental knots in various fields as very necessary and constructive, and added, "All writers and elites, scholars, professors, and teachers should help in setting up and strengthening dialogue centers with the youth".

The head of the Supreme Council of Youth called creating vitality and hope in the future generation of the country as one of the most central tasks in the Jihad of Enlightenment, and referring to the importance of the role of correct and honest narration in Jihad of Enlightenment.

The President considered awarding the badge of hope to the youth as effective in motivating and encouraging the youth and calling it necessary to revise the



regulations for awarding state badges, and said, "Due to the connection of youth issues with many institutions and organizations, a comprehensive and coordinated work should be done in this field".

Ayatollah Raisi stated, "In the situation where the enemies have targeted the thoughts and actions of our young generation with cultural imitations for many years, all institutions, including the Supreme Council of Cultural Revolution and the Supreme Council of Youth, must use new and effective methods to prevent the enemy take advantage of future builders of the country".

The President called the enthusiasm and participation spirit of the young as a valuable asset for the country and emphasized the government's efforts to support the young, especially in the matter of their marriage, employment and housing.

The head of the Supreme Council of Youth also congratulated H.H. Ali Akbar's (PBUH) birthday, describing him as a worthy and instructive role model for the Islamic society, especially the young generation.

The 42nd session of the Supreme Council of Youth also had some resolutions.

It's West That Violates Women's Rights, Not Iran

TEHRAN (IP) – Government Spokesman notes that women's rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran record are clearly respected but in Western countries, their rights are fully violated.



In an interview with Iran Press, Ali Bahadori Jahromi highlighted the Iranian women's 44-year progress in science, technology and sports fields, saying: "We are witnessing that the Iranian women are accomplishing successes in the domestic and global sectors in all areas."

Recalling the case of the West's sending infectious blood to Iran, chemical weapons to Iraq during the 8-year imposed war and footprints of the Western countries in terrorist acts in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Yemen, he said: "These countries' advocacy of human rights is very ridiculous."

The government spokesman emphasized that if some country or a person is concerned about human rights, they should stop either interfering with the domestic affairs of other countries or sanctioning them which hinder other countries' economic growth and healthcare servicing.

Highlighting the recent sequences of the school girls' poisoning and its impact on the country's education, he said: "Poisoning students' is the continuation of such a series of measures taken by the enemy's agents."

He reiterated that these actions will not go anywhere and added that the element behind the poisonings of students will be identified and brought to justice soon.

Referring to the recent unrest in Iran, the spokesman said that some enemies' agencies were trying to prevent the country's growth by causing insecurity inside the country.

Bahadori Jahromi said that hostile media tried to represent the riots as an "honorable sabotage" and emboldened the rioters to keep on their wrongdoings such as destruction, stabbing, and desecration.

Noting that the universities, due to their scientific nature, would welcome free discussions over political and social Bahadori Jahromi said that invited other government officials to further interact with the student in this field. He emphasized that the university students' job was to question and that they should know what was going on in the country.

Referring to the attempts made by the enemies in the recent unrest to prevent the country's scientific growth, he said that despite these attempts, schools and universities in the country were not closed.

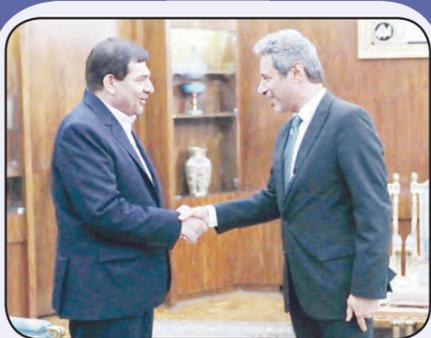
He pointed out that the enemies have been frustrated to see the speed of growth and consecutive scientific progress of Iran, so they attack academic centers.

The spokesman pointed to the capabilities of the young generation of the country and said that during the 44 years after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, it was through the reliance on the youths' capabilities that has gained achievements in different areas.

He stressed the knowledge-based companies and the government's focus on them and said: Ministries and various departments of the administration have plans to activate the knowledge-based capacities in the field of their specialized activities.

With regard to the appointment of the youths in administrative posts across the country, Bahadori Jahromi solving the issues should be assigned to the youth so that the result would be achieved in the shortest possible time.

Iran, Oman Stress Lifting Banking Obstacles



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior officials from Iran and Oman explored ways for removing banking barriers on the way of bilateral trade between the two countries.

First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber and Oman's Minister of Energy and Minerals Salem bin Nasser Al Aufi met in Tehran on Saturday when the Iranian official urged the need to solve the problems on the way of banking exchanges as core to any economic relation.

Al Aufi is visiting Tehran as special envoy of the Omani Sultan Haitham bin Tarik.

Speaking during the meeting, the Iranian vice president also called for increasing the number of weekly flights between Tehran and Muscat.

He also expressed hope that the two countries will witness a speedy implementation of already signed cooperation agreements that have yet to be taken into practice.

The Omani minister, for his part, said that he is in Tehran to pursue the course of cooperation between the two countries in all fields, including energy.

He said that the Omani Sultan has stressed the need for solving the issues hindering bilateral cooperation at the earliest.

Iran, Syria Confer on Boosting Military Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran, met and discussed expanding military cooperation with Lt. Gen. Ali Mahmoud Abbas, Minister of Defense of Syria.

Brigadier General Ashtiani said in this meeting: "The illegitimate and illegal presence of occupying forces in Syria is insecure and destructive, and this regime only understands the language of force and power."

The Minister of Defense added: "Today, a large part of the strategic depth of the two countries is due to the mixing of the blood of Iranian and Syrian "warriors in the fight against terrorist and Takfiri groups."

Brigadier General Ashtiani stated that in the shadow of the wise leadership of the two countries, many commonalities and ties have led the relationship between Iran and Syria to a deep and cordial one, which the common enemies have not managed to separate so far, and said: "The relations between the two countries are one of the best. It experiences its historical periods."

Minister of Defense and Armed Forces Logistics, referring



to the importance and role of Syria in the axis of resistance, emphasized the necessity of strengthening and strengthening the national and defense power of this country.

Ashtiani, while referring to the Zionist regime's attacks on the territorial integrity of Syria, emphasized: "We condemn any attack on the territorial integrity and national sovereignty of Syria, and we believe that this fake regime only understands the language of force and power, and that regime should not be allowed to be more arrogant."

In this meeting, the Minister of Defense of Syria, while expressing his satisfaction with his trip to Tehran and meeting with Iranian officials, said: "This meeting and discussion shows the peak of cooperation with the Iranian brothers in the fight against terrorism and establishing the security of the region."

Lt. Gen. Ali Mahmoud Abbas, referring to the epics and bravery of the resistance axis to maintain the security of the region, appreciated the role of the Islamic Republic of Iran in this regard and said: "We are trying to improve and expand the level of relations and cooperation with Tehran."

Tehran Expects Professional, Non-Political IAEA Approach

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Tehran expects the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) to adopt a "professional" approach to its nuclear energy program and refrain from being affected by certain powers which are pursuing their own specific goals.

In a meeting with the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi in Tehran, Raisi said Iran has had the highest level of cooperation with the agency based on its goodwill gesture.

Pointing to Grossi's negotiations with Iranian

officials in Tehran, the president expressed hope that the IAEA will act based on professional and fair behavior and the principle of neutrality to announce realities regarding Iran's peaceful nuclear activities and the country's adherence to regulations.

He said the visits by the IAEA's officials to Tehran indicate the Islamic Republic's "firm determination to have constructive cooperation with the agency."

Underscoring the need to use nuclear energy in

industry, agriculture and medicine to improve people's welfare, Raisi said, "Some countries, the US and the Zionist regime (Israel) at the top of them, have used the nuclear issue as an excuse to put more pressure on the Iranian people, while this regime has not become a member of the agency and does not act according to its regulations."

The Iranian president said the United States was the first violator of the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), through its unilateral withdrawal from the accord.

He said the three European signatories to the JCPOA -- Britain, France and Germany -- have also failed to fulfill their obligations as per the agreement despite Iran's adherence to its commitments as verified more than 15 times in the IAEA reports.

In a meeting, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and the IAEA chief agreed to further strengthen bilateral cooperation. Amir-Abdollahian reiterated Iran's resolve to solve technical issues pertaining to the Safeguards Agreements in the shortest possible time.

Grossi, for his part, said the IAEA is ready to settle issues between the two sides through technical and diplomatic approaches.

He said the IAEA welcomes any constructive initiative that helps the Vienna talks parties reach a final agreement on the JCPOA revival.

Transit of Goods Via Shahid Bahonar Port Up 65%

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Transit of commodities through Iran's southern Shahid Bahonar port increased by 65 percent in the first eleven months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022-February 19, 2023), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, a provincial official announced.

Hamid-Reza Mohamad-Hosseini Takhti, an official with the ports and maritime department of Hormozgan province, where Shahid Bahonar port lies, said that over 4,000 tons of products were transited via this port in the mentioned 11-month period.

He said the main transited goods included cars, fruits, vegetables, and dried fruits, which were transited from Shahid Bahonar port to the three countries of Turkmenistan, Armenia, and Georgia.

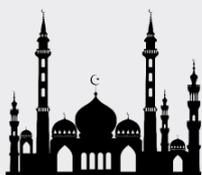
As announced by the head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), transit of commodities through Iran increased by 5.22 percent in the first eleven months of the current year, as compared to the same period of time in the past year.

Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that 12 million tons of commodities have been transited via the country in the 11-month period.

After seven years of reduction in the transit of goods from the country, the growth path of transit resumed in the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20, 2022) and with the passage of 12.65 million tons of goods through Iran, a growth of 68 percent was achieved, the former spokesman of IRICA has previously announced.

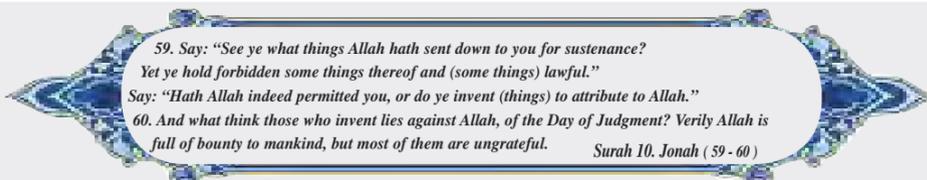
The policy of paying attention to neighbors and developing political and economic relations with neighboring countries in the current government, increasing attention to road and rail routes in the world and the efforts and cooperation of transportation and trade-related organizations in establishing or activating corridors through the country has led to significant growth in transit of goods through Iran.

Iran is one of the countries that has a special status in trade and transit relations due to its strategic location and special geography, as the country is the passage of several important international corridors.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:15
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:21
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	05:03
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:26



Iranian, Kazakh Provinces Seek Broadening Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A trade delegation from Mangystau Region of Kazakhstan visited Mazandaran Chamber of Commerce in Sari, the capital of the Mazandaran Province, and discussed ways for broadening the trade between the two states.

The Kazakh delegation was headed by Deputy Governor of Mangystau Region Mr. Kulzhanov Kanat Zhanbyruly and entered Mazandaran Province on Saturday.

Upon the arrival of the delegation in the province, it paid visits to the economic capacities of Mazandaran Province and also visited the strategic port and Amirabad Special Economic Zone.

Then the Kazakh delegation had a meeting with officials of this province and economic activists.

In the meeting, Head of Mazandaran Chamber of Commerce Mr. Abdollah Mohajer Darabi welcomed the Kazakh delegation and accepting the invitation to visit the province and announced readiness of Mazandaran Province for broadening the trade ties.

He then pointed to the visit of governors general of both provinces in the last decade which were planned for knowing the capacities and capabilities of both sides.

Mr. Mohajer Darabi then pointed to the historic relation between Iran and friendly and neighboring Kazakhstan and stipulated that it seems both sides have gained enough acquaintance about their capacities during these years and now it is time to operationalize it in line with broadening trade.



He further said that Aktau Port of Kazakhstan and Amirabad Port of Iran are an important capacity for trade by the sea as the goods can be taken to the destination in 48 hours. He also called for creating strong and more tie between the two provinces with pursuing it by the governors of Mazandaran and Mangystau.

Mohajer Darabi further said that Iran has exported goods worth of \$160m to Kazakhstan and Mazandaran has accounted for \$15m of the amount although this is small level but it can be expanded. He reiterated that Mangystau Region is very important for Mazandaran and called for the launch of an economic center in this province. He then pointed to solving the visa problem which was materialized by presidents of both countries and called for zeroing the tariff which can ease the trade exchange between the two countries and this problem can be solved with pursuing it by both sides.

He also called for operationalizing the previous agreements between the two states and called for the launch of a workgroup by both sides.

The governor of Mazandaran further called for the launch of weekly flight between Mazandaran and Mangystau, broadening cooperation in tourism, fishery, cultivation, technical knowledge especially in architecture.

Then Zhanbyruly, for his part, pointed to the capacities of both sides in agriculture, fishery and horticulture, mass construction and architecture and called for broadening the trade between entrepreneurs of both sides.

He expressed his positive views regarding the proposals of Mazandaran governor and called for submitting the proposals to him to transfer it to the economic activists of Mangystau.

Tehran to Host Iran-Qatar Business Forum

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A Iran-Qatar business forum is scheduled to be held in Tehran during March 6-7, an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization announced.



Farzad Piltan, the director-general of TPO's Office of Arabian and African Countries, said 20 major Qatari holdings and companies along with more than 200 Iranian companies active in various fields are going to participate in this event, the TPO portal reported.

According to Piltan, the forum has been organized by the TPO in collaboration with Qatar's embassy in Tehran and Qatar Development Bank.

The event is going to be attended by senior officials from both sides including TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak, deputy head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), and Qatar's deputy minister of Trade and Industry, as well as the secretary general of Qatar Chamber of Commerce and Industry.

In addition to introducing the two countries' economic and investment opportunities, during the two-day event, the representatives of the private sectors of the two sides are going to hold B2B meetings to explore ways of expanding mutual cooperation.

Tehran and Doha have set a target of three billion dollars of annual trade by 2025.

In a meeting between Mohsen Rezaei, the Iranian vice president for economic affairs, and Qatar's Emir Sheikh Tamim Bin Hamad al-Thani in October 2022, the two sides discussed ways of expanding trade ties between the two countries and emphasized the need for taking the necessary measures to reach the mentioned economic goal.

During the meeting, which was also attended by TPO Head Alireza Peyman-Pak, the Iranian side proposed drawing a roadmap for the two countries' trade development which was welcomed by Qatar's Emir.

Rezaei and Peyman-Pak visited Doha on top of a trade delegation to attend the opening ceremony of Iran's exclusive exhibition in the country.

Iran-Venezuela Friendship Exhibition Opens in Caracas

TEHRAN (IP) - The Iran-Venezuela Culture and Friendship Exhibition was opened in Caracas with the presence of all walks of life.

The Iran-Venezuela Culture and Friendship Exhibition was opened on Saturday evening local time with the presence of Hojatullah Soltani, Iran's Ambassador to Caracas, Pedro Infante, the Vice Speaker of the Venezuelan Parliament, and the head of the Iran-Venezuela Parliamentary Friendship Group, some ambassadors and cultural activist of Iran and Venezuela.

The Venezuelan citizens are very interested in Iran and some of the first-day visitors of the exhibition had photos of martyr Soleimani in their hands.

Hojatullah Soltani, Iran's ambassador to Venezuela, said in the opening ceremony of the exhibition expressed hope that this exhibition will provide more opportunities for the two nations to get familiar with each other. Pedro Infante, Vice Speaker of the Venezuelan Parliament, also appreciated the holding of the exhibition and emphasized the friendship of the nations of Latin America with Iran.

Persian Gulf booths with the aim of introducing Iran, Venezuela booth, women and hijab booths, medical services booth, and children's booths are among the departments of the exhibition.

The exhibition kicked off on March 4 and will last until 12.

IRISL to Send Technical Team for Preparing Load, Unload of Goods in Venezuela

TEHRAN – Deputy Head of Promoting Market of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) says with dispatching the first vessel in the regular shipping line to Venezuela in January and February, the group will dispatch the next ship to Venezuela in May.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Speaking on a TV program, Amir Bayat said that IRISL with dispatching two ocean liner ships to Venezuela in January and February has launched direct shipping line between the two states. He added that this action is in line with the policy of the current government and the group is trying to have sustainable shipping line between Iran and Venezuela.

He said that in February, a vessel with the capacity of 2200 TEU was sent to Venezuela in February, adding that according to the plans of IRISL Group, every three months a vessel will be sent to Venezuela and will return and according to this plan, the next vessel will be dispatched to Venezuela in May. He termed the long distance between the two states as the main reason for long gap between the dispatches of vessels. He said that

the vessel will take almost 35 days to reach Venezuelan ports after being loaded in Iranian ports and the unload process takes two weeks on average and its return will also take 35 days, so the pans have been prepared according to this fact.

Bayat also urged exporters to take immediate action for reserving for the next dispatch in order that the vessel with full capacity would be dispatched.

He reiterated that continuation of this regular line depends on Iranian traders and their interests, admitting that so far Iranian traders have not welcomed the regular line as it was expected while Iran's Trade Promotion Organization had emphasized the launch of this line.

Bayat said that the group is preparing to send a technical team for preparing the ground for load and unload of Iranian goods in Venezuelan ports. He went on to say that construction materials are the major needs of Venezuela and Venezuela can export wood and iron ore and coke to Iran. He once again called on Iranian traders to take advantage of this direct shipping line between Iran and Venezuela.

Iran, China Planning to Spread Persian, Chinese Languages

TEHRAN (MNA) – Referring to President Ebrahim Raisi's recent visit to China, the Iranian deputy minister of science in international affairs said that plans have been made to spread the Persian and Chinese languages through granting scholarships.

Vahid Haddadi-Asl said that so far, China and Iran have not been able to use each other's capacities and potential well.

Referring to President Raisi's recent visit to China, Haddadi-Asl said that currently, the relations between the two countries are at a good level.

During the meeting, the Iranian president expressed Iran's readiness to expand bilateral educational cooperation with the Chinese side.

The Iranian deputy minister further added that in this regard, necessary plans have been made to spread the Persian language in China and the Chinese language in Iran through granting scholarships.



Regarding the field of technology, the country has been able to establish good cooperation in the field of technology parks, he added.

Iraqi Science Minister in Tehran to Sign Cooperation MoUs

TEHRAN (IP) - Iraq's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research has arrived in Tehran to enhance scientific cooperation.

Iraqi Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research Naem Al-Aboudi paid an official visit to Iranian Research Organization for Science and Technology (IROST). On the sidelines of the visit, in response to a question about the purpose of his trip to Iran, Naem Al-Aboudi said: Iran and Iraq are going to ink several memoranda of understanding and extend the educational and scientific cooperation.

Al-Aboudi further said: Iran and Iraq are also supposed to exchange professors, students, and scientific experiences. While referring to the opening of the Tehran University branch in Iraq, the Iraqi Minister added: Iran-Iraq relations are at a very high level and we want to expand these relations in science and research, because currently, more than 70,000 Iraqi students are studying in Iran.

During the visit, Iraq's Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research was accompanied by Prof. Hassan Zamanian president of IROST, and Deputy Minister of Science, Research and Technology.



Notice of tender for export sale No. 26/1401/Z

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export **60.000 metric tons of Iron Ore pellet (%Fe:65.00)** on basis of F.O.B at Shahid Rajaee Jetty Bandar Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: www.geg.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 14:00 P.M. on 13th Mar. 2023 to the Golgohar complex in Sirjan. (50 km in Shiraz road) Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 10:00 A.M. on 14th Mar. 2023 at the office of the Seller.

Analysis %		
Min	65.00	Fe
Max	1.20	FeO
Max	0.05	P
Max	0.01	S
Max	3.5	SiO2
Max	0.7	Al2O3
Max	0.9	CaO
Max	2.5	MgO
Ave 250		CCS(kg/p)
Min 90		8-16 mm%
Ave5		-6 mm%
Max 4.0		Al.I%
Min 94		T.I%
19-24		Prosity%
Min 90		Reducibility%

At Least Four Dead In Malaysia Floods



YONG PENG (Dispatches) - At least four people have died and nearly 41,000 were evacuated in Malaysia after floodwaters caused by "unusual" torrential rains lasting days swept through several states, officials said.

Local reports and social media posts showed images of flooded roads, submerged cars, waterlogged homes and rows of shops closed in the affected areas, mainly in the southern state of Johor near neighboring Singapore.

The rains have continued unabated, hampering relief efforts.

Police said at least four people have died since Wednesday, including a man whose car was swept away by floodwaters and an elderly couple who drowned.

Protesters in Colombia Clash With Oil Company



CARACAS (Dispatches) - Colombia's Defence Minister Ivan Velasquez and the commander of its armed forces, Helder Giraldo, have landed in Caqueta province to seek the release of dozens of police officers and oilfield workers taken hostage during deadly protests.

At least 79 police officers and nine oilfield workers have been held since Thursday, as protesters demand that the oil company Emerald Energy invest in surrounding rural communities.

An officer and civilian died in confrontations between riot police and protesters, as demonstrators took control of the oil company's offices. Police sources indicate that the civilian was shot to death, while the officer suffered a stab wound.

UN Chief Slams Rich Countries' Treatment of Poor States



DOHA (Dispatches) - UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres slammed the world's rich countries and energy giants for throttling poor nations with "predatory" interest rates and crippling fuel prices.

Speaking in the Qatari capital, Doha, Guterres told leaders of more than 40 of the most deprived states that wealthy nations should provide \$500 billion a year to help others "trapped in vicious cycles" that block efforts to boost economies and vital services.

The summit of Least Developed Countries (LDC) is normally held every 10 years but has twice been delayed since 2021 because of the coronavirus pandemic.

Afghanistan and Myanmar, two of the poorest countries, are not present at the Doha meeting of 46 LDC states because their governments are not recognised by UN members.

No leader from any of the world's major economies attended.

At a leaders' summit ahead of the start of the general LDC conference on Sunday, Guterres hit out straight away at the way poor nations are treated by the more powerful.

"Economic development is challenging when countries are starved for resources, drowning in debt, and still struggling with the historic injustice of an unequal COVID-19 response," he said.

The LDCs have complained that they did not get a fair share of the Covid vaccines that went mainly to Europe and North America.

"Combating climate catastrophe that you did nothing to cause is challenging when the cost of capital is sky-high" and the financial help received "is a drop in the bucket", said Guterres.

Russia Close to Encircling Ukraine's Bakhmut After Months of Fighting



CHASIV YAR (Dispatches) - Russian artillery pounded the last routes out of Bakhmut, aiming to complete the encirclement of the besieged Ukrainian city and bring Moscow closer to its first major victory in half a year after the bloodiest battle of the war.

The head of Russia's Wagner private army said the city, which has been blasted to ruins in Russia's more than seven month onslaught, was almost completely surrounded with only one road still open for Ukraine's troops.

Reuters observed intense Russian shelling of routes leading west out of Bakhmut, an apparent attempt to block Ukrainian forces' access in and out of the city. A bridge in the adjacent town of Khromove was damaged by Russian tank shelling.

Ukrainian soldiers were working to repair damaged roads and more troops were heading toward the frontline in a sign that Ukraine was not yet ready to give up the city. To the west, Ukrainians were digging new trenches for defensive positions.

Russia's RIA state news agency released a video showing what it said were Wagner fighters walking by a damaged industrial facility. One fighter is heard saying Ukraine's army is destroying infrastructure in settlements near Bakhmut to prevent the Russian encirclement.

The commander of Ukraine's ground forces, Oleksandr Syrskiy, visited Bakhmut on Friday for briefings with local commanders on how to boost the defence capacity of frontline forces.

Denys Yaroslavskiy, commander of a Ukrainian army unit at Bakhmut, told Espresso TV that parts of some units had been ordered to rotate to more secured positions, describing the situation since the morning as "aslaughterhouse on both sides."

A Russian victory in Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of about 70,000, would give it the first major prize in a costly winter offensive, after it called up hundreds of thousands of reservists last year. Russia says it would be a stepping stone to completing the capture of the Donbas industrial region, one of Moscow's most important objectives.

Before the war Bakhmut was known for salt and gypsum mines. Ukraine says the city has little strategic value and the huge casualties Russia has suffered trying to take Bakhmut could shape the course of the conflict.

Cuba Blasts U.S. for Years of Disregarding Evidence on Havana Syndrome

HAVANA (Dispatches) - Cuba blasted the United States for taking too long to accept evidence that the ailment "Havana Syndrome" was not likely caused by a foreign enemy, saying Washington ignored the science as a pretext for cutting off relations with the Communist-run island.

A globe-spanning U.S. intelligence investigation declassified on Wednesday concluded it was "very unlikely" a foreign adversary was responsible for the mysterious sickness, first identified in the Cuban capital of Havana but which has afflicted U.S. diplomats and spies worldwide.

"This conclusion ... confirms what we already knew," Vice Foreign Minister Carlos Fernandez de Cossio told Reuters in an interview in Havana late on Thursday. "The unfortunate thing is, the U.S. government leveraged (Havana Syndrome) to derail bilateral relations ... and discredit Cuba."

Cuba has for years labeled as "science fiction" the idea that Havana Syndrome resulted from an attack by a foreign agent, and its top scientists in 2021 found no evidence of such allegations.

The U.S. State Department did not immediately reply to a request for comment on de Cossio's statements. U.S. officials have previously said the science was inconclusive and ongoing and that the government had opted to err on the side of caution in determining its policies toward Cuba.

De Cossio told Reuters there had been no shortage of evidence and that the revelation this week cast fresh doubt on the credibility of other U.S. policies towards Cuba.

He pointed a U.S. decision to keep Cuba on its blacklist of state sponsors of terrorism, calling it unfounded as well. The Trump administration in 2021 said the island's government harbored American fugitives and Colombian rebel leaders and gave security support for socialist Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro.

"This State Department list is not an instrument to promote the fight against terrorism," de Cossio said. "It is a tool of political and economic coercion against countries that do not subordinate their sovereign rights to the whims of the U.S. government."

Tunisia Labor Union Rally Urges President to Accept Dialogue

TUNIS (Dispatches) - More than 3,000 people demonstrated against Tunisia's government at a rally organized by the powerful UGTT trade union, which called on President Kais Saied to accept "dialogue".

Saied has pushed through sweeping changes to the political system in the sole democracy to have emerged from the Arab Spring uprisings, concentrating near-total power in his office since he froze parliament and sacked the government in July 2021.

In the biggest crackdown since the president's power grab, police have arrested around 20 prominent political figures over the past two weeks, primarily Saied's opponents.

"Freedom, freedom, down with the police state," demonstrators chanted as they marched in Tunis on Saturday, also calling for "a halt to impoverishment" in the North African country.

UGTT chief Noureddine Taboubi accused the president of targeting the powerful union as part of a wider crackdown against critics.

Taboubi condemned the latest wave of arrests and the imprisonment since February of Anis Kaabi, a top UGTT official for highway workers, who had been detained after a strike by toll barrier employees.

"We will never accept such arrests," Taboubi told the protesters. The UGTT has around one million members and shared a Nobel Peace Prize in 2015 with

three other civil society groups for promoting national dialogue in the country of about 12 million inhabitants.

AFP journalists said that more than 3,000 people took part in the rally.

Taboubi called on Saied to embrace "dialogue" and "democratic" ways, slamming the president for pursuing a "violent discourse... that is dividing the country".

The UGTT chief also defended "the rights of migrants, regardless of their nationality or the colour of their skin".

"Tunisia is a country of tolerance, no to racism," he told the crowd.

Saied last month ordered officials to take "urgent measures" to tackle irregular migration, claiming without evidence that "a criminal plot" was underway "to change Tunisia's demographic make-up".

The rally came as some 300 West African migrants in Tunisia prepared to be repatriated, fearful of a wave of violence since Saied's comments.

Taboubi also criticised negotiations between the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and Tunisia, which is struggling under crippling inflation and debt worth around 80 percent of its gross domestic product (GDP).

Tunisia is seeking a bailout package worth nearly \$2 billion from the IMF, which conditions any aid on a series of reforms.



Erdogan Dismisses Opposition Split



ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's President Tayyip Erdogan said that his ruling AK Party and its nationalist ally will continue on their planned course after the opposition bloc split over who should run to challenge him in a national election scheduled for May.

"We've said this was going to happen months ago... We have already set our goal... Whatever they do, we continue to work on our plan, on our road map," state-owned TRT Haber reported Erdogan as saying.

The public split on Friday in an alliance of opposition parties followed months of simmering discord in the group, and was seen by analysts as a blow to opposition hopes of unseating Erdogan, who has been in power for two decades.

Erdogan said this week that the elections would go ahead on May 14, despite criticism of his government's response to last month's devastating earthquakes, which killed more than 45,000 people in Turkey.

Meral Aksener, leader of the centre-right nationalist IYI Party, the second biggest in the alliance, announced on Friday the party was leaving the bloc.

She said that at a presidential candidate selection meeting this week, five parties in the alliance proposed Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the Republican People's Party (CHP), as their candidate.

Aksener accused members of the alliance of pressuring her party and defying people's will, adding that she proposed Mansur Yavas and Ekrem Imamoglu, CHP mayors of capital Ankara and Istanbul respectively, as candidates.

The CHP has the largest voter base in the alliance followed by IYI Party. Kilicdaroglu has said that there is no room for political games in the alliance and signaled that more parties could join the bloc.

Five remaining leaders of the opposition alliance met on Saturday and were expected to issue a statement following discussions.

"The best hope for the crisis-struck opposition now is to keep Erdogan under 50% in the first round (of voting) and show unity in the second round," said Erdem Aydin, founder of London-based RDM Advisory.

"As things stand both IYI and CHP showed poor leadership and communications which culminated in a crisis ... Nobody wins in this scenario, except for Erdogan," Aydin said.

Preventing Black Nails In Walkers and Runners

LONDON (Dispatches) - The terms black toenail, runner's toe, tennis toe, or toenail subungual hematoma all describe the same condition and are interchangeable. It results from bleeding in the nail bed, just underneath the nail, and appearing black. It can occur by direct trauma to the toe or repetitive trauma from the toe friction, as occurs with walking or running.

Key takeaways:

The terms black toenail, runner's toe, tennis toe, and subungual hematoma are all the same condition.

A black toenail occurs when blood from the nail bed stays under the nail plate.

A black toenail can be caused by direct trauma (from a heavy object), crush injury, or cumulative trauma from a repetitive action like the toe repeatedly making contact with the sneaker in a sport like running.

Properly fitted footwear and sport-specific footwear are essential to prevent black toenail.

Learning the nail structures is essential in understanding a subungual hematoma or black nail.

As shown above, the nail area is made up of several important structures:

Nail plate. The nail plate is what we colloquially call the nail. It is composed of a hard substance called keratin.

Nail bed. The nail bed is under the nail plate. It is comprised of a deeper layer, the dermis, and an outer layer called the epithelium, a "sticky" substance for adherence to the nail plate.

Nail matrix. The nail matrix is the part that produces new nail plates, a process that takes about 18 months for an entirely new nail.

When the nail bed is injured, it will bleed. The blood then becomes trapped between the nail bed and the nail plate, leading to the black areas under the nail.

Blood entering this space causes pressure and pain since nerve endings are compressed.

Subungual hematomas can be caused by trauma including:

Direct blow. A common example would be dropping a heavy object on the toe.

Crush injury. For example, getting your toe trapped in a door.

Cumulative trauma. This occurs in a person who walks or runs frequently. Subungual hematomas occur due to the repetitive friction between the toes, sneakers, and other toes. This cumulative trauma leads to pressure on the nail bed, causing it to bleed. It is also seen in hikers since the downhill portion of the hike places stress on the toes.



Having a toenail fungus increases the likelihood of developing a black toenail.

A physical exam to inspect for the following:

A toenail fungus producing a yellow and rough textured nail.

To check if the nail is still being held in place or no longer attached to the nail bed, a condition called an avulsed toenail. The avulsion can be partial or complete.

Check if the toe tissue is still attached or missing.

After examining the toe, your provider may order x-rays of the toe to evaluate for an underlying bony fracture, called a tuft fracture, when it occurs at the furthest end of the bone.

If the subungual hematoma is less than 48 hours old, a simple trephination procedure can be performed, in which a small hole is made in the nail to allow the blood to evacuate from under the nail, relieving the pressure and pain. The trephination can be done with a needle, however, it is more often done with an electrocautery device — an electric current generating a heated filament to enable the user to burn a tiny hole.

To prevent non-traumatic subungual hematoma (black toenail) there are a number of recommendations to consider:

Properly fitted sneakers are essential since you don't want sneakers that are too small or too large. Furthermore, there should be some space at the end of the toes, but not enough to allow foot movement inside the footwear. We recommend having a professional measure your foot for size, width, and arch. In addition, a professional can help you decide which brand to choose since different brands are better for different-shaped feet.

Running or jogging while wearing tennis shoes is not a good idea. You want to tie your laces so the sneakers (shoes) are snug but not too tight — this is especially important for hikers when walking back down the trail. If the laces are too loose, the toes can repeatedly contact the front of the sneaker, leading to a black toenail.

If your toenails are too long, the toe is more likely to experience repetitive trauma from friction. Some custom or prefabricated orthotics could raise the toes or push them forward, increasing friction and the risk of a black toenail.

Half of World On Track to Be Overweight by 2035



LONDON (BBC) - More than half the world's population will be classed as obese or overweight by 2035 if action is not taken, the World Obesity Federation warns.

More than four billion people will be affected, with rates rising fastest among children, its report says.

Low or middle-income countries in Africa and Asia are expected to see the greatest rises.

The report predicts the cost of obesity will amount to more than \$4tn (£3.3tn) annually by 2035.

The president of the federation, Prof Louise Baur, described the report's findings as a clear warning to countries to act now or risk repercussions in the future.

The report in particular highlights the rising rates of obesity among children and teenagers, with rates expected to double from 2020 levels among both boys and girls.

Prof Baur said the trend was "particularly worrying", adding that "governments and policymakers around the world need to do all they can to avoid passing health, social, and economic costs on to the younger generation" by assessing "the systems and root factors" that contribute to obesity.

The effects of obesity's prevalence on lower-income countries is also highlighted in the report. Nine of the 10 countries with the greatest expected increases in obesity globally are low or lower-middle income states in Africa and Asia.

Reasons include trends in dietary preferences towards more highly processed foods, greater levels of sedentary behaviour, weaker policies to control food supply and marketing, and less well-resourced healthcare services to assist in weight management and health education.

Lower-income countries are "often the least able to respond to obesity and its consequences".

The findings estimate that rises in obesity rates around the world will have a significant impact on the global economy, equating to 3% of global Gross Domestic Product.

The report emphasises that its acknowledgement of the economic impact of obesity "is in no way a reflection of blame on people living with obesity".

The data published in the report will be presented to the UN on Monday. Obese is a medical term used to describe a person with a high excess of body fat.

The report uses body mass index (BMI) to make its assessments. BMI is calculated by dividing an adult's weight by the square of their height.



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Volvo Cars' Sales Rise 22% in February

COPENHAGEN (Dispatches) - Sweden-based Volvo Car AB said sales grew 22% year-on-year in February to 51,286 cars helped by a jump for its recharge models, sending its shares up.

Volvo Cars, which is majority-owned by China's Geely Holding, said in a statement sales of fully electric cars soared 187% to account for 19% of total sales. All recharge models, also including those not fully electric, were up 49% to account for 40% of total sales. Volvo Cars' shares rose 3% in early trade.

In January, the group's total car sales were up 2% as they were held back in China by Chinese New Year calendar effects. In February, sales in China were up 50%. In biggest market Europe, sales were up 9% in February.



German Exports Rebound In January

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's exports rebounded more than expected in January underpinned by shipments to the US, although the overall increase was insufficient to offset the decline in December, official data revealed.

Exports increased 2.1 percent on a monthly basis in January, in contrast to the 6.3 percent decline in December, Destatis reported. Shipments were forecast to grow 1.5 percent.

At the same time, the decline in imports eased to 3.4 percent from 5.6 percent in the previous month. Economists had forecast imports to grow 2.0 percent.

As exports increased amid falling imports, the trade surplus rose to EUR 16.7 billion from EUR 10.0 billion in December. This was well above economists' forecast of EUR 11 billion.

On a yearly basis, growth in exports almost doubled to 12.2 percent from 6.3 percent in the previous month. Likewise, imports growth accelerated to 7.7 percent from 3.6 percent.

The unadjusted trade balance showed a surplus of EUR 10.8 billion in January, which was bigger than a EUR 5.4 billion surplus posted in the same period last year.

Trade with EU and the euro area countries remained moderate. Exports to EU countries rose 0.7 percent and imports from those countries gained 0.6 percent. Likewise, shipments to the euro area countries moved up 0.5 percent and imports from those countries fell 1.0 percent.

Exports to the US and China were up 3.1 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively. Meanwhile, imports from China decreased 6.0 percent and imports from the US climbed 8.8 percent.

In the very near term, the current weakness in export order books together with the expected slowdown of the US economy, high inflation and high uncertainty will leave a clear mark on German exports, ING Economist Carsten Brzeski said.

"The reopening of the Chinese economy will probably not be enough to fully offset the long series of downward risks," the economist added.

The Purchasing Managers' survey published today showed that while external demand for services continued to act as a drag, reflecting challenging international market conditions, the fall in Germany's new export business eased to the slowest for six months.

The services Purchasing Managers' Index registered 50.9 in February, up slightly from January's 50.7 and the flash score of 51.3.

The largest euro area economy had contracted 0.4 percent in the fourth quarter, suggesting that hopes of a shallow recession in the biggest euro area economy were premature.

In the February monthly report, Bundesbank said the economic output will fall again in the first quarter, but things could slowly pick up again as the year progresses.

Meanwhile machinery and plant manufacturers in Germany are reportedly also struggling with falling order figures in the new year. At the beginning of the year, orders "fell significantly once again," the industry association VDMA announced in Frankfurt on Friday. Adjusted for price increases (in real terms), new orders in January thus remained 18 percent below the level of the same month last year.

"Last year, January was a strong start with an increase in orders of almost 20 percent. Therefore, the statistical base effect now plays a significant role in the equally strong decline," explained VDMA chief economist Ralph Wiechers. "But as before, many customers are reluctant to make new investments in view of the considerable uncertainties."

Sri Lanka Unexpectedly Raises Rates to Fulfil IMF Bailout Requirements

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's central bank raised interest rates in an unexpected move in a bid to help the country secure a bailout package from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to stabilize its crisis-hit economy.

The bank raised its standing deposit facility rate and standing lending facility rate by 100 basis points each to 15.50% and 16.50%, respectively, it said in a statement.

The country is awaiting approval of a \$2.9 billion IMF bailout package.

Central bank Governor P. Nandalal Weerasinghe said with the rate increase all "prior actions" have been fulfilled and he was hopeful of the IMF bailout being approved within this month.

Despite the increase in rates, the central bank expects market rates will continue to reduce, while on the currency front the country will gradually move towards a market-driven exchange rate regime, Weerasinghe added.

The island nation's economy has been squeezed by its worst financial crisis since independence from Britain in 1948, with growth contracting by an estimated 9.2% last year amid soaring inflation that hit 50% in February.

"There have been some differences between the CBSL and IMF staff on the inflation outlook," the Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL) said in its statement.



Pakistani Rupee Strengthens 2.38% Versus Dollar

KARACHI (Dispatches) - The Pakistani rupee on Friday strengthened 2.38% in interbank closing at 278.46 rupees against the dollar, a day after the central bank raised its policy interest rate by 300 basis points (bps) to 20%, trading data showed.

The rupee, which fell more than 6% on Thursday, was trading at 275.5 against the dollar during the day, up nearly 3.5%, after the opening session.

"The rupee may have appreciated over the governors statement in the analyst meeting where he says the IMF has not asked to match the border rate," says Mustafa Pasha, chief investment officer at Lakson Investments.

Pasha added that expectations of reaching a staff level agreement soon have shot up now that the government has floated the currency, withdrawn farmer/export subsidies, and imposed electricity surcharges.

He says, "On the other hand, it could be that the SBP has done a soft intervention or overseas Pakistanis decided to remit after seeing the rupee touch 286 against the dollar."

The value of the local currency has been depreciating amid delays in a funding deal with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which is crucial for the South Asian's broken economy faced with a balance-of-payment crisis.

The sides have been negotiating a policy framework since the start of last month to agree on measures to bridge the fiscal deficit ahead of an annual budget around June.

UAE's Non-Oil Business Activity Picks Up in Feb

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Growth in the United Arab Emirates' (UAE) non-oil private sector in February accelerated slightly from the previous month, supported by a pick up in output growth, although the overall outlook remains uncertain, a survey showed.

The seasonally adjusted S&P Global UAE Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) expanded to 54.3 in February from 54.1 in January, in line with the series long run trend, and remained above 50 separating growth from contraction.

The output sub-index rose to 62.1 in February from 59.8 a month earlier, and the highest since October 2022, the survey showed, with respondents often attributing the increase to new projects or growing client sales.

However, the rate of growth in new orders eased to its lowest level since September 2021 on higher competition and weaker exports. The new order sub index slowed to

55.4 in February versus 56.0 in January.

"The UAE PMI gave conflicting signals for the non-oil economy midway through the first quarter of the year," David Owen, senior economist at S&P Global Market Intelligence, said.

"The chief upside to the index was a faster rate of output growth, which accelerated for the first time in four months. However...the latest upturn in new business was the slowest seen for 17 months, suggesting the improved growth picture may be short-lived."

Improved supply chain conditions contributed to a sharp reduction in lead times, with the Suppliers' Delivery Time sub-index - inverted to the PMI index - at 55.0 in February, indicating the sharpest drop in lead times since September 2019.

Still, business confidence over the next 12 months remained below the 2022 average.

Macron Pushes Economic Ties In Angola

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron pursued his African tour aimed at renewing frayed ties, inking an economic accord with Angola.

In the Angolan capital Luanda, Macron held talks with his counterpart Joao Lourenco, singling the oil-rich country as the "strategic partner in the region".

Macron, who had earlier chaired an economic forum attended by more than 50 French companies, told a joint conference with Lourenco that at the "heart of this visit is the strengthening of agricultural partnerships" with Angola.

France, he said, is seeking to "build a balanced and reciprocal partnership" with Angola. "This fits in with the idea I have of this economic partnership between the African continent and France," Macron told around 100 delegates earlier.

"Mindsets have changed," he said, adding France wanted to find solutions that benefited both parties, rather than "impose ready-made" ones.

France has for decades been involved in the petroleum industry in the Portuguese-speaking southern African country, which is one of the continent's top crude oil producers.

Macron's visit offered an opportunity to explore cooperation in other sectors.

The two governments penned an agreement to boost Angola's agricultural sector, particularly "climate resilience and water security", in addition to helping revamp coffee, soya, cotton and dairy production, among other sectors.

The goal should be to develop a "made-in-Africa strategy", he said.

Macron's visit comes as part of a drive to enhance French ties with anglophone and Portuguese-speaking Africa.



He arrived in Luanda late Thursday from Gabon, and is due in Brazzaville later Friday before winding up his tour in Kinshasa, capital of the Democratic Republic of Congo.

Anti-French sentiment runs high in some former African colonies as the continent becomes a renewed diplomatic battleground, with Russian and Chinese influence growing.

On Thursday Macron said the era of French interference in Africa had ended and there was no desire to return to the past.

"The age of FrancAfrique is well over," Macron said in Gabon's capital Libreville, referring to the post-colonisation strategy of supporting authoritarian leaders to defend French interests.

Macron later heads to Congo-Brazzaville, another former French colony, where Denis Sassou-Nguesso has ruled with an iron fist for almost four decades.

Brazilian Real's Strength Challenged as Economy Sours



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Strength in Brazil's real currency will soon be challenged by rising worries about an ongoing downturn in Latin America's No.1 economy and disagreements among policymakers, a Reuters poll of foreign exchange specialists showed.

The currency has been relatively stable close to 5.20 per U.S. dollar for months after a weak spell in the second quarter of 2022, defying concerns of market volatility around October's presidential election.

Friday's survey pointed to further appreciation for the real, gaining 1.9% in 1 year to 5.10 per U.S. dollar from 5.19 on Wednesday, according to the median estimate of 19 FX strategists polled over Feb. 28-March 2.

However, the analysts warned of a potential wobbly phase ahead with signs of economic deterioration after last year's outburst of activity driven by former President Jair Bolsonaro's inflationary spending drive.

"Growth concerns will not be going away any time soon and the risks of the Federal Reserve tightening more are elevated," said Edward Moya, senior market analyst at OANDA. "The Brazilian real should see more downside in the first half of the year."

Brazil's economy contracted 0.2% in the fourth quarter of 2022, reeling from the lagged impact of a spike in consumer prices and steep interest rate hikes.

Emerging markets in general remain on tenterhooks, looking for any sign the U.S. central bank may prolong its hawkish stance as inflation remains stubbornly high.

Brazil's policymakers, meanwhile, are profoundly divided, with the central bank employing a restrictive monetary strategy that is being assailed by President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva and unorthodox officials in his government.

3 Persian Leopards Spotted at Protected Reserve in Semnan

TEHRAN (IFP) - Three Persian leopards, from a rare and endangered species, have been spotted in a protected reserve in Aradan County of Iran's Semnan Province.

An environmentalist activist on Saturday released footage of the three leopards walking in the mountainous areas of Aradan.

The good news came days after a male Persian leopard was found in

critical condition in the mountain range north of the capital, Tehran. The animal was transferred to a veterinary hospital, but it succumbed to the wounds, which were found to be old. Autopsy showed it had long been suffering from severe infection caused by the injuries.

The Persian Leopard, the largest of leopard subspecies, face a threat of extinction.



U.S. Republicans Aim to Stymie Gun Sale Codes at State Level

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Legislation being pursued by Republicans in several U.S. states aims to limit use of a planned merchant code for credit card transactions at gun retailers meant to detect suspicious firearms and ammunition sales, undermining a tool welcomed by gun control advocates.

The bills were introduced in states including Texas, Florida, Mississippi, Oklahoma, West Virginia and Wyoming.

They would prohibit or limit banks or payment processors from using the "merchant category code," or MCC, approved for gun sellers in September by the Geneva-based non-governmental International Organization for Standardization (ISO), which develops standards on various aspects of technology and manufacturing.

The major credit and debit card companies have committed to using the code. Discover Financial Services has said it will introduce it in April and that it is following other companies in doing so. Discover is the first company to publicly state a timetable.

The code was requested from the ISO by Amalgamated Bank of New York, which calls itself a socially responsible lender and investor.

The state proposals mark the latest flashpoint for U.S. Republicans in their attack on the growing corporate consideration of environmental, social and governance (ESG) factors - what some conservatives deride as "woke capitalism."

The Republican state lawmakers sponsoring the bills have said they want to prevent the code from being used to infringe upon gun rights enshrined in the U.S. Constitution's Second Amendment.

Jansen Owen, a state representative who is the author of legislation in Mississippi, said that as a conservative he worries that the code among other things could be used to track lawful ammunition purchases.

"I don't want card companies to raise interest rates or fees on merchants as a way to dissuade them" from selling guns and ammunition, Owen told Reuters.

"This MCC would lead to the creation of a backdoor registry" of gun purchases in violation of state law in Florida, state Senator Danny Burgess told a February hearing on legislation he has authored.

Some trade groups representing banks have expressed concern that the state measures could create problems such as exposing only certain financial companies to enforcement or making it harder for consumers to use credit cards across state lines. Some said they do not oppose the bills but worry about possible repercussions.

"We're working toward a solution that gets what the sponsors want to do and makes sure there's no unintended consequences," said Anthony DiMarco, head of government affairs for the Florida Bankers Association, whose members include top Wall Street lenders such as JPMorgan Chase & Co and Wells Fargo & Co.

Wyoming's proposed "Second Amendment financial privacy" bill stalled last month. Scott Meier, president of the Wyoming Bankers Association, said there was concern among legislators about whether the proposal could expose local banks to penalties even though they had little say on how payment networks and processors adopt the code.

"Banks don't set these codes," Meier said.

Some Democrats and gun-control advocates have voiced concern that the bills could reduce the effectiveness of the code for spotting worrisome purchases.



They have cited instances in which people who carried out mass shootings bought weapons on credit.

Proponents of the code have said it will enable financial institutions to better assist law enforcement authorities in investigating crimes involving gun violence.

Adam Skaggs, chief counsel for the gun safety group Giffords Law Center to Prevent Gun Violence, expressed opposition to the Republican proposals.

"The only thing they're protecting is the rights of criminal gun purchasers," Skaggs said of the legislation.

Skaggs also said the legislation could lead to unpredictable consequences like driving gun retailers to become cash-only businesses.

"We're wading into uncharted waters here," Skaggs said.

The new code will not show specific items purchased but will identify where a person shopped by adding gun stores to a list of hundreds of existing retail categories including snowmobile dealers and wig shops.

Peter Pope, a special counsel to Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, said the codes would allow banks to flag suspicious purchases, for example when people buy a single gun from multiple stores in order to avoid required forms for multiple purchases - just as banks already flag other transactions.

"If the banks could raise their hand when they see indicators of moving money around for narcotics, then they could raise their hand for gun trafficking," Pope said.

Visa Inc declined to comment on the state bills. Other payment card companies Discover, Mastercard Inc and American Express Co did not respond to requests for comment.

A JPMorgan representative declined to comment. Wells Fargo did not immediately provide comment.

Owen, the Mississippi state legislator, said he expects that payment companies could address any technical issues the bills could create.

"I think the credit card companies are going to have to adapt on a state-by-state basis," Owen said.

Global Energy-Related CO2 Emissions Edged Up To Record High in 2022



LONDON (Dispatches) - Global energy-related emissions of carbon dioxide hit a record high last year, although more clean technology such as solar power and electric vehicles helped limit the impact of increased coal and oil use, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

Deep cuts in emissions, mainly from burning fossil fuels, will be needed over the coming years if targets to limit a global rise in temperatures and prevent runaway climate change are to be met, scientists have said.

"We still see emissions growing from fossil fuels, hindering efforts to meet the world's climate targets," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a release alongside the report. The report by the Paris-based watchdog comes just weeks after major fossil fuel producers such as Chevron, Exxon Mobil and Shell reported record profits, with BP BPL also rowing back on plans to slash oil and gas output and reduce emissions.

"International and national fossil fuel companies are making record revenues and need to take their share of responsibility," Birol said.

Global emissions from energy rose by 0.9% in 2022 to a record 36.8 billion tonnes, the IEA analysis showed.

Carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions from coal grew by 1.6% last year with many countries turning to the more polluting fuel after Russia's invasion of Ukraine and a reduction in Russian gas supply to Europe sparked record high gas prices.

CO2 emissions from oil rose by 2.5% but remained below pre-pandemic levels the report said.

Around half of the increase in oil-related emissions was due to a rise in air travel which was rebounding from a low during the pandemic.

Lower output from nuclear power plants and extreme weather events including heatwaves also contributed to the increase in energy related emissions, the IEA said.

China Widens Renewable Energy Supply Lead With Wind Power Push

LITTLETON (Dispatches) - China has been the world's largest and fastest-growing producer of renewable energy for more than a decade, but has widened its lead over international rivals through a steep acceleration in the roll out of wind capacity since 2021.

China added more wind generation capacity in the past two years than over the previous seven, and in 2022 generated 46% more wind power than all of Europe, the second largest wind generation market, according to data from think tank Ember.

As Europe had been the world's top wind power producer until 2020, China's widening lead over the rest of the world in such a tight time frame further cements China's status as the global green energy leader, and underscores Beijing's commitment to overhauling its massive energy system at a record pace.

Further, the rapid roll out of wind capacity, along with a more than 27% surge in solar generation in 2022 from the year before, helped push China's electricity share from clean energy sources to a record 34.2% last year.

That in turn will help the country's energy system to limit reliance on high-polluting fossil fuels such as coal even as economic growth gathers momentum in 2023 following the lifting of COVID-19 movement curbs that restricted activity in 2022.

While China has deployed record volumes of both solar and wind power capacity over the past decade, wind generation capacity has grown more steeply than solar capacity since 2020.

For industrial scale electricity generation, wind power is often preferred over solar due to the ability for wind turbines to generate electricity around the clock, while solar power generation drops off as the sun sets.

Over the past two years, the average annual increase in China's wind capacity was 178.6 terawatt hours (TWh), or 350% more than the average annual increase from 2015 through 2020.

In contrast, China's solar capacity grew by an average of 78.3 TWh in 2021-22, or roughly twice the yearly growth pace of 39.6 TWh from 2015 to 2020.

China's recent wind power expansion was also sharply higher than in other major markets, with the cumulative growth in 2021 and 2022 3.6 times greater than the growth seen over the same period in the United States, and 7.3 times more than in Europe.

China's total wind farm operational capacity was 278,353 megawatts (MW) as of January 2023, according to data from Global Energy Monitor (GEM).

Nearly 60% of that total has been installed since 2015, and 95% since 2010, meaning that a vast majority of China's wind projects are relatively modern installations with commensurately high efficiency rates.

In contrast, 22% of wind capacity in the United States, and 27% in Europe's top wind producer, Germany, was installed before 2010, and so is likely to be less efficient than the latest generations of turbines.

Beyond cementing China's place in the international green energy hierarchy, the climb in wind power capacity has helped redraw the energy mix across several key provinces.

China's operational wind installations are spread out across 30 provinces, 10 of which have installed capacity in excess of 10,000MW, GEM data shows.

Major manufacturing hubs such as Guangdong in the south, Fujian on the east coast, and Shanxi and Hebei in the north have all seen steep climbs in wind power generation in recent years, which has helped local power producers to reduce reliance on high-emitting fossils.

In addition, higher generation of renewable power has helped cap power costs for consumers just as the prices of coal and natural gas have pushed sharply higher on international markets.

Going forward, the higher levels of wind generation will also play a vital role in providing power increased to China's factories and industries following the easing of movement restrictions tied to COVID-19 that constrained growth last year.

Greater use of coal is also expected this year as China's entire economy steps up a gear in response to Beijing's stimulus measures that are aimed at reviving growth at businesses and more mobility across the population.

Iran's Wheat Production...

FROM PAGE 1

China was the largest wheat producer in 2022 with a production of 137.7 million tons, followed by the European Union with 134.5 million tons and India with 106.8 million tons.

Russia, the U.S., Australia, Canada, Pakistan, Ukraine, Turkey, the UK, and Kazakhstan were placed higher than Iran and ranked fourth to twelfth.

In a previous report released in June 2022, FAO saw cereal production in Iran to grow 34.2 percent in 2022, while the imports of such products were seen to drop 25 percent.

Agreements With IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

The two sides agreed that bilateral interactions will be carried out in a spirit of collaboration, with Iran expressing readiness to continue its cooperation and provide further information to the agency to address the outstanding safeguards issues.

Asked whether the agreements conformed to a law approved by the Iranian parliament in December 2020 to accelerate the development of Iran's peaceful nuclear program, Kamalvandi said, "These agreements [with the IAEA] are in no way in contravention to the parliament's strategic law and will be followed up on in total conformity with this law."

The law, dubbed the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions was adopted by Iranian lawmakers to counter sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and its Western allies, and promote the country's peaceful nuclear program.

The AEOI's spokesman rejected allegations that Iran has agreed to give the agency access to certain people, saying, "During the two days that Mr. Grossi and his accompanying delegation were in Iran, no discussion was made of access to people and no text has been drawn up on this issue."

"Of course, even if such a request had been made, it would have been definitely turned down [by Iran]," he emphasized.

Kamalvandi also explained about a 50-percent increase in the IAEA's inspections of Iran's nuclear sites, saying, "Since [uranium] enrichment to 60-percent purity level had been started for the first time at Fordow [nuclear] facility, the number of inspections had to increase in line with the Safeguards [Agreement between Iran and the agency]."

"Basically, when the enrichment level increases or more sensitive materials are introduced into a facility, the number of inspections increases based on a mutual agreement between the two sides," he added.

Therefore, the spokesman said, the number of Fordow inspections, which previously stood at eight, was increased to 11 in view of the increased level of enrichment there.

The AEOI spokesman also rejected allegations about an agreement with the agency on access to "three alleged locations" as many times as the agency demanded, saying, "No discussion was made about the frequency of [the IAEA's] access to three alleged locations."

"In view of the previous access to these locations, more extensive access [to them] does not seem to be necessary, and the agency has made no request [in this regard] so far," he said.

Tehran, Islamabad...

FROM PAGE 1

Mentioning an already existing preferential trade agreement between the two countries, Qanadzadeh said "We signed the agreement in 2006 based on which up to 380 commodity items were subjected to preferential trade."

"In 2016, some restrictions were put in place and the implementation of the agreement fell behind. Again, last year, these restrictions were lifted, and now the preferential trade between Iran and Pakistan is underway," he added.

In December 2016, Iran and Pakistan started negotiating an FTA with the resolve to timely complete the negotiation process and achieve the objective of enhancing bilateral trade for the betterment of the people of both countries.

The talks were an outcome of a memorandum signed by Islamabad and Tehran on a five-year strategic trade cooperation plan in March 2016.

Iran Buying Sri Lankan Tea...

FROM PAGE 1

Tea industry sources said that the allocation made in Iran for purchasing tea has become unavailable for their usual importers.

Iran is one of the leading buyers of Ceylon Tea with purchases amounting to 15,127 metric tonnes (MT) in 2020 and 22,263 MT in 2019. Sri Lanka's exports of tea to Iran were worth US\$73.99 million in 2022, according to the UN COMTRADE database on international trade.

It is learnt that importers who approached the Iranian Agriculture Ministry for the allocations for the procurement of tea were turned down following which an investigation has been called for.

Sources point out that due to investigations being carried out in Iran concerning monies not been made available for the purchase of teas by Iranian importers it will take time until around mid April for this to conclude. Moreover, with the Iranian New Year celebrations scheduled in late March it is unlikely that stocks will get picked up at the auctions.

"So we are basically hampered although there was a bit of speculative buying recently," one source said.

However, Sri Lankan importers are more concerned about the sharp appreciation of the rupee as a result of which tea exporters have noted prices to have dropped by Rs.30 below last week's rates.

He pointed out that the impact of the rupee appreciation could be more than the temporary restriction of Iranian purchases. The rupee appreciation will have a major impact on the exporters also it is good for the country.

Neymar Ruled out of Champions League Clash With Bayern

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain forward Neymar will miss the next two games due to an ankle injury, coach Christophe Galtier said yesterday, ruling him out of their Ligue 1 clash with Nantes and the second leg of their Champions League last-16 tie against Bayern Munich. The Brazil international was carried off the pitch on a stretcher during PSG's 4-3 win over Lille on February 19 with what was later confirmed to be an ankle ligament injury.

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Stolz Becomes Youngest World Champion

HEERENVEEN (Dispatches) - American Jordan Stolz became the youngest world speed skating champion as the 18-year-old won gold in the men's 500 metres event at the World Single Distance Championships in Heerenveen, Netherlands. Stolz crossed the line in 34.10 seconds, winning by a margin of 0.36 seconds over defending champion Laurent Dubreuil of Canada, who finished 0.02 seconds ahead of Japan's Wataru Morishige, the Olympic bronze medalist.

Nets Stun Celts With Biggest Comeback of Season

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Mikal Bridges led all scorers with 38 points and the visiting Brooklyn Nets overcame a 28-point deficit, the biggest comeback in the NBA this season, to defeat the Boston Celtics 115-105.

Bridges made 13 of 22 field goals, including four 3-pointers. He also had 10 rebounds and four assists. Cam Johnson added 20 points for the Nets, who also received 17 points apiece from Spencer Dinwiddie and Dorian Finney-Smith. Center Nic Claxton had a team-high 12 rebounds.

Jaylen Brown scored 35 points to lead Boston, which was held to 41 points in the second half. Jayson Tatum, who turned 25 on Friday, finished with 22 points and 13 rebounds, but he missed all eight of his 3-point attempts.

Knicks 122, Heat 120

Julius Randle scored a game-high 43 points -- including a go-ahead, off-balance 3-pointer with 1.7 seconds left -- as visiting New York won its eighth straight game, defeating Miami.

Knicks point guard Jalen Brunson, the reigning Eastern Conference Player of the Month, had 25 points and a game-high eight assists. Immanuel Quickley scored 21 points off the bench for New York.

Jimmy Butler scored 33 points to lead Miami, which has lost six of its past seven games. New York matched its longest win streak of the season, which ran from Dec. 4 to 20.

Magic 117, Hornets 106

Paolo Banchero poured in 31 points and visiting Orlando scored in bunches in the first three quarters on the way to defeating Charlotte.

The Magic's next three top scorers were reserves: Cole Anthony with 16 points, Jalen Suggs with 15 and Moritz Wagner with 13. Wendell Carter Jr. added 12 points and a team-high nine rebounds.

Kelly Oubre Jr. scored 29 points to go with 10 rebounds, but the Hornets lost their second game in a row since losing point guard LaMelo Ball to an ankle fracture earlier in the week. Terry Rozier posted 22 points, Gordon Hayward 17 and Mark Williams 13 points for Charlotte, which was hurt by 21 turnovers.

Mourinho's Two-Match Ban Suspended

MILAN (Dispatches) - Jose Mourinho's two-match ban for an outburst against officials has been suspended, the Italian Football Federation said on Saturday, allowing the Portuguese to be in the dugout for Roma's clash with Juventus.

In a statement, the FIGC said that the ban and a €10,000 fine given to Mourinho on Wednesday would be suspended until the next hearing on March 10, in order for an investigation into the incident to be closed.

Roma boss Mourinho was sent off during his team's shock 2-1 loss at Serie A strugglers Cremonese on Tuesday following a clash with fourth official Marco Serra, who reportedly insulted the 60-year-old and told him to "go home".

After the match, the coach was still so angry at what he considered provocation that, said Serie A, he entered the referee's dressing room without permission and "made seriously offensive statements".

Ferrari Boss Says He Is Loving the Pressure

MANAMA (Dispatches) - Fred Vasseur says he is loving the pressure as he prepares for his first race as Ferrari Formula One team boss, as well as having a shorter walk to work from the track car park.

The Frenchman moved to the sport's oldest and most successful team in January from Swiss-based Sauber, who compete as Alfa Romeo, as replacement for departed principal Mattia Binotto.

Ferrari have not won a championship since the 2008 constructors' title but expectations, and pressure levels, are always high.

Alfa Romeo ended last season sixth overall in the standings, Ferrari were runners-up. "I have to walk much less from the parking to the hospitality, first," Vasseur told reporters at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix when asked how the experience so far compared to his previous job.

"For sure the expectations are different. What we are doing, it's much more visible for everybody but honestly I love the pressure and the target is to win and it's a dream."



Hawks 129, Trail Blazers 111

Dejounte Murray scored a career-high 41 points to lead Atlanta to a win over visiting Portland, handing coach Quin Snyder his first victory with his new team.

Murray, who produced his previous high of 40 at Portland on Jan. 30, scored 23 in the first half. He finished 17-for-22 from the field, including 5-for-5 from 3-point range, and added six assists and five rebounds.

Portland was led by Damian Lillard, who had 33 points and eight assists. Cam Reddish added 25 points, one shy of his season high, and Jeremi Grant scored 14. The Blazers have lost three in a row and dropped five of their past six.

Suns 125, Bulls 104

Devin Booker scored 35 points and Josh Okogie added 25 to lift over host Chicago for its 14th win in 19 games.

Booker made 12 of 24 shots from the floor -- including 6 of 10 from 3-point range. He also torched Chicago for scored 51 points on Nov. 30. Kevin Durant, playing his second game with the Suns, scored 20 points to increase his career total to 26,727 and move past Hall of Famer Oscar Robertson (26,710) into 13th place in NBA history. Durant added nine rebounds and six assists.

Chicago's DeMar DeRozan sank 13 of 18 shots from the floor to finish with 31 points. Zach LaVine added 27 points and Nikola Vucevic recorded 13 points and nine rebounds for the Bulls, who have lost eight of their last 11 games.

Timberwolves 110, Lakers 102

Rudy Gobert had 22 points and 14 rebounds, Anthony Edwards added 19 points and visiting Minnesota beat Los Angeles.

Naz Reid contributed 15 points and eight rebounds for Minnesota, which has won two straight following a three-game skid. Mike Conley scored five of his 14 points in the final 1:13 to help secure the victory.

Anthony Davis led the Lakers with 38 points on 12-of-22 shooting, and he went 12 of 14 from the foul line. Davis made a pair of 3-pointers and grabbed five rebounds.

Shiffrin Claims Fifth Overall World Cup Title



SLO (Dispatches) - Mikaela Shiffrin secured her fifth overall women's World Cup title when she took fifth place in the downhill in Kvitfjell, Norway, but her wait for a record-equalling 86th World Cup win continues.

With seven races left, the American has an unassailable lead at the top of the standings over second-placed Lara Gut-Behrami of Switzerland, who finished in 21st place.

"It is pretty wild actually. You know the overall, or any season titles it's always strange to explain how it feels on the day you win it if you didn't win the race. But I have started to get used to the feeling," Shiffrin said.

Shiffrin, who won three consecutive overall World Cup titles from 2017-19 as well as one in 2022, is now one shy of the women's record held by Austrian Annemarie Moser-Proell, winner from 1971-75 and in 1979.

Another Austrian, Marcel Hirscher, holds the record for men and women with eight titles in a row from 2012-19.

Shiffrin is also one race win away from equalling Swedish men's slalom great Ingemar Stenmark's decades-old record of 86 World Cup victories. She broke the women's record of 82 World Cup wins in January.

"I mean actually it's really hard not to think about that because I am talking about it constantly, everybody is asking about it," Shiffrin added.

Barca the Hardest Club in the World to Manage



were criticised for only having 34 percent possession.

Xavi said the demands on his team to play good football as well as winning games and lifting trophies meant his job was trickier than any other in the game.

"You beat Real Madrid 1-0 and it seems that it's not convincing enough, whereas if it

was the reverse there would be a national party," Xavi told reporters. "So it is the hardest club in the world. Now you believe me? I said it last year and got bashed for it.

"At Barcelona you have to win and convince, to have 70 per cent of possession and create 16 chances while the opponent makes three.

"That is the objective, and that is our objective, but you have to understand that there is an opponent who is the reigning La Liga and European champions, and we're competing with them."

Xavi said it was "absurd" to criticise Barcelona for not keeping the ball when they faced a Madrid side pressing them high up the pitch.

"We did not want to set up in our box, Madrid pushed us there, that wasn't our objective for the game," said Xavi.

Medvedev Wins in Dubai for Third Title In Three Weeks

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev conquered all remaining doubts as he completed an impressive hat-trick, picking up a third title in as many weeks with a 6-2, 6-2 victory over Andrey Rublev in the Dubai final.

"Not over yet," scribbled the third-seeded Medvedev on the TV camera lens after his triumph, referring to his current 14-match winning streak amassed over the last 19 days, starting with the title in Rotterdam, followed by Doha and now Dubai.

"It's amazing because the start of the year was not perfect; in tennis, when you don't win tournaments you're always doubting no matter what happens in practice," said Medvedev, who briefly dropped out of the top 10 last month before recovering in tremendous fashion. "I was doubting a lot and now it just feels better. I'm really happy with these three weeks and I'm looking forward to the next ones."

Playing free-flowing tennis throughout the week, which earned him a coveted victory over world number one Novak Djokovic in the semi-finals before ending Rublev's title defence in the final, Medvedev fired a total of 119 winners through five matches, including 27 in the championship decider.

"A lot of shots this tournament were landing, which were maybe not supposed to be, and that's when confidence is going sometimes, so that helps a lot," said Medvedev, who has now won his last four consecutive matches against top-10 opposition after losing nine in a row.



Arsenal Stage Thrilling Fightback Against Bournemouth

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal recovered from conceding the second fastest goal in Premier League history as Reiss Nelson's stoppage-time strike gave the Premier League leaders a thrilling 3-2 win over Bournemouth after title rivals Manchester City beat Newcastle 2-0.

Mikel Arteta's side were trailing by two goals with just over half an hour left. But the Gunners showed they can cope with the pressure of the title race with a remarkable comeback that kept them five points ahead of second placed City.

Arsenal hadn't even touched the ball when Philip Billing gave second-bottom Bournemouth the lead after just 9.11 seconds with a clinical finish from inside the Gunners area.

The quickest goal in Premier League history was scored by Shane Long after 7.69 seconds for Southampton against Watford in 2019.

Arsenal fell further behind in the 57th minute as Marcos Senesi escaped Thomas Partey to glance a header past Aaron Ramsdale from a corner.

Partey made amends for his slack marking five minutes later when he reduced the deficit with a close-range finish from Emile Smith-Rowe's header.

Underlining their desire to win a first title since 2004, Arsenal seized the momentum and equalised through Ben White's powerful finish from Nelson's cross in the 70th minute.

