

**Mikhail Ulyanov, Russian Permanent Representative to International Organizations in Vienna Said That the Draft and Agreement With Iran in Its Nuclear Talks With World Powers Is Ready**

# IRAN NEWS

**Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mahdi Esmaili Left Tehran for Caracas to Participate in the Iranian-Venezuelan Joint Cultural Exhibition Which Is Underway in Caracas**

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## West Seeks to Hype Iran's Case to Distract World From Israel's Nuclear Arsenal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's envoy to the International Atomic Energy Agency's (IAEA) says the European countries seek to magnify Iran's nuclear program in an attempt to distract the international community from the issue of Israel's nuclear arsenal.

Mohsen Naziri Asl said, "The European countries are drawing the world's attention to Iran's nuclear program in the IAEA to cover up the important and very worrying issue of the Israeli regime's military nuclear program, which is a source of instability in the region and a threat to peace and security."

The Europeans are pursuing a plan to deprive an independent country, Iran, of its national interests while Tehran remains fully committed to international regulations, the diplomat said.

They are trying hard to manipulate realities, pursue a limited political agenda and prevent a key player in regional issues to play its role vis-à-vis foreign interference, he stressed.

The Iranian diplomat added that the European Union must end its zero-sum game against Iran and change its attitude toward the country, rather than insisting on its ineffective, authoritarian approach.

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## Tehran Warns Against Israeli Presence in Caucasus Region



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has said that the presence of the Israeli regime in the Caucasus region is among the important issues facing the region.

"Iran warns all parties to be vigilant about Israel and not let Israel's presence in the Caucasus," Amir-Abdollahian said while speaking at a joint news conference with his Turkish counterpart, Mevlut Cavusoglu, in Ankara.

He also said terrorism originating from Iraq's northern region is a common threat to both Iran and Turkey. Amirabdollahian said Iran and Turkey enjoy a high level of security cooperation regarding the fight against terrorism. "Terrorism originating from Iraq's Kurdistan region as well as the Daesh terrorism emanating from Afghanistan are among our common concerns," he said. "We believe that terrorism is not good or bad, but an ominous phenomenon in any guise and form."

He then made clear that within the framework of international law, Iran and Turkey reserve the right for a "legitimate defense against any terrorist act" from any direction and by any group.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Amirabdollahian said Iran supports the restoration of relations between Turkey and Syria. "We welcome the return of Turkey-Syria relations. We were interested in working to resolve misunderstandings between Syria and Turkey. We welcome participation in any quadripartite format."

Cavusoglu, for his part, explained that Amirabdollahian wanted to join the tripartite talks between Turkey, Russia, and Syria, which were held two months ago, and that Ankara happily agreed.

The deputy foreign ministers of Turkey, Russia, Syria and Iran are meeting in Moscow next week ahead of planned talks between foreign ministers.

Meanwhile, Amirabdollahian said that Cavusoglu will soon visit Tehran and that consultations were made about Raisi's trip to Turkey.

The Iranian foreign minister arrived in neighboring Turkey earlier in the day "to express sympathy with the Turkish government and people" over last month's devastating earthquake.

Speaking upon his arrival at Ankara airport, Amirabdollahian said he will visit Turkey's quake-hit areas. "I have come to this country to express sympathy with the Turkish nation and government," he said.

"We will also discuss the latest international developments and bilateral relations in a meeting with the Turkish foreign minister," he added.

During the joint press conference, the top Iranian diplomat said that from the first hours of the earthquake, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei and President Ebrahim Raisi issued orders to help the Muslim Turkish people.

"Even though aid workers were involved in providing relief to the earthquake victims in [the northwestern Iranian city of] Khoy, the IRCS, the Army and the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) immediately entered Turkey's earthquake-hit areas and provided their services ranging from search [and rescue] to support and relief works. It is because we consider Turkey's pain as that of ours," he noted.

Amirabdollahian further said that Cavusoglu will soon visit Tehran and that consultations were made about Raisi's trip to Turkey.

Cavusoglu thanked Iran's assistance after the natural disaster, saying, Iran helped the quake victims by sending humanitarian aid via ground and air

## IRGC Adds New Warship, Missile-Launching Boats To Navy Fleet

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has taken delivery of a new ocean-going warship and nearly 100 missile-launching speed boats.

Equipped with offensive and defensive systems, the Shahid Mahdavi warship was officially added to the IRGC Navy's fleet in a ceremony in the southern port city of Bandar Abbas on Thursday.

Also, 95 Ashura- and Tareq-class missile-launching speed boats joined the IRGC Navy's fleet.

Speaking at the ceremony, IRGC Navy Chief Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said the Shahid Mahdavi warship is a heavy, multi-purpose and long-range vessel capable of carrying and operating all kinds of helicopters, drones, and high-speed missile launchers, as well as missile, defense and radar systems.

The 2,100-ton warship has a length of 240 meters and a width of 27 meters, he said, adding that it is equipped with a 3D phased-array radar as well as surface-to-surface and surface-to-air missiles, highly advanced electronic warfare telecommunication systems, and Khordad-3 missile systems, all of which are designed and manufactured by young Iranian technicians.

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## Iran Economic Growth At 3.3% in Q3

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian government's statistics agency (SCI) show the country's economy grew by 3.3% in the three quarters to December 21 last year.

SCI figures released on Thursday showed that Iran's gross domestic products (GDP) had reached 58,250 trillion rials (\$117 billion) in the nine months to December, up from 56,410 trillion rials reported over the quarter to December 2021.

The GDP in Iran's non-oil sector of the economy rose by 2.9% year on year in March-December last year to reach 50,010 trillion rial, said the Statistical Center of Iran.

The agency considers fixed prices reported in 2011 as a baseline for its GDP calculations. The price of US dollar in the Iranian market was nearly 18,000 rials in 2011 while its current price is around 498,000 rials. SCI figures showed that Iran's manufacturing and mining sector, which includes oil and gas production, had expanded by 5.3% year on year in the three quarters to late December last year.

Iranian services sector grew by 2.6% while agriculture contracted by 4.3% over the March-December 2022, according to the SCI figures. The figures come as the Central Bank of Iran had posted a GDP growth of 3.6% for Iran's economy in the quarter to late September.

## Iran Committed to Promoting Women's Rights Despite U.S. Sanctions

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's deputy permanent representative to the United Nations has reiterated the country's commitment to empowering women and promoting their rights despite the hurdles created by the illegal U.S. sanctions.

Speaking at a UN Security Council debate on women, peace and security, Zahra Ershadi said Tehran acknowledges that there is always room for improvement in terms of protecting and promoting women's rights.

"We continue to work to empower Iranian women and girls and to ensure that their rights are upheld while actively taking into account the concerns voiced by our women and girls. This is one of our top priorities, and we'll endeavor to make progress in it," she said.

"Despite facing challenges, such as the inhumane unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States, Iran remains committed to promoting women's rights and has made significant progress in empowering women."

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## U.S. Sanctions 39 Entities Facilitating Iran's Oil-Related Banking

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Treasury Department has imposed sanctions on dozens of entities accused of helping Iran evade Washington's bans on Iran's access to the global financial system.

The sanctions announced on Thursday covered 39 entities, including many based in the United Arab Emirates and Hong Kong, according to the Treasury website.

The designated entities have been accused of granting Iranian and foreign companies involved in the trade of Iranian oil and petroleum products an access to the international banking system.

The Treasury described the entities as a "shadow banking" network that helped Iran-related companies hide their trade with foreign customers.

Iranian officials have yet to comment on the new sanctions. The Reuters news agency, which first reported on the bans, said it had not received any immediate response to a request for comment from Iran's mission to the United Nations in New York.

That comes as Iranian government has downplays the impact of US sanctions on its ability to export oil and petroleum products and to receive payments for the shipments.

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## Iran Buys More Russian Wheat Despite Payment Issues

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian state procurement agency, the Government Trading Corporation, reportedly purchased several hundred thousand tonnes of Russian milling wheat last week for April and May shipment. The tender caught most of the market by surprise, especially with Iran's wheat harvest expected to commence in May.

News of the deal came as vessels carrying more than 650,000t of Russian wheat remain stranded at the major Iranian ports of Bandar Imam Khomeini and Bandar Abbas, unable to discharge due to documentation issues and hard currency payment delays. Some of the vessels have been at anchor in the Persian Gulf since September last year, as the Central Bank of Iran's lack of foreign currency reserves severely hampers the flow of essential goods, such as wheat and sugar, into the country.

With the demurrage bills growing daily, Russia sent a trade delegation to Iran on January 25 in an effort to resolve the issue. The negotiations resulted in an Iranian Government agreement to pay for all agricultural products caught up by the payment delays. However, virtually nothing has been discharged and released by shippers since the meeting. The quality of the food goods once the cargoes are finally discharged is a rapidly escalating challenge due to the extraordinarily long period in the vessel holds.

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## Iranian, Belgian FMs Discuss Issues of Mutual Interests Over Phone

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Belgian counterpart Hadja Lahbib held a telephone conversation to discuss the latest situation of bilateral relations.

Over the phone, the two foreign ministers expressed hope that bilateral ties would promote under the light of cooperation and joint endeavor.

The two sides also exchanged views about consular cooperation.

It was last week that the foreign ministers of the two countries met in Geneva, Switzerland, on the sidelines of the 52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council.

## SCO Can Serve as Effective Force Against Unilateralism

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

**TEHRAN - Iran underlines the capacities that are lent to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) as a result of its sheer extent and size of membership.**

President Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks, meeting with the international body's visiting Secretary-General Zhang Ming, who is currently in the Iranian capital Tehran as the head of a delegation.

The SCO member states have "considerable manpower," "rich resources," and "vast geographical expanse" at their disposal, the chief executive said.

"This has created extraordinary capacities for the organization [that it can use] to effectively confront unilateralism and play an effective role in creating regional and international convergence," he added.

The SCO was founded by China, Russia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan in 2001, and currently forms the world's biggest regional market with eight official and four observer members.

The organization accounts for 40 percent of the world's population and 28 percent of the global gross domestic product (GDP).

The Islamic Republic's membership is expected to be completed during the SCO's



next summit, which is scheduled to take place in New Delhi, India in April.

Iran's membership, the president said, would further galvanize regional cooperation and reinforce trade relations with the organization's other members.

He considered the "increasing exchange of expertise and interaction" among the member states to be an element that contributed to the reinforcement of their economic strength and intra-organizational trade cooperation.

For his part, Zhang submitted a report detailing the process of completion of Iran's membership in the SCO.

He appreciated the quality of the Islamic Republic's relations with the rest of the organization's membership, laying emphasis on Tehran's role in regional peace, stability, and development.

"We are certain that, given its rich civilizational and historical background, Iran can serve as an active and productive member in expanding the Shanghai Cooperation Organization's field of action and strength..."

## President, Iraq PM Review Status of Bilateral Cooperation

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi had a phone conversation with Iraqi Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' Al Sudani with both leaders calling for strengthening bilateral ties.

President Raisi, according to a statement issued by his office, said the "warm and historical relations" between the two neighboring countries are "rooted in common culture, civilization and deep beliefs".

He emphasized the importance of "strengthening cooperation in various fields" between Tehran and Baghdad, the statement noted, in line with agreements reached during Sudani's recent visit to Tehran.

The Iraqi premier visited Iran in November last year, accompanied by Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein, Oil Minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani, National Security Adviser Qassim Al Araj and the head of the state-run Trade Bank of Iraq.

During the visit, the two sides hailed their "deeply rooted" and "historic" bilateral relations and vowed to further "boost economic, political and security cooperation".

The two leaders in Wednesday's phone call reviewed the status of Tehran-Baghdad economic cooperation, with a focus on "constructive agreements" reached during Sudani's November visit, the statement by the presidential office noted.

President Raisi, it stated, "emphasized the need to strengthen cooperation (between the two countries), especially in the fields of energy, industry, trade, finance and banking".

For his part, the Iraqi premier said the government and people of Iraq "have always appreciated the help of their Iranian brothers, especially in difficult times."

The statement did not specify whether the two leaders discussed security issues, including Pentagon chief Lloyd Austin's visit to the Iraqi capital, which has been widely condemned by Iraqi groups.

Austin made a surprise visit to Baghdad on Wednesday, ahead of the 20th anniversary of the US-led invasion of the country, and held meetings, among others, with Sudani.

Austin announced Washington's intent to maintain its military presence in the country that began in 2003, expressing hope to "strengthen and broaden" relations with Iraq.

## Israel's Strikes Against Syria Bespeak The Regime's Inhumane Nature

DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian condemns the Israeli regime's repeated acts of aggression against Syria in the strongest terms, saying the strikes bespeak the regime's savage nature.

The top diplomat, who is on a two-day visit to Syria, made the remarks on Thursday, meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad.

The Iranian official singled out the regime's most recent airstrike against an international airport in the northwestern city of Aleppo, saying the attack indicated the regime's aggressive and inhumane nature.

He added that the strike also reflected the regime's anxiety over the change that has affected the political equation in Syria -- apparently referring to regional countries' racing to restore their relations with the Arab country -- as well as Tel Aviv's endeavor to deflect attention from its own predicaments.

The foreign minister considered the regional rapprochement drive to be a practical development and a positive step down the path of Islamic unity.

Amirabdollahian reiterated Iran's solidarity and sympathy with the Syrian government and nation over the devastating earthquake that hit the Arab country and neighboring Turkey last month killing more than 52,000 people on both sides of the border.

He further conveyed Iran's assertion concerning the need for the elimination of the United States and its Western allies' sanctions on Syria towards facilitation of aid operations that center on the quake-hit nation.

For his part, Assad expressed his gratitude towards the Islamic Republic over its provision of support for the Syrian nation in the wake of the temblor and thanked Amir-Abdollahian for his earlier visit to quake-hit areas in Syria.

The Syrian head of state also laid emphasis on the need for further development of his country's relations with Iran, defining the ties as strategic and in favor of regional stability and security.

Also on Wednesday, the Iranian top diplomat met with his Syrian counterpart Faisal al-Mekdad before attending a joint press conference.

Asked if Iran had any plans for reinforcing the Syrian air defenses against the Israeli regime's incessant attacks, Amirabdollahian said, "Tough days await the Zionist regime," adding that Tel Aviv had to wait for "regret-inducing days."

He also insisted that the time had come for foreign forces to leave Syria, saying, "Tehran invites all parties to respect Syria and the region's sovereignty, territorial integrity, security, and stability."

Amirabdollahian condemned the double-standard approach that was adopted by the West in the aftermath of the earthquake that saw Western countries lagging far behind in loosening their crippling sanctions against the Arab country despite the dire situation that it was facing.

"Tehran and Damascus [however] are fellows in misfortune," he noted, referring to the Islamic Republic's rushing to Syria's assistance right after the occurrence of the natural disaster.

Amirabdollahian repeated Tehran's condemnation of the Israeli aggression against Syria, while hailing the regional countries' efforts to repair their ties with the Arab nation.

"We have no doubt that the Zionists will have no place in the region's future, but the regional countries will take strong steps towards interaction with one another," the Iranian official said.

He considered multilateral regional negotiations to be the key to the resolution of the regional crises, saying the Islamic Republic welcomed the continuation of talks among Iran, Syria, Russia, and Turkey on the situation in the Arab country.

## Iran Blasts German FM's Baseless Remarks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly condemned anti-Iran remarks made by German Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock during a visit to the Iraqi capital, Baghdad, saying the comments were aimed at harming Tehran-Baghdad relations.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks, a day after Baerbock accused Iran of jeopardizing the "stability" of the region with its missile attacks, particularly on Iraqi territory.

Kanaani said the German foreign minister must apologize for the past "shameful behavior" of her government toward the two nations instead of trying to hide the history of Germany's crimes by making "baseless" claims against the Islamic Republic.

Germany supported Saddam Hussein's regime during

its eight-year war against Iran, he said, adding that Berlin equipped the Ba'athist regime with chemical weapons in order to use them against defenseless Iranian and Iraqi soldiers and civilians.

"Unfortunately, a significant number of terrorists and armed separatist groups, who have Iranian and Iraqi civilians' blood on their hands, have now taken refuge in Germany," Kanaani said, reminding Berlin of Iran's undeniable role in supporting Iraq's territorial integrity and unity.

On Tuesday, Baerbock called on Iran to cease its missile attacks on Iraqi territory, claiming that the strikes put both civilians and regional stability at risk.

"It is unacceptable and dangerous for the whole region," she said at a news conference with her Iraqi counterpart.

## Western Officials Not Entitled to Talk About Women's Rights

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani said that the Western countries and the United States are in no position to talk about the rights of women in other countries with their own negative record.

"The United States and several arrogant European countries with their dark record of violating the fundamental rights of human beings and women in their societies and in other parts of the world, the lack of relevant laws and also the religious and moral teachings of human rights and women are not at all in a position to make claims about others; rather in the issue of human rights and women owe too much to the world and mankind," Kanaani wrote in a tweet on the occasion of the International Women's Day.

"International Women's Day, instead of becoming an incentive to reflect on the disastrous history of Western culture in dealing with women and family rights, it has become apolitical means in the hands of Western authorities to show themselves as women's rights advocates and accuse and blame other countries and nations regardless of their civilizational and cultural diversity," he further pointed out.

## Iran Ready to Continue Talks With Saudi Arabia, Strike Deal

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Republic is ready for a new round of fence-mending talks with Saudi Arabia in the Iraqi capital city of Baghdad, Iran's Nour News said Wednesday, adding that the country is determined to strike an agreement.

Nour News, affiliated with the country's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), made the announcement in a Persian-language tweet, a day after Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan told reporters in London that Riyadh is ready to continue talks with Tehran.

"We are open to dialogue with Iran," the chief Saudi diplomat said on Tuesday.

"Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan has once again declared his readiness for talks with Iran. The five rounds of negotiations already held between the two countries have completely clarified the common areas of interest," the tweet said.

It added, "Iran also welcomes the continuation of dialog and is ready to reach an agreement. The existence of political will is necessary for progress within the course of negotiations."

On January 29, Iraqi Foreign Minister Fouad Hussein said Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman had urged senior Iraqi authorities to arrange a face-to-face meeting between the top diplomats of Riyadh and Tehran.

## West Accepts Iran as A Nuclear Country

TEHRAN (MNA) - Stating that the West has accepted Iran as a nuclear country, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) said the West's only option in dealing with Iran is diplomacy.

"Achieving economic power along with scientific and technological power requires the realization of independence in the literal sense of the word", Mohammad Eslami said in the opening ceremony of the exploration and exploitation of the Anomaly 8 Stone Mine in Narigan.

Stating that since before the revolution until today, the enemies did not want to see Iran's fuel cycle, Eslami stressed that today they have accepted this issue adding that the most important goal of the sanctions is not economical but the goal is to break the will of the Iranian nation.

Referring to the fact that Iran is now among the top and prominent countries in the field of nuclear knowledge, Eslami noted that Iran obtained this knowledge by relying on its own human resources.

The enemies did whatever they could to prevent Iran from reaching this achievement, added the vice president.

The AEOI chief further pointed out that now the arrogance knows that it has no other option than diplomacy and that the Western countries have accepted Iran as a nuclear country.

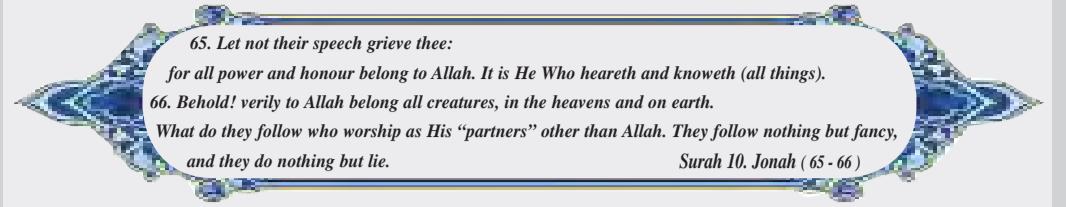
"More than one million patients use nuclear medicine annually", Eslami said adding that this is a very important issue since today many countries are facing very serious problems due to the lack of nuclear drugs.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:14
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:26
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:56
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:19



# President Opens Largest Hospital In Middle East

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi launched a mega hospital dubbed by authorities the largest in the Middle East region as he vowed his administration will be committed to complete unfinished projects in the country despite financial difficulties caused by sanctions.**

Raisi opened the Mahdi Clinic hospital, a 1,000-bed, 18-storey health complex located in downtown Tehran.

He said the hospital is the largest healthcare project opened in Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution of 1979.

Construction of Mahdi Clinic began in 2011, according to a report by the official IRNA news agency which said the hospital will benefit from permanent services of some 380 doctors and medical professors.

Figures released on Wednesday showed that the number of new hospital beds launched in Iran since Raisi's government took office in August 2020 had topped 15,000.

Addressing the inaugural ceremony, the President stressed investments in Iran's medical field of treatment.

Raisi praised the unique mission of Iran's medical society in the past 3 years in



safeguarding the Iranian nation's lives in COVID-19 pandemic and called it as a source of pride for the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He further went on to stress the quality of the medical services provided to Iranian society.

President Raisi then emphasized investment in the healthcare sector and called it the element which is significant in terms of having the possible effects in the medical field of treatment.

He also explained further that efforts should be made so that by observing prevention policies and measures the disease could be prevented before people need to be cured and the prevention precedes the treatment.

Referring to the great capacities of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the healthcare sector, President Raisi called the medical experts as biggest capital of Iran. He also stressed making efforts to improve medical knowledge so that Islamic Iran's medical status would be upgraded and enhanced as the World's medical reference.

The 18-storey hospital covers an area of 108,000 square meters in a densely-populated district of downtown Tehran. It is the largest health care project launched in Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979.

The hospital will use the permanent services of 380 doctors and medical professors.

## Iran Active in Oil, Gas Exploration In 4 Neighboring Countries

TEHRAN (MNA) - The director of exploration of National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) stated that currently Iran has oil and gas exploration relations with four neighboring countries and said transferring exploration technologies to neighboring countries can create value and generate income for Iran.

Making the remarks in a press conference, Mehdi Fakour said that exploration has a special status in the oil industry, stressing that exploration maps the country's energy future.

The transfer of exploration technologies to neighboring countries can create value and generate income, the official further reiterated.

Pointing out that there is no local exploration management in the countries around Iran, the director of the exploration of the National Iranian Oil Company said this is a prominent position for the Iranian Ministry of Oil to present itself to the neighboring countries and Eurasian countries, and they are also willing to cooperate with Iran.

Emphasizing that this important issue has not been possible in the past years, Fakour clarified: "We now have exploratory relations with four neighboring countries."

He pointed to the holding of meetings with Oman and said: "We had meetings with the minister of Oman and they accepted all the proposals for exploration cooperation to form a joint team and advance the agreements."

The official also named Tajikistan, Russia, and Iraq as the three other neighboring countries cooperating with Iran in the field of exploration.



## Minister Calls for Expansion of Iran-Africa Transactions



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Roads and Urban Development called for the expansion of Iran and Africa ties and transactions.

Speaking at the first Conference of Iran and West African countries (IRAN WAC) for scientific and economic cooperation which was hosted by Tehran on Monday, Mehرداد Bazrpash stated that Iran and Africa need to be determined to develop bilateral cooperation.

He noted, "We should gain achievements that will stimulate the development of economic relations between Iran and Africa."

He also pointed out that despite economic relations with West Africa, the volume of commercial transactions has not been satisfactory as expected, adding that in the past years, many fields of cooperation such as infrastructural development, housing construction, power plants, refineries and extraterritorial agriculture have been taken into account.

Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development mentioned that Iran has sufficient experience, qualified workforce and standard productions in various fields including types of machinery, technical and engineering services, the refinery's infrastructure, transportation, housing, dam construction, urban development, tourism, rail and road development, airport construction and health care.

Emphasizing that Iran and Africa should take more serious steps in investment and commercial development by the provision of services, Bazrpash said that with the growth of technical and engineering companies, they can be effectively used in Africa in all sectors of oil, gas, mineral products, dam construction, power plants, extraterritorial agriculture, medicine and medical equipment.

During the conference, 20 multilateral and bilateral agreements and MoUs between Iran and West African countries were signed in order to expand and deepen comprehensive economic cooperation.

## Tax Receipts Up 54% in 11 Months to Late February

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) show that government's tax revenues increased by more than a half in the 11 months to February 19.

INTA's head of planning and statistics Mojtaba Amiri said that Iranian tax receipts had reached more than 4,280 trillion rials (\$8.5 billion) between March 2022 and February this year, up 54% from the same previous period.

Amiri said that tax revenues collected in Iran over the period had exceeded targets set in the current calendar year's budget by some 103%.

Iran's direct tax revenues rose by 59% year on year in the 11 months to late February to reach over 2,660 trillion rials, said Amiri.

He added that indirect tax revenues collected from levies on goods and services over the same period had reached some 1,620 trillion rials, an increase of 48% compared with the period between March 2021 and February last year.

The official said increased tax revenues were mainly a result of Iran's stricter controls on tax evasion.

He added that the government had offered more tax credits and exemptions to manufacturers and enterprises over the past 11 months to help boost economic activity in the country.

Iran has sought to rely more on tax revenues in recent years to offset the impact of US sanctions on its crude oil exports. The INTA says it has made increased use of modern technologies to prevent tax evasion and increase its receipts.

## Iran, UAE Ink MoU on Air Cooperation

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The spokesperson for the Iranian Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) on Tuesday announced the signing of a memorandum of understanding (MoU) between Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in the field of cooperation of air transportation.

Jafar Yazarloo stated that Iran's CAO and General Civil Aviation Authority (GCAA) of UAE signed the MoU on maintaining air transportation cooperation.

Given the volume of trade and tourism exchanges between Iran and the UAE, and after years of updating the MoU between the two countries that had been signed in

2015, the two sides emphasized the need for increasing bilateral cooperation in the relevant field, Yazarloo said.

A new memorandum of understanding was signed between the two sides, after holding expert-level meetings on increasing flights between the two countries, developing the foreign flight network, and increasing flights through Iran as well as the necessary arrangements for signing the air transport agreement, he stated.

The representatives of the airline companies of the United Arab Emirates including Fly Dubai and Al-Itihad also attended the meeting, the spokesman noted.

## Iran Ready to Attract Investors in Southern Ports

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's deputy minister of roads and urban development for transportation affairs said that the country is ready to attract investors in its southern ports.

Shahriar Afandizadeh made the remarks in a meeting with the Director of the Intergovernmental Council of Roads Management of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS) Buri Karimov in Tehran.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed international transport and transit issues.

The Islamic Republic is ready to transit one million tons of goods from Central Asia and to welcome participation of investors in southern Iranian ports wholeheartedly, Afandizadeh said. Turning to the target of transit of 20 million tons of goods from Iranian land and territory, he stated, "Despite the efforts made, facilitation of transit with the Central Asian states has not been carried out successfully and it is necessary to take effective steps in this regard."

The Director of the Intergovernmental Council of Roads Management of the Commonwealth Independent States (CIS), for his part, proposed the initiative plan of implementation of the "International Rally" aimed at strengthening the trade and cultural ties and considered the development of relations with the Central Asian states "more important".

Buri Karimov pointed out that the initiative plan of "International Rally" will kick off on March 27, 2023 and would continue after passing from Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Turkmenistan and Armenia.

Increasing the transit volume between Iran and Turkmenistan, determining the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs as the centerpiece of cooperation for holding International Rally, readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran for accepting investment opportunities at the southern Iranian ports, transiting up to one million tons of goods from the Central Asian states, etc, were among the main topics discussed earlier between the two sides.

## Minister Eyes Increased Presence in West Africa Markets

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran eyes increased presence in markets in West Africa as the country plans to sign nearly \$2 billion worth of trade contracts and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with countries in the region.

Trade minister Reza Fatemi Amin said that Iranian mining and metals companies have a good opportunity to invest in projects in West Africa.

"Countries in West Africa have good potentials in mines ... which can be used to expand economic and trade ties between Iran and the region," said Fatemi Amin while addressing a conference held in Tehran to boost scientific and economic cooperation between Iran and West Africa.

Some 50 political and business delegates from 10 countries in West Africa are in Tehran to explore opportunities for increased

trade with Iran, said the minister. He added that some \$850 million worth of contracts and around \$1 billion worth of MoUs will be signed during the ongoing forum in Tehran.

Fatemi Amin said Iran's exports to Africa had doubled in 2022, adding that increased presence in the African markets has become a focus of Iran's trade policies in recent years. Iran has introduced extensive measures to expand foreign trade since 2018 when its crude oil exports came under American sanctions.

The policy had led to increased hard currency revenues for the country while enabling the government to diversify the Iranian economy away from oil. Figures by Iran's customs office released last month showed that non-oil exports from the country had risen by 12.22% year on year in the 11 calendar months to late February to reach \$48.8 billion.

## Iran, Singapore Need to Expand Health Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - The director general of the international cooperation department of Iran's health ministry stressed the importance of expanding relations with Asian countries including Singapore in the health sector.

Mohammad Hossein Niknam made the remarks in the Webinar meeting with Lyn James, director general of the international cooperation department at Singapore's health ministry during which the Iranian health official also said that "the two countries have significant capacities for cooperation in the field of health and that this cooperation can be defined not only bilaterally but also for the countries of the Middle East and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)."

"Iran's health system is among the leading systems in the region and the world and enjoys having great capacities and potentials in medical education, provision of specialized treatment services, production of medicine and medical equipment, health research, vaccination against infectious and non-infectious diseases", Niknam asserted.

He called for more familiarity with Singapore's health system's capabilities including the knowledge-based companies, new technologies in the field of health and vaccine production.

"After the two countries become familiar with each other's capabilities in the field of health, cooperation can be arranged and exchanged within the framework of the cooperation memorandum of understanding signed between the two countries," the Iranian official asserted. He also called for exchanging delegations between the two nations in order to exchange information and experiences between the two countries and establish durable communication.

Lyn James, for her part, presented a report on the structure of the health system and the capabilities of Singapore's health ministry, such as the pharmaceutical industry, the issue of the aging population, the health services costs and how to admit patients in the hospitals.



## Taliban Governor Killed In Suicide Attack

KABUL (Dispatches) - The Taliban governor of Afghanistan's Balkh province, known for fighting against Islamic State jihadists, was killed in a suicide attack at his office on Thursday, officials said.

The killing, a day after he met top government officials visiting from Kabul, makes Mohammad Dawood Muzammil one of the highest-ranking figures slain since the Taliban stormed back to power in 2021.

Violence across Afghanistan has dramatically dropped since the Taliban seized control, but the security situation has again deteriorated with IS claiming several deadly attacks.



## Over 40 Killed in Suspected Eastern DR Congo Rebel Attacks

MUKAKATI (Dispatches) - Suspected Allied Democratic Forces (ADF) militants have killed over 40 people in twin attacks in eastern DR Congo, local officials said Thursday, in the latest bloodshed across the turbulent region.

The ADF, which the Islamic State group claims as its central African affiliate, is one of the deadliest armed militias in eastern Congo, accused of slaughtering thousands of civilians.

Fighters from the group attacked the neighbouring villages of Mukondi and Mause, in the Beni territory of North Kivu province, during Wednesday evening and the early hours of Thursday, officials said.



## Russia Launches Deadly Missile Attacks in Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia launched a huge wave of missile strikes across Ukraine while people slept, killing at least six civilians, knocking out electricity and forcing a nuclear power plant off the grid.

The first big volley of missile strikes since mid-February shattered the longest calm since Moscow began a campaign to attack Ukraine's civil infrastructure five months ago.

Kyiv said it included an unprecedented six of Russia's small arsenal of kinzhals hypersonic cruise missiles, one of Moscow's most valuable weapons.

"The occupiers can only terrorize civilians. That's all they can do. But it won't help them. They won't avoid responsibility for everything they have done," President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said in a statement, describing strikes that hit infrastructure and residential buildings in ten regions.

Russia's defense ministry said it had carried out a "massive retaliatory strike" on Ukrainian infrastructure as payback for a cross-border raid last week on a village in Russia's Bryansk region.

Villagers in Zolochiv in Ukraine's western Lviv region carried a body in a black plastic bag over the rubble of a brick house completely destroyed by a missile. They put the body into the back of a white van with two others, of at least five people killed there. A dog lay curled up on a carpet in the ruins.

Oksana Ostapenko said the house belonged to her sister Halyna, whose body was still buried under the rubble with two other family members.

"They still haven't found them. We were hoping that they're alive. But, they're not alive," she said.

Another civilian was reported killed by the missiles in the central Dnipro region. Three civilians were separately reported killed by artillery in Kherson.

In the capital Kyiv, a seven-hour air strike alert through the night was the longest of the Russian air campaign that began in October.

"I heard a very loud explosion, very loud. We quickly jumped out of bed and saw one car on fire. Then the other cars caught on fire as well. The glass shattered on the balconies and windows," said Liudmyla, 58, holding a toddler in her arms.

"The child got scared and jumped out of bed," she said. "How can they do this? How is this possible? They are not humans, I don't know what to call them."

Moscow says its campaign of targeting Ukraine's infrastructure far from the front is intended to reduce its ability to fight. Kyiv says the air strikes have no military purpose and aim to harm and intimidate civilians, a war crime.

Ukrainian officials said it was the first time they had faced so many kinzhals missiles, which Ukraine has no way to shoot down. Russia is believed to have just a few dozen kinzhals, which fly many times faster than the speed of sound and which President Vladimir Putin touts as a weapon for which NATO has no answer.

Ukraine said the attack had knocked out the power supply to the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant, Europe's largest, severing it from the Ukrainian grid and forcing it onto emergency diesel power to prevent a meltdown.

## Georgian Ruling Party Withdraws Foreign Agents Bill But Faces More Protests

TBILISI (Dispatches) - Georgia's ruling party said it was dropping a bill on "foreign agents" after two nights of violent protests against what opponents said was a Russian-inspired authoritarian shift that imperiled hopes of the country joining the European Union.

The Georgian Dream ruling party said in a statement it would "unconditionally withdraw the bill we supported, without any reservations". It cited the need to reduce "confrontation" in society, while also denouncing "lies" told about the bill by the "radical opposition".

However, opposition leaders said the protests would resume at 7 p.m. (1500 GMT). Giga Lemonjava, a representative of the Droa party, said they were demanding that the government formally denounce the bill and release all those detained during the protests.

The Black Sea country of 3.7 million people has seen frequent political upheaval since winning independence from the Soviet Union in 1991, including a peaceful "Rose Revolution" in 2003 and a calamitous war against Russia five years later.

The bill would have required Georgian organizations receiving more than 20% of their funding from abroad to register as "foreign agents" or face fines.

Government officials said the proposals were necessary to root out "foreign influence" and "spies" from Georgia's political scene, arguing that Georgians had the right to know who funds non-government organizations working there.

The opposition said it was a local version of a Russian law that President Vladimir Putin has used to crush dissent for more than a decade.

"It was a Russian law that had to be recalled and should not have gone through parliament under any conditions", said Nika Oboladze, a 32-year-old Tbilisi resident.

"Those who proposed the law are responsible for all this mess. Because 90% of Georgians support European integration and nothing should stop that," he added.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said Moscow was "concerned" by events in Tbilisi, and said that the Georgian bill bore no relation to Russian laws.

"The Kremlin didn't inspire anything there, the Kremlin has absolutely nothing to do with it. ... If I understand it correctly, one version was very similar to an equivalent law in the United States," Peskov said.



## Strikes Halt Greek Transport as Thousands March Over Train Crash

GREECE (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands marched in Athens and other cities across Greece to protest over the country's deadliest train disaster as workers staged a nationwide, day-long walkout.

Unions and student associations organised the protests, while strikes halted ferries, public transport, primary schools and public hospitals.

A crowd of more than 40,000 marched in central Athens chanting "Murderers!" and "We are all in the same carriage".

More than 20,000 joined rallies in Thessaloniki, where several dozen youths challenged a police cordon. Twelve students from the city's university were among the 57 killed in the 28 February head-on crash between two trains.

Police fired tear gas in the southern city of Patras, where a municipal band earlier played music from a funeral march while leading the demonstration. In the central city of Larissa, near the scene of the train collision, students holding black balloons chanted "No to profits over our lives!"

A railway worker accused of contributing to the disaster by placing the trains on the same track has been charged with manslaughter and other offences, while the country's transportation minister and senior railway officials resigned the day after the crash.

The crash has sparked protests across Greece. "Message me when you get there," a placard in Athens read - a protest slogan that echoes a final message from a bereaved relative.

"You feel angry because the government did nothing for all of those kids. The public transport is a mess," said 19-year-old Nikomathi Vathi.

"We're going to be here until things change," said another student, Vaggelis Somarakis. "We are the youth of this country and we're not going to stop."

Greece's conservative government, which had planned to call elections in the coming weeks, has promised to fix the ailing railway system.

Transport Minister George Gerapetritis told a news conference he understood the anger the accident had caused.

## North Korea Fires Ballistic Missile Toward Sea

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired a short-range ballistic missile toward waters off its western coast, South Korea's military said.

The launch came as the United States and South Korea prepare to hold their biggest combined military training exercises in years next week to counter the threat of North Korea's nuclear arsenal, which leader Kim Jong Un has aggressively expanded in recent years despite his country's deepening economic isolation and pandemic-related difficulties.

The South's Joint Chiefs of Staff said the missile was fired at around 6:20 p.m. from an area near the western coastal city of Nampo. There were no immediate assessments of how far it flew or where it landed.

The Joint Chiefs of Staff said later Thursday it was examining the possibility that North Korea may have launched several ballistic missiles from the area, not just one.

The South Korean military strengthened its surveillance of North Korean activities while maintaining "full readiness" in close coordination with its ally, the U.S., the Joint Chiefs of Staff said. The U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said the launch did not pose an "immediate threat to U.S. personnel or territory, or to our allies" but still highlighted the destabilizing impact of North Korea's nuclear weapons and missile program.

The launch came after Kim's powerful sister warned

Tuesday that her country is ready to take "quick, overwhelming action" against the United States and South Korea as the allies expand their military training to cope with a growing North Korean nuclear threat.

Coming off a record year in missile testing, North Korea has conducted more weapons demonstrations to 2023 including test launches of an intercontinental ballistic missile, short-range missiles and a purported long-range cruise missile system in recent weeks.

Experts say North Korea with its escalated testing activity and threats is trying to claim an ability to conduct nuclear strikes in South Korea and the U.S. mainland. Kim, who sees his nuclear arsenal as his strongest guarantee of survival, is trying to force the United States into accepting the North as a nuclear power and wants to negotiate badly needed economic concessions from a position of strength, analysts say.

Diplomacy between the U.S. and North Korea has stalled since 2019 because of disagreements over an easing of crippling U.S.-led sanctions against the North in exchange for steps by the North to wind down its nuclear weapons and missile programs.

Last week, the South Korean and U.S. militaries announced they will conduct computer-simulated command post training on March 13-23 and will resume their largest springtime field exercises, which were last held in 2018.



## South Korea, Japan To Hold Summit To Expand Ties

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The leaders of South Korea and Japan will meet next week for a summit on strengthening ties, both governments said, days after South Korea unveiled a step toward resolving strained ties stemming from Tokyo's colonial rule of the Korean Peninsula.

President Yoon Suk Yeol is to visit Japan on March 16-17 at the invitation of the Japanese government and will meet with Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, according to the South Korean and Japanese governments.

Yoon's office said in a statement that the summit will be "an important milestone" in the development of South Korea-Japan relations. It said South Korea hopes the two countries will "overcome an unfortunate past" and expand cooperation on security, the economy and other sectors as a result of the visit.

Kishida told reporters that "I hope to make (Yoon's visit) an opportunity to work toward strengthening our relationship."

Japanese Chief Cabinet Secretary Hirokazu Matsuno separately said Tokyo's invitation to the South Korean leader was the result of close communication between the two countries since Yoon's inauguration last May.

"South Korea is an important neighbor that Japan should cooperate with in various issues," Matsuno said.

On Monday, South Korea announced it would raise local funds to compensate Koreans who won damage awards in lawsuits against two Japanese companies over their forced labor during the 1910-45 colonial period. The South Korean plan doesn't require the Japanese companies - Nippon Steel and Mitsubishi Heavy Industries - to contribute to the reparations.

Bilateral ties suffered a major setback after South Korea's Supreme Court in 2018 ordered the two Japanese companies to compensate some of their former Korean employees for forced labor. The companies and the Japanese government refused to comply with the rulings and insisted that all compensation issues were settled by a 1965 treaty that normalized bilateral relations and was accompanied by hundreds of millions of dollars in economic aid and loans from Tokyo to Seoul.





## Czech Company Sees Boom in Market For Fake Tanks, HIMARS



DECIN (Dispatches) - Losing a tank or valued U.S.-made high mobility artillery rocket systems (HIMARS) can hurt an army less if the weapon is a cheap inflatable decoy placed on the frontlines to deceive the enemy.

With the war in Ukraine boosting the need for heavy military vehicles, guns and planes, it has also been a boon to Inflattech Decoys, a Czech maker of fake army equipment.

The company has added HIMARS to its fleet of over 30 types of inflatable real-size decoys it sells to customers worldwide, Chief Executive Vojtech Fresser said on Monday.

Inflattech would not confirm Ukraine is among the destinations, but Fresser said he would expect them to find their way there.

"I can imagine that if we want to support a partner country which is in trouble, we will send them Inflattech inflatable decoys and they are already there or certainly will be," he said.

The Czech Defence Ministry, which helps organise Czech military supplies to Ukraine, was not immediately available for comment.

The decoys are made out of synthetic silk and, apart from misleading the adversary visually, have a thermal footprint and appear on radars to fool enemy reconnaissance.

They pack into sacks that two to four soldiers can carry, and can be inflated within 10 minutes.

The HIMARS inflatable top, without the heat generator and compressor equipment, weighs 43 kg, Fresser told reporters at the company's factory in the northern Czech city of Decin.

The decoys cost from \$10,000 to \$100,000.

"If you lead the enemy to destroy my piece of equipment by something that is four, or maybe 20 times more expensive, then you are winning economically," Fresser said.

Inflattech has seen its business boom over the past year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, raising production to dozens of decoys per month, and sees big growth this year - in tens and maybe over 100%, Fresser said.

## Spain Reaches Pre-Pandemic Tourism Levels in January



MADRID (Dispatches) - A total of 4.1 million international tourists came to Spain in January this year, representing an increase of 65.8 per cent compared to the same month last year.

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INE), these travellers spent €5,218 million on their trip and stay, which is €2,178 million or 71.7 per cent more than in January 2022, SchengenVisaInfo.com reports.

The same source revealed that the data for January has reached the level of the number of tourists visiting before the pandemic. In 2019, only 49,594 more tourists arrived in Spain than in January 2023. Meanwhile, in terms of spending, compared to January 2019, international tourists spent €529 million more this year.

"These extraordinary data show that tourism will be one of the engines of the Spanish economy this year; With figures like the ones we have seen today, we are closer to our objective: to adapt tourism to the 21st century, enhancing its quality," the Minister of Industry, Commerce and Tourism, Reyes Maroto pointed out in this regard.

INE data also show that in January, the average cost of tourists was €1,258, an annual increase of 3.5 per cent. At the same time, the average daily expenses also increased by 19.3 per cent, to €148 million.

Based on these data, the average duration of international tourist trips was 8.5 days, which is 1.3 days less than last January.

With 742,212 tourist visitors, the United Kingdom, which continues to lead the tourist emission market, has also experienced strong growth in January, with 103.6 per cent compared to the same month of 2022.

Regarding the number of visits, France and Germany followed, contributing to 485,116 and 478,258 visitors, respectively.

Other countries that experienced an annual increase in tourists during this January were the United States with 102.8 per cent, Italy with 78.6 per cent and Ireland with 66.1 per cent.

As the first leading destination for tourists in January, with 29.0 per cent of the total, the Canary Islands welcomed 1.2 million tourists, 58.5 per cent more than a year ago.

After the Canary Islands, Catalonia is the second community in terms of the number of international tourists, with 19.2 per cent or 798,331 visitors.

In Catalonia, 71.6 per cent more tourists have arrived in January this year than in the same month of 2022. In addition, in terms of country of origin, 18.1 per cent of visitors come from France and 10.6 per cent from Italy.

Moreover, the third place in terms of the number of tourists is Andalusia, with 571,873 tourists and an annual increase of 76.8 per cent. The United Kingdom is also the main country of origin, with 16.3 per cent of the total, followed by the Nordic countries with 11.3 per cent.

In other countries, the communities, such as in the Community of Madrid, tourists increased by 113.1 per cent more than a year ago. In the Community of Valencia was marked an annual rise of 71 per cent, and in Illes Balears, 54.5 per cent higher than in January 2022.

## Women Leaders Sidelined at Multilateral Organizations

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Women have held just 12% of the top jobs at 33 of the biggest multilateral institutions since 1945, and more than a third of those bodies, including all four large development banks, have never been led by a woman, a new study released shows.

Five of the bodies have only had a woman president once in their history, and that includes the current head of the World Trade Organization Ngozi Okonjo Iweala, according to the report prepared by GWL Voices for Change and Inclusion, an advocacy group made up of 62 current and former senior women leaders.

The study, to be released during this week's meeting of the United Nations Commission on the Status of Women, called for proportional representation of women at every level of multilateral organizations, from field offices to headquarters, as well as in secretariats and governing bodies.

"The truth is that numbers matter," said Maria Fernanda Espinosa, a former Ecuadorian foreign minister who served as president of the U.N. General Assembly from 2018-2019.

"We are 50% of the world's population so it's a demographic justice thing, to start with," she told Reuters in an interview on Friday. "But I also believe that women bring this combination of leadership, wisdom and empathy, and sometimes, an even greater understanding of what is happening in the world."

Since 1945, the 33 institutions studied have had 382 leaders, but only 47 were women, the report showed. And despite recent progress, only one-third of the institutions are currently headed by women.

GWL Voices said it would release a more extensive version of the report in September that would also look at the senior management teams and governing bodies of the 33 institutions. It said it was pushing for governance reforms that could "accelerate the transition to gender-balanced leadership."



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## Australian Food Inflation Rate Falling, But Slowly

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's top grocer said that while the food inflation rate was beginning to decline, prices were taking longer than expected to retreat off pandemic highs.

Woolworths Group Ltd Chief Executive Officer Brad Banducci said while price rises were slowing for certain products, with vegetables now "deflationary", prices elsewhere were falling more slowly or not at all.

"We've seen food inflation in aggregate come down but much more slowly than anyone anticipated," Banducci said at the Australian Financial Review business summit on Tuesday in Sydney. Food inflation rose 9.2% in the December quarter versus a year ago, the highest reading since 2006. Vegetable prices rose 5.7% over the same period, down from a 17.2% reading in the September quarter.



## China Sets Lowest Economic Growth Target in Three Decades

BLOOMBERG (Dispatches) - For the second straight year, China set its lowest annual economic growth target since 1991, with a 5% growth forecast that dimmed optimism for a rebound from the nation's second-weakest yearly growth in almost half a century.

Premier Li Keqiang announced the target at the beginning of China's annual legislative session, three months after the government began lifting stifling COVID-19 restrictions.

With those curbs in place, China's economy grew just 3% last year. Aside from 2020, when the country abandoned a growth target altogether during the height of the pandemic, the country had not produced growth that low since 1976, the last time its economy contracted.

Last year's growth also fell far short of the country's 5.5% target set at the 2022 legislative session. As pandemic restrictions abated, analysts and investors had surmised this year's target might increase.

Instead, Li told the session on Sunday that "it is essential to prioritize economic stability" this year—another signal that growth no longer remains China's priority.

"It is a complete shift," Joerg Wuttke, president of the European Chamber of Commerce in China and a 32-year resident of the country, said late last year. "We just have to realize that the old notion of putting a premium on the economy—these days are gone. The agenda is self-reliance. We've entered a new era."

Even if China meets its 2023 target, it would mark the country's third-lowest year of growth—all in the past four years—since 1990, when the country's gross domestic product rose 3.9% on a real basis. China's economy has expanded every year since 1976, when GDP contracted 1.6%.

Li set the target even after China's manufacturing, service, and construction sectors all rebounded substantially in the first two months of the year.

However, China's property market remains in a slump, and demand for Chinese exports has fallen, with analysts expecting low-single-digit growth on a percentage basis this year.

CCB International, a Chinese investment bank, said the "cautious" target likely reflects concern about the elevated jobless rate and problems with financing local governments struggling with the lingering effects of pandemic shutdowns.

China's unemployment rate is hovering near 5%, though many economists say official government figures underestimate the actual figure.

The less-than-ambitious growth target suggests China's economy will provide more modest help than many expected for a global economy facing the prospect of recession—particularly as developed world central banks steadfastly persist with interest rate hikes to fight inflation.

At the same time, weaker growth from the world's second-largest economy may limit the global inflationary pressures that have necessitated those rate increases.

The target essentially matches the consensus projection for 5.1% growth of economists surveyed last month by Bloomberg. The Shanghai Stock Exchange Composite Index, up 7.7% this year and 15% in the past four months, fell 0.2% on Monday.

## Russia Says Economic Activity, Inflationary Pressure Rose in Jan-Feb

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian economic activity rose in January-February but inflationary pressure also increased, the central bank said, adding that this could warrant a tighter monetary policy.

The bank, whose next rate-setting meeting is scheduled for March 17, also said Russia's decision to cut oil output would likely narrow its trade surplus, a risk factor for the rouble, and that this could have an adverse impact on Russia's gross domestic product (GDP) in the second quarter and beyond.

The Bank of Russia has become more hawkish this year. It held its key rate at 7.5% last month but said a further widening of the country's budget deficit might compel it to raise the cost of borrowing.

"Domestic demand is growing on the back of increased budget spending," the bank said in a report.

Russia's finance ministry said on Monday the federal budget deficit had widened to around \$34 billion in the first two months of this year as Moscow sharply raised expenditure while revenue fell amid slumping oil and gas takings.

The central bank said Russia's GDP dynamics in 2023 could be better than its baseline forecast of 1% contraction to 1% growth, provided that there were no new, significant challenges.

Russia's economy has proven unexpectedly resilient in the face of Western sanctions imposed last year over the Ukraine crisis, but a return to pre-conflict levels of prosperity may be far off as more government spending is directed towards the military and price caps squeeze crucial energy export earnings.



## Asian Palm Oil Buyers Seek Stable Export Policies From Malaysia

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - The Asian Palm Oil Alliance (APO), a body of palm oil buyers, want producing countries to make sure they have stable export policies after changes last year caused volatility in the trading of the tropical oil, the head of the group said.

India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka are currently members of the APOP and the alliance wants to add more buyers. Atul Chaturvedi, the APOP chairman, said at the annual meeting of member countries in Kuala Lumpur.

Importing countries have built refineries to process crude palm oil, but producers are imposing higher export duties on crude palm oil than for refined and making the buying of refined palm oil cheaper than the crude grade, Chaturvedi said.

"The higher duty on crude palm oil is keeping refineries idle in importing countries. Producers need to think about this duty structure, which is hurting buyers," he said.

Dorab Mistry, the director of Indian consumer goods company Godrej International, told the gathering that key producers Indonesia and Malaysia need to realise that Asian countries are their most trusted buyers and that they make purchases without creating trouble for the industry.

The sudden change in export policies such as ban on the exports imposed by Indonesia last year not only disrupts supply chains in importing countries, but also hurts producers and they should think about buyers while making sudden changes, Mistry said.

## Saudi Arabia Pumps \$5b Into Turkish Economy

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and Turkey concluded a long-awaited agreement for the Kingdom to invest \$5 billion in the central bank in Ankara.

The deposit will provide a major boost to the Turkish economy - struggling in the wake of February's devastating earthquakes and rising inflation - ahead of the parliamentary and presidential elections on May 14.

The Saudi Fund for Development said the deal was "not only the proof of close cooperation and historical ties between the two countries and its brotherly people, but also a demonstration of the commitment of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia to support Turkey's efforts to strengthen its economy."

Ankara has been working to consolidate its economic and business ties with the

Persian Gulf region, including the UAE and Saudi Arabia, by securing foreign currency inflows.

Enver Erkan, an economist from Dinamik Yatirim, in Istanbul, told Arab News: "The \$5 billion deposit to be invested in the CBRT is expected to critically contribute to the Turkish economy in recovering financial damages after the earthquake and in preparing for the approaching parliamentary and presidential elections."

Initial estimates put the cost of quake damage in Turkey at around \$34 billion - approximately 4 percent of its annual economic output. The Turkish Enterprise and Business Confederation has calculated the figure to be \$84.1 billion, mainly in relation to the housing sector.

"Since Turkey's current account deficit will probably be in the range of \$30 billion to \$40 billion this year, financing resources are of critical importance. The reconstruction efforts in the earthquake-hit region of the country will also require financial backing for financing the economic damage and keeping the exchange rate stable in this period," Erkan said.

The Turkish lira lost 30 percent of its value against the dollar last year and the country has faced a serious shortage of foreign currency reserves for the last five years.

The nation was also hit hard by soaring energy prices after Russia's invasion of Ukraine, due to being heavily dependent on imports. The depreciation of the Turkish lira coupled with ongoing high inflation rates has hit living costs in the country.

Robert Mogielnicki, senior resident scholar at the Arab Persian Gulf States Institute in Washington, told Arab News: "Saudi Arabia has been shoring up relations with regional actors for some time now - it's not surprising that Turkey is now in focus. Saudi Arabia is willing to throw some of its financial largesse around the region to secure a regional leadership status."

## Latin American Central Banks Show No Signs of Reversal

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Latin American central banks have dashed hopes that they will back off sky-high benchmark interest rates, amid stubbornly high inflation, expected further tightening by the U.S. Federal Reserve, and political risks in some cases.

Latin American central banks were often in the vanguard of the global battle to quash inflation, with rate hikes totaling over 1,000 basis points in some countries.

The central bank of Brazil, the region's largest economy, held its Selic benchmark interest rate at 13.75% last month, but said it was considering holding the six-year-high rate for longer than markets expected due to fiscal risks under new President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva.

The Brazilian central bank's weekly survey of private economists last year foresaw cuts in June 2023, but a recent survey pushed the forecast back to November.

The bank's policies have faced increasingly vociferous criticism from Lula, who has said they risk triggering a credit crunch and hurting economic growth.

In neighboring Argentina, the central bank put the brakes on a 10-month hiking cycle in October, leaving its eye-popping 75% benchmark rate unchanged since then on signs the country's nearly 100% annual inflation was cooling.

But hopes of a potential rate cut in Argentina have dissipated as prices heat up anew, sources told Reuters recently, adding that it did not "seem appropriate to make monetary changes" in the near future.

In Chile, the central bank kept its key interest rate on hold in January, and underscored this week that it was in no hurry to reverse the process as inflation remained above its target.

The central bank's poll of traders now expects cuts won't come until May, likely making Chile the first mover.



A key issue banks face is bringing down core inflation, a key metric for policymakers which strips out some volatile food and energy prices and has taken longer than expected to slow in Latin America and beyond.

"We've seen goods inflation peak in most countries, but services inflation is proving a lot more stubborn," said Kimberly Sperrfechter, an analyst at Capital Economics, explaining that rates are also forecast to stay "quite high" throughout 2024.

"We've had a quite a few hawkish comments from central banks across the region, pushing back against the idea of rate cuts," she added.

Among them is Bank of Mexico deputy governor Jonathan Heath, who told Reuters that rates would be kept steady for an extended period once the bank's current hiking cycle ends.

## Sri Lanka in Talks to Extend \$1b Indian Credit Line as IMF Deal Looms



COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka is negotiating with India to extend a \$1b credit line by a few months, two sources told Reuters, as the island nation tries to line up funds for the rest of the year while the IMF looks set to approve a \$2.9 billion loan for it soon.

The credit line is due to expire on March 17 with Sri Lanka having used only about two-thirds of it, mainly for medicines and food, said the sources and another person familiar with the matter.

The extension talks come as the economy improves and forex reserves rise for Sri Lanka, where huge protests took place last year amid widespread shortages of essentials after the COVID-19 pandemic hurt tourism and remittances while exposing low tax revenues.

A source at the Sri Lankan Finance Ministry said the government wanted to extend the credit line by 6-12 months because there was about \$300 million of it left unused. No agreement had been reached, said the source.

All the sources declined to be named ahead of an announcement.

Sri Lanka's finance ministry and India's foreign ministry did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

Sri Lanka's central bank said on Tuesday the country's official reserves had risen 4.5% to \$2.22 billion in February from a month earlier.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe told parliament there were signs the economy was improving but there was still insufficient foreign currency for all imports, making the IMF deal crucial so other creditors could also start releasing funds.

He said China, Sri Lanka's biggest lender, extended support for the IMF programme on Monday, clearing the way for the loan.



## Europe Dissolves Trading System With Iran Called INSTEX

LONDON (Dispatches) - European countries have shut down the INSTEX system, which they had launched in the midst of US sanctions to facilitate trade with Iran.

INSTEX is a system that European countries launched in 2019 to protect trade with Iran against US sanctions. High-ranking European officials have repeatedly admitted that since

private companies cannot be forced to do business with a country, INSTEX is only a symbolic measure.

According to Iran Press news agency, European countries announced on Thursday that they have shut down the INSTEX system.

According to European countries, only one transaction has been done through this system.



## World's Major Quakes Inflict Nearly \$1 Trillion in Economic Damage

ANKARA (Dispatches) - In addition to thousands of deaths and unprecedented sorrow, the world's major earthquakes in the last 50 years also created nearly \$1 trillion in economic damage, according to Anadolu Agency (AA) data.

The magnitude 9.1 earthquake and tsunami that struck Japan's Tohoku on March 11, 2011, claimed the lives of nearly 20,000 people and caused 70 million cubic meters of rubble, data from the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) shows.

The Tohoku earthquake also created the most extensive property loss at \$360 billion. It is also the most expensive in world history regarding insured losses, which stood at \$47 billion, according to the Insurance Information Institute (I.I.I.).

The Great Hanshin disaster, a 6.9 magnitude quake in Japan in 1995, led to a death toll of over 6,400 with \$200 billion in economic damage.

The 8 magnitude Sichuan earthquake in 2008 in southern China, which caused the deaths of more than 87,000 people, resulted in an estimated damage of \$150 billion.

The U.S. experienced one of its most costly earthquakes, Northridge, on Jan. 17, 1994, when a 6.7 magnitude earthquake shook Los Angeles, California. The economic damage was calculated as \$50 billion.

It was the second-largest earthquake in world history in terms of insured losses at \$31 billion, according to I.I.I.

## Cereal Output Rises 26% y/y in 2022

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Latest figures by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of United Nations show that cereal production in Iran rose by more than a fourth in 2022.

The figures covered in a Tuesday report by the official IRNA news agency were taken from the Crop Prospects and Food Situation, a quarterly report by the UN food agency which was released earlier this month. The figures showed that Iran had produced an estimated 20.6 million metric tons (mt) of cereals last year, up 26% from 2021. They indicated that Iran's cereal stocks had reached 12.4 million mt in 2022, up 5.9% from the previous year.

Iran, the world's 18th most populous country, ranked eighth globally last year in terms of the size of cereal stocks, showed the UN food agency report.

Tables in the quarterly report showed that Iran had produced 13 million mt of wheat last year, up from 10.1 million mt in 2021. Rice paddy production in Iran increased by half a million mt year on year last year to reach 3.5 million mt while coarse grains output in the country reached 4.1 million mt from 3.2 million mt reported in 2021.

Forecasts by FAO showed that Iran's cereal production will reach over 20.4 million mt in 2023 while stocks would drop slightly to 12.2 million mt. Iran has introduced measures to ensure its population would have proper access to food supplies amid a global food crunch caused by the war in Ukraine and amid sanctions imposed by the United States which has affected trade between Iran and other countries.

## West Seeks to...

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"They need to abandon the win-lose scenario and change their attitude toward Iran," Naziri Asl said in an address to a session of the IAEA Board of Governors.

"The ineffectiveness of this authoritarian approach has been proven many times in relation to Iran," Naziri Asl said.

Naziri Asl also slammed repeated statements by certain countries urging Iran to implement its commitments as per the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), which was unilaterally abandoned by the United States three years after its conclusion.

These countries have not only deliberately mixed up Iran's voluntary commitments with its legal commitments, but they have also made their utmost efforts to hide the very real fact that the JCPOA has other parties and annexes that must be implemented by its signatories without further delay, he maintained.

Naziri Asl was apparently referring to a statement to the IAEA Board of Governors' meeting this week by the three European signatories to the JCPOA - France, Germany and the UK - which accused Iran of "unabated and dangerous nuclear escalation."

The trio claimed that Iran continues to install new centrifuge cascades, including advanced centrifuges, in significant numbers and voiced their concern over the country's announcements to install further advanced centrifuges and cascades at the Fordow nuclear facility. "This unprecedented enrichment at up to 83.7 percent U-235 is an extremely grave escalation," they said.

The US also called the discovery of the particles "an alarming development."

Iran rejected the claim, asserting that there has been "no deviation" in its peaceful nuclear activities.

## IRGC...

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"Shahid Mahdavi warship is like a mobile maritime city ready to carry out ocean missions ... to create sustainable security of sea communication lines and provide aid to the commercial and fishing fleets of the Islamic Republic and regional countries," The IRGC Navy commander said.

Tangsiri also said the elite military force has converted rocket-launching vessels into missile-launching ones in an "unprecedented" move in the world.

"By the joining of the specialized naval equipment ... and the conversion of Ashura- and Tareq-calls rocket-launching vessels into the missile-launching ones with a minimum range of 10 and maximum of more than 180 kilometers, the IRGC Navy has managed to take an important and effective step in upgrading the level of its naval combat power. It is somehow unprecedented in the world," IRGC Navy Chief said.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subject to negotiations.

Also speaking at Thursday's event, IRGC Chief Major General Hossein Salami said whenever the enemy acts forcefully against the Islamic Revolution, Iranians appear stronger against it.

"The enemy has come to the scene with all its strength, but the more it acts, the less it gains and the farther it gets from its so-called objectives," he added.

Some fugitives portray themselves as benefactors and saviors of the nation while they demand the enemies intensify the embargo and isolation targeting Iran so that medicine and food do not reach the Iranian people, Salami stressed.

"In the Iranians' mentality, this kind of behavior is disgusting and shameful," Salami noted.

## U.S. Sanctions...

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Latest statement by Iranian Oil Ministry and reports by international tanker tracking services show that Iran has been shipping record amounts of oil to Asian customers since late 2022.

Sales of Iranian petroleum products and petrochemicals have also increased over the last year with customs figures showing the country has earned tens of billions of dollars from such exports.

However, U.S. Deputy Treasury Secretary Wally Adeyemo claimed in a Thursday statement that the new sanctions are a sign of US "ability to disrupt Iran's foreign financial networks."

Brian O'Toole, a former Treasury Department official, also described the new sanctions as "a pretty big deal" and claimed that they would put a dent in Iran's ability to keep moving oil and get paid for it.

## Surveying Legal, Human Rights Aspects of Martyr Soleimani's Assassination

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A meeting to survey the legal and human rights aspects of Martyr Soleimani's terroristic assassination, was held in the presence of over 100 diplomats, scientific and academic personalities on sidelines of 52nd UN Human Rights Council.

The Permanent Ambassador of Iran in Geneva-based UN Office Ali Bahraini gave a lecture and Abbas Kadhodaie, the head of the Legal Committee to Pursue Martyr Soleimani's Assassination presented a report on the moves made to observe justice.

Three legal experts from Iraq and France, Dr. Mahmud Khlalil Jaafar, a professor of international laws at Baghdad University, Eli Hatam and Zohreh Mahi, residing in France on Thursday gave lectures on the issue in the online panel discussion.

Ali Bahraini elaborated on some personality traits of Martyr Soleimani and said that he was a strong defender of the human rights, adding, "The criminal act of assassinating Soleimani was not only obvious breaching of the human rights and the international laws, but also violation of the rule of laws and threatening the international and regional peace and stability seriously, and therefore the criminals involved in this crime need to be punished justly."

## Senior Iran, Iraq Border Guard Commanders Hold Security Meeting

TEHRAN (MNA) - The border guard commanders of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Iraq attended a meeting in the Iraqi Kurdistan region to discuss security issues.

This meeting was held in the city of Sulaymaniyah with the presence of the commanders of the border guards of Iraq and Iran.

The two sides discussed ways of controlling the borders and creating an agreed mechanism to control the border areas between the two countries, especially the areas related to the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

It was agreed to form a committee from both sides to delineate the borders of Iran and Iraq and prevent infiltrators from entering the borders of the two countries.

The two sides examined ways to control smuggling and smugglers from the two countries. According to this report, the mechanism for the development of trade exchanges between Iraq and Iran at the Basmakh border crossing was also discussed.

## Iran Warns Against Politicization of Aid Required by Afghan People

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Iran's ambassador to the United Nations warns against withholding the humanitarian aid that is direly needed by millions of people in Afghanistan, for political purposes.

Amir Saied Irvani made the remarks before a United Nations Security Council briefing on the situation in Afghanistan. "The situation [in Afghanistan] remains dire, with an estimated 28 million people projected to require humanitarian and protection assistance in 2023," the envoy said.

"However, we must be cautious of the politicization or exploitation of humanitarian aid for political purposes," Irvani asserted, noting, "Such practices would harm the Afghan people who depend on this aid for their survival."

"It is also crucial that the release of frozen assets belonging to the Afghan people is expedited and not subject to political conditions. This is critical for restoring the Afghan economy and saving lives."

Afghanistan has about \$9 billion in assets overseas, including \$7 billion in the United States. The rest is mostly in Germany, the United Arab Emirates, and Switzerland. "To ensure that the Afghan people receive the support they need, humanitarian aid must remain impartial and unconditional," Irvani, however, stated.

He reminded that Iran was hosting more than five million Afghan people, despite receiving minimum support from the international community and donor countries and facing challenges caused by the inhumane unilateral sanctions of the United States and its Western allies.

The ambassador, meanwhile, repeated Iran's call for formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan, which has been under the Taliban's control since the US's withdrawal of its forces from the Central Asian country in 2021.

## Iran Not After Africa's Wealth, But Its Progress

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Tehran seeks to enhance relations with African countries to help those nations progress and thrive.

"In the past centuries, Western countries have looted the wealth of African countries by exercising domination and establishing colonial rule," Raisi said while addressing the first Scientific and Economic Cooperation meeting between Iran and Africa.

"But for the Islamic Republic of Iran, the development of relations with Africa is

not for the wealth of this region, as [Iran] seeks the progress and welfare of all nations, including African nations," he said.

He added that Iran and Western African countries should become aware of the capacities, resources, and grounds for cooperation and exchanging their experiences.

Despite the extensive sanctions targeting the Islamic Republic, he noted, Iran has managed to make remarkable progress in the fields of technology, engineering, medical equipment, medicine, nanotechnology, agricultural equipment, biological technologies, and modern technologies.

Raisi also pointed to the common, foreign-backed terrorist threats faced by Iran and Africa, saying, "With its human and natural talents and capacities, Africa can make significant progress through unity, coherence, and resistance against colonial policies."

## Iran Committed to...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian envoy also said that armed conflicts have devastating and disproportionate effects on women and girls, who are often the main victims of violence, displacement, and human rights abuses.

The international community, she went on, should use diplomacy and dialogue in order to find political solutions to conflict hotspots and engage women in all stages of the peace process.

During Tuesday's debate, U.S. Ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield claimed that women and girls in Iran, among other places, are facing violence. Some Western countries also echoed the allegation.

Ershadi said Iran categorically rejects unjustified references made to Iran at this meeting by certain member states.

"Iranian women are active in various fields, including science, education, and politics, and play a crucial role in society," she said.

She also raised concerns about the restrictions imposed on women by Afghanistan's ruling Taliban government.

Ershadi warned that the Israeli regime is endangering the security of Palestinian women through occupation and siege.

She noted that some countries selectively apply international law and human rights to advance their political interests, and use UN platforms to push their agenda while remaining silent when it comes to the human rights violations and atrocities committed against Palestinian women and girls by the Israeli regime.

"It is concerning that these certain states shamelessly support the Israeli regime's apartheid policies as self-defense while disregarding the suffering and oppression of Palestinian women. Such political approaches can erode the credibility of the UN," the envoy noted.

## Iran Buys More Russian...

FROM PAGE 1

Last week's deal is believed to be a government-to-government agreement that will most likely be executed by a select band of well-connected Russian exporters. As such, the extremely costly discharge delays will be mitigated as these cheaper shipments will reportedly go straight to the front of the discharge queue.

Food security is a priority for the Iranian government, especially in light of the ongoing riots. Drought drastically decreased domestic production in the 2021 harvest, culminating in record wheat imports of 8Mt in the year to June 2022.

In Iran's crop year ending August 2022, the Agriculture Ministry reported wheat production of 11.5Mt off 4.9M hectares, an increase of 45pc compared to the previous

season. A far more favourable growing season, a 50pc fall in the subsidised price for fertiliser and pesticides, and an increase in the planted area following a 130pc increase in the government's guaranteed purchase price were the primary contributing factors.

Wheat is considered a staple in Iran, and the government purchases it from farmers every crop year to build up its reserves and regulate supply to the market over time. The government has purchased 7.5Mt of wheat from local farmers following last year's harvest, up from 4.5Mt the previous year. However, despite the significant jump in production, wheat imports are still expected to be around 5.5Mt in the current marketing year, assuming the hard currency issues are resolved soon. In the five seasons prior to

2021-22, wheat imports averaged just 1.2Mt annually.

Iran was Russia's third biggest wheat customer in the 2022 calendar year, importing a total of 1.8Mt, down 55pc compared to 2021 shipments of 4Mt. The biggest importer of Russian wheat last year was Turkey with 4Mt, down 5.2pc, followed by Egypt, which registered a 12.6pc rise to 3.5Mt. Trailing Iran on the list was Saudi Arabia with 1.5Mt, up 119pc, and Algeria with 1Mt, up 270pc.

Iran's barley production in its 2021-22 crop year was up 11pc to 3Mt, on par with the average of the past five years. Imports are pegged at 2.7Mt in the 2022-23 marketing year, slightly higher than the five-year average of 2.5Mt as stockfeed manufacturers increase barley inclusion rates at the expense of wheat.



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## Brady Dismisses Notion of Ending Second Retirement

**NEW YORK (Dispatches)** - Tom Brady jokingly cited his new family responsibilities as his reasoning against ending his second retirement from the NFL and returning for a 24th season. "Anyone who thinks I have time to come back to the NFL has never adopted a 2 month old kitten for their daughter," Brady wrote yesterday on Twitter. Brady's response on social media came after The Rich Eisen Show suggested that the decorated quarterback could make another comeback, this time with the Miami Dolphins.

## Brandt to Miss Two Games With Torn Muscle

**BERLIN (Dispatches)** - Borussia Dortmund midfielder Julian Brandt has been ruled out for two weeks with a torn thigh muscle, the club announced. The Germany midfielder was subbed off after just five minutes in the 2-0 loss at Chelsea on Tuesday which eliminated Dortmund in the Champions League last 16. The club tweeted Brandt "tore a muscle fibre in the thigh" and will miss the club's upcoming derby match at Schalke, along with their home clash with Cologne.

# Bayern, AC Milan Reach Champions League Quarters

**MUNICH (Dispatches)** - Bayern Munich forward Eric-Maxim Choupo-Moting scored against his former club and Serge Gnabry added a late second as the Germans beat Paris St Germain 2-0 today to reach the Champions League quarter-finals.

The 33-year-old Choupo-Moting, who played for PSG from 2018-20, tapped in from Leon Goretzka's assist in the 61st minute and substitute Gnabry struck in the 89th minute to seal the hosts' 3-0 aggregate win after a 1-0 victory in Paris.

The Germans made sure of their last-eight spot after shutting out PSG superstars Lionel Messi and Kylian Mbappe and are one of the title favourites going into the last eight.

"In the first half, we didn't do what we had talked about before very well," Bayern coach Julian Nagelsmann said. "There was too much space."

"But we defended better in the second half and were dangerous on the ball. In the end, we deserved to win."

"If we show maximum hunger with emotion and we couple that with our quality then we can achieve anything."

PSG's long wait to win Europe's premier club trophy for the first time goes on.

Without injured forward Neymar, the French team were sharper in the early stages and went close through Mbappe and a double effort from Messi in the 25th minute.

Bayern gradually took control, however, and had a chance when Jamal Musiala's 32nd-minute shot was blocked by keeper Gianluigi Donnarumma.

Despite PSG captain Marquinhos being taken off with a rib injury in the 36th minute, the visitors almost went ahead when under-pressure Bayern keeper Yann Sommer lost possession in the box.

Vitinha's shot with the goal at his mercy was cleared on the line by Matthijs de Ligt in what proved to be a pivotal moment in the game.

The Dutch defender had made an almost identical stop against VfB Stuttgart in the league last week.

With Mbappe largely quiet, it was in-form Choupo-Moting who struck just past the hour for his 17th goal in all competitions this season.

PSG attempted to bounce back instantly and Sergio Ramos's header was saved by Sommer before the Spaniard headed wide but their hopes were shattered when Gnabry rounded off a quick break with the second Bayern goal.

Meanwhile seven-time winners AC Milan



reached the Champions League quarter-finals for the first time in 11 years as a disciplined display earned them a drab 0-0 draw at Tottenham Hotspur today and a 1-0 aggregate victory.

On a freezing night in north London the Italians comfortably protected the slender advantage they established in the first leg of their last-16 tie at the San Siro as Tottenham huffed and puffed to little effect and exited with a whimper.

Tottenham failed to muster an attempt on target in the first half as their frustration boiled over with manager Antonio Conte booked for letting his emotions get the better of him while they had defender Cristian Romero sent off late on.

Milan could have made it a more comfortable night had they taken any of the good chances they created but in the end a masterclass of game management saw them through.

While Stefano Pioli's Milan can look forward with optimism, Tottenham's season is fizzling out after a dismal week in which they also lost in the FA Cup to second-tier Sheffield United and to Wolverhampton Wanderers in the Premier League.

Milan may be some way off returning to their European pomp but while they lack the household names of the late 1980s and early 1990s, Pioli's team had too much craft for a meek Tottenham side who were booed at the final whistle.

"We knew it would be tough, but we managed. I asked the players to show character. We never gave up, and we deserved to progress," Pioli said. "We made it to the quarters, now let's see what happens in the draw."

## Conte Casts Doubt on Spurs Future

**LONDON (Dispatches)** - Antonio Conte's dismal record in the Champions League continued as his Tottenham Hotspur side exited the competition in the last 16 after a dreary 0-0 draw at home to AC Milan.

Tottenham never really threatened to overturn a 1-0 deficit from the first leg and went out with a whimper and boos from the home fans whose patience is running out.

Conte returned to the technical area after missing the last four games following gallbladder surgery but was as subdued as his team on a freezing night in north London.

In six Champions League campaigns with Juventus, Inter Milan, Chelsea and Tottenham, the Italian has only managed to reach the Champions League quarter-finals once.

And with his contract up in June, Wednesday's defeat felt like the beginning of the end of an era even if his side remain in contention to finish in the Premier League top four.

Whether or not Conte remains for the rest of the season is not certain, judging by his comments to Italy's Amazon Prime.

"I continue to work, I have a contract with Tottenham. I respect the contract. At the end of the season, assessments will be made with the club in the most serene way," he said.

## Swiatek Starts From Scratch in Indian Wells WTA Title Defense

**INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches)** - Iga Swiatek, learning to navigate the expectations piled on a world number one, says she's looking forward not back as she launches her title defence at the Indian Wells ATP and WTA Masters.

The 21-year-old from Warsaw took tennis by storm in 2022, her early-season victories including prestigious wins at Doha, Indian Wells and Miami.

She'd finish the year with two Grand Slam titles at the French Open and US Open, but said Wednesday she is trying to "not really think about what happened last year and remember that's a different story."

Swiatek was toppled by Elena Rybakina in the Australian Open round of 16, and after defending her Doha WTA title last month she was stunned in the Dubai final by Barbora Krejickova.

"Sometimes it's also important to remember that you can lose," Swiatek said. "There are other players who are also playing great tennis. Last season spoiled me a little bit."

She admitted that a stream of easy match wins — she hasn't played a three-setter this year — might have let a little complacency creep in.

"I still have to kind of remember that I'm going to have tight matches and to fight for every ball," she said.

While she and her coach assess each defeat and work to make adjustments, she said she tries to tune out criticism from outside.

Swiatek herself was pleased with her play in Doha and Dubai — noting that reaching both finals was, in fact, a strong result even if her loss to Krejickova, a former French Open champion now 30th in the world — drew scrutiny.

"Last year, before all this huge streak, before winning all these tournaments, I would be so happy with the result, but because of these comments right now I felt like 'Oh, that's not enough,'" she said.

"So I'm trying not to read a lot of these things and I don't want it to influence me because I'm happy with the work I've made and with how I played in, Doha and Dubai."

# Nakashima Bests Isner at Indian Wells



second to see off the big-serving Isner before a crowd that included Kansas City Chiefs quarterback Patrick Mahomes and his family.

"Coming to this tournament, it's always super exciting for me," said Nakashima, who made his tour debut at Indian Wells in 2018.

"Growing up here, close by in San Diego, it's one of the tournaments where I grew up

**INDIAN WELLS (Dispatches)** - Rising American Brandon Nakashima beat veteran John Isner 7-6(7) 6-3 to set up a second round meeting with Daniil Medvedev in first round action at Indian Wells.

Nakashima, 21, saved a set point in the first breaker and stepped up his defence in the second round.

coming here as a little kid, watching all the top pros.

"So to be able to play here now against another top American on the centre court here, is a super special feeling."

He will have his work cut out for him when he faces world number six Medvedev, who has won three consecutive titles and is on a 14-match winning streak.

In other first round action, Australia's Jordan Thompson crushed Frenchman Gael Monfils 6-3 6-1 and Diego Schwartzman made quick work of fellow Argentinian Federico Coria 6-1 6-2.

Ugo Humbert will face hard hitting Canadian Denis Shapovalov after the Frenchman topped Bernabe Zapata Miralles of Spain 6-2 7-6(6).

Taiwan's Wu Tung-lin, ranked 175th, earned his first ATP tour victory after seeing off Kazakh Alexander Bublik 6-4 6-4. He will face 10th seed Cameron Norrie in the next round.

## World Cup Study Confirms Fears Around Player Health

**MANCHESTER (Dispatches)** - Global soccer players union FIFPRO said that the World Cup should never again be squeezed into a November-December window, and that Raphael Varane's international retirement should ring alarm bells about the sport's smothering schedule.

FIFPRO released their World Cup 2022 Post-Tournament Review and Player Survey on Thursday, and said the results confirmed their fears around players' mental and physical fatigue and injury risk.

Varane helped France reach the World Cup Final - then announced on Feb. 3 he was ending his international career over a "suffocating" schedule.

"(Varane's) decision should really, really make competition organisers nervous, because it's ultimately those players who are on the field creating the game, they're creating the product that is being sold by everybody ... and they're the players the fans come to see," FIFPRO General Secretary Jonas Baer-Hoffmann said during a video conference call on Tuesday.

"And if they're taking career choices of that drastic nature, based on their physical and their mental health, caused by the pressure that is on them, that is what we've been warning about."

Varane had just eight days between the World Cup Final and his first game back with his club Manchester United.

Sixty-four World Cup players were surveyed, and a lack of preparation and recovery time, and the resulting increased health risks were the key takeaways. Only 11% of players surveyed favoured the November/December World Cup timing.



## Klinsmann Aims To Put Smile Back On Son's Face

**SEOUL (Dispatches)** - South Korea coach Juergen Klinsmann will look to lift Son Heung-min out of his on-going run of poor form when the Tottenham Hotspur striker joins up with his national team for the German's first matches in charge later this month.

Klinsmann was officially unveiled as Paulo Bento's replacement as South Korea head coach at a press conference in Seoul on Thursday and the 58-year-old outlined his desire to bring an end to Son's current slump.

"I'm a big fan of Sonny," said Klinsmann of a player who finished joint-top scorer in the English Premier League last season. "He had a difficult World Cup because he was not healthy."

"I saw all the games and I felt for him but I think this is a normal period. All players go through ups and downs. The situation also at Tottenham is not so easy."

"I hope I'm going to see him in two weeks and he comes with a smile and is hungry for the national team."

Son scored 23 times for Tottenham in the Premier League last season to finish level at the summit of the scorers' chart with Liverpool's Mohamed Salah but since then the 30-year-old has only netted five times in the league.

He was forced to play in a protective face mask during the World Cup after sustaining an eye-socket fracture playing Marseille in the UEFA Champions League weeks before travelling to Qatar and his performances were subdued.

Son's form has continued to fall short of his previous standards since returning from the World Cup, where the Koreans were knocked out in the last 16 by Brazil.

