

Iranian Authorities Deported 18 Pakistani Migrants Who Had Illegally Entered the Country and the Illegal Immigrants Were Handed Over to Levies Officials at the Rahdari Gate of MirJaveh-Taftan Border

IRAN NEWS

The Secretary of the Association Of Audio-Video Appliances Manufacturers Has Said That Production of TV Sets in Iran Has Risen Over 25% During the Last Iranian Calendar Year 1401 (Ending on March 20)

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Iran Blasts West's Instrumental Use of Human Rights

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent representative to the United Nations Office and other international organizations in Geneva has censured Western governments for using human rights as a political tool against the Islamic Republic following the UN Human Rights Council's approval of an anti-Tehran draft resolution.

Ali Bahraini made the remarks in a Tuesday speech ahead of voting on a draft resolution, titled "Situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran," proposed by the United Kingdom, Iceland, North Macedonia, the Republic of Moldova and Northern Ireland at the 52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council.

The anti-Iran draft resolution was approved after 23 member states voted in favor, eight countries were against and 16 others abstained. "The draft of the resolution that the Council is about to put to vote, submitted by Iceland and Britain as its main sponsors, is completely unjustifiable and rejected by Iran," Bahraini said.

Stressing that the supporters of the resolution hide themselves behind the title of human rights, the Iranian diplomat said certain states exploit the organization to advance their own political objectives. **See Page 7**

Tehran to Help Syria Boost Air Defenses

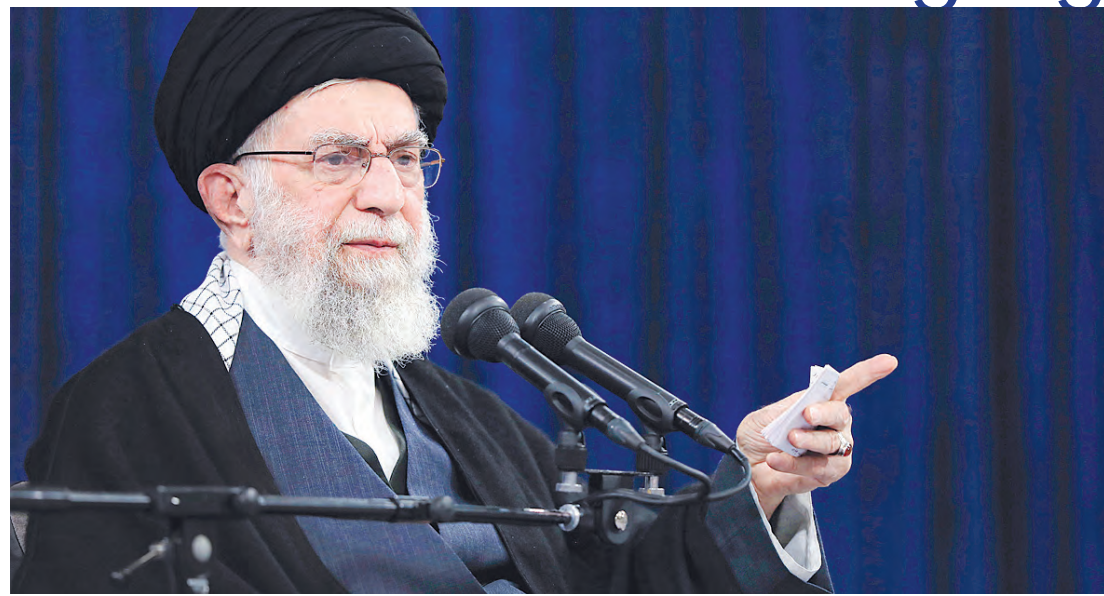
TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian defense official has reaffirmed Tehran's commitment to the security of friendly countries, saying the Islamic Republic considers itself "obliged" to help reinforce Syria's air defense capabilities in repelling Israeli attacks on the Arab country.

Brigadier General Hamzeh Qalandari, deputy defense minister for international affairs, made the remarks on the sidelines of a ceremony to mark the International Mine Awareness Day and Assistance in Mine Action in the capital, Tehran, on Tuesday.

"We find ourselves committed to help friendly countries, like Syria, improve their air defenses and fend off aerial attacks," he said, as he talked about the export of defense products at the event.

The deputy defense minister further noted that Syria used to be a "defenseless" country in the face of Israeli aerial attacks in the past, but now Damascus is repelling a large number of air strikes carried out by the occupying Israeli regime. **See Page 7**

Leader Says State of the World Order Is Changing



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei pointed to the internal crises in the occupying Israeli regime, saying that Zionists are leaving Palestine before 25-year deadline he had predicted.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting on Tuesday with the heads of Iran's three branches of government, a number of parliament members, current and former authorities, and senior managers of various organizations.

The meeting was held on the 13th day of the holy month of Ramadan at Imam Khomeini Hossaineh in Tehran. Senior Iranian officials, parliament members, and cultural activists were among the participants in the meeting with the Leader.

At the start of his address to the meeting, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution pointed out that different sectors of society affect one another, adding that the economic problems that people in a society face come with a negative impact on the cultural field of that society.

Ayatollah Khamenei recalled the naming of the new Iranian year of 1402 (which began on March 21, 2023) as the "Inflation Control and Growth in Production" and urged the government official to seriously pursue tackling the economic problems.

The Leader stressed that all the government apparatuses need to intensify their efforts to materialize the slogan of the new year.

Meanwhile, he stressed that focusing on the economic field should not come at the expense of forgetting about the cultural field.

He further stressed that all the country's vast resources and potential have to be employed in line with materializing the goals of curbing inflation and an increase in domestic production.

Elsewhere, he stressed the importance of expanding foreign relations, noting that the world does not only consist of the US and Europe as there are some 200 other countries.

Ayatollah Khamenei went on to point to the crises in the Israeli regime, saying that the different crises that the regime grapples with has accelerated the destruction of the regime before the 25 years deadline that he had previously predicted.

"We said that the Zionist regime would not see the next 25 years. But they (Zionists) were in a hurry and want to leave sooner."

The Leader continued to stress the necessity of transparent and stable economic and financial policies by the government officials as the solution to secure the confidence of the investors. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Zionists Should Get Due Answer

While the world is busy with its own domestic problems and issues like Russia-Ukraine war and inflation, the Zionist regime continues its atrocities and crimes wherever it needs necessary and unfortunately nobody tries to stop this savage and terrorist regime.

In recent days the Israeli forces have stepped up their terrorist and criminal actions in Palestine and even in Syria and unfortunately the international bodies have remained indifferent and silent against these crimes and they are just concentrated on Russia and what is going in between Russia and Ukraine.

The crimes of Israelis against the Palestinians have increased in order to hide what is going in Israel and recent chaos in this fake country. The Zionists have targeted many Iranian military advisors in Syria and many young Palestinians in recent days to distract the world from protests inside Israel.

Reacting to these crimes, Iran said Israel had always based its survival on sparking wars and instability in the region but it cannot escape internal collapse anymore.

Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks in a tweet, days after two Iranian military advisers were martyred in Israeli airstrikes on Syria. Kanaani also argued that Israel tends to ramp up its adventurous acts whenever diplomacy comes to the fore in West Asia.

"The more the path of diplomacy and convergence is strengthened in the West Asia region, the more the adventurous measures of the usurping Zionist regime increase," he wrote.

"The reason is obvious; The existence and survival of the fake Israeli regime have always been based on war, insecurity and sowing discord in the region, and of course, it now has no escape from internal collapse."

Israel's latest crime came at a time when the occupying entity is in the grip of one of the most serious domestic crises in its history with uproar over Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's now-delayed plans to overhaul the judicial system.

This is while regional countries such as Iran and Saudi Arabia have stepped up efforts to resolve their differences and mend ties.

Of course the Islamic Republic of Iran is the only country which has always raised its voice against the atrocities of the Zionists and has urged the world to take due actions against this savage regime which has been busy with shedding blood since the first day of its establishment to survive. **See Page 7**

IOM Assistance Sought To Repatriate Sri Lankans Stranded in Iran

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The assistance of the International Organization for Migration (IOM) has been sought to repatriate Sri Lankans stranded in Azerbaijan and Iran.

The Ambassador of Sri Lanka to Iran G.M.V. Wishwanath Aponso met with the Chief of Mission of the IOM in the Islamic Republic of Iran Lalini Veerassamy at the Sri Lanka Embassy in Tehran and exchanged views on international migration, its impact on the socio-economic development of states, increasing trend of illegal migrants from South Asian countries to Iran, joint mechanism for the governance of illegal migration, repatriation issues of Sri Lankan illegal migrants in Iran, human smuggling and trafficking.

UN Migration Chief Lalini Veerassamy expressed the view that due to the instability in various regions of the world and the economic crisis affecting a number of countries, there have been significant increase of illegal migrants and refugees especially in the West Asia region. She briefed on the ongoing work of the IOM office in Tehran. **See Page 7**

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Iran Calls for Preventing Arms Race in Outer Space

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - First Counselor of Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations called for preventing an arms race in outer space and averting a severe threat to international peace and security.

"Iran believes that outer space and other celestial bodies are humanity's common heritage and must be used only for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all countries," Heidar Ali Balouji said in a statement addressing the United Nations Disarmament Commission.

"The prevention of an arms race in outer space can be a first step towards achieving this goal and averting a severe threat to international peace and security," he added.

Reading the statement, Balouji said: "The world is facing multiple and interlinking global threats and challenges, including those posed by weapons of mass destruction, particularly nuclear weapons, which continue to pose an existential threat to humanity. Despite this, international efforts towards nuclear disarmament are eroding, and the taboo against the use or threat of use of nuclear weapons is fading away."

He added: "The ongoing escalation of political and military tensions, increasing military budgets, and the renewed and expanded nuclear arms race through the replacement or upgrading of nuclear arsenals are all harbingers of a dangerous future in terms of international security. The increase in the quantity and quality of nuclear arsenals, nuclear sharing together with military doctrines lowering the threshold for the use of nuclear weapons, means that the threat of a nuclear catastrophe is closer than ever before. For instance, both the US and the UK have increased their nuclear weapons budget and arsenal."

Balouji further said: "On the other hand, the two consecutive failures of the NPT review conferences in 2015 and 2022 are clear examples of the lack of accountability and political will by the NWSs and those advocating nuclear deterrence to honor their explicit legal obligations regarding nuclear disarmament based on Article VI of the NPT." **See Page 7**

No Gasoline Price Hike on the Agenda

TEHRAN (IP) – Oil Minister Javad Owji said that he has told again and again that a gasoline price hike is not on the agenda of the Parliament and Oil Ministry.

Owji pointed also to the oil price and told the reporters that in the OPEC Plus meeting, it was decided that the member states reduce 3,650,000 barrels of their production, an issue which would lead to the 8-10 percent increase in the oil price.

Owji also said in response to a question about the liquidation of Iraq's gas debt to Iran: "We are pursuing the liquefaction of gas money from Iraq; the money should be spent on buying medicine and similar items".

Iran, Saudi FMs Reportedly To Meet in Beijing

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iranian and Saudi foreign ministers will hold their first meeting in years in Beijing on Thursday (today), Iranian and Saudi media reported.

Citing sources, Saudi newspaper Asharq Al-Awsat reported on Tuesday that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan will meet in Beijing on Thursday.

The officials will meet to activate the agreement reached last month in China to restore diplomatic relations, according to the Saudi paper.

The sources said Thursday's talks have been preceded by a series of three telephone calls between the foreign ministers that tackled the future steps that will be taken between their countries in line with the landmark agreement that was brokered by China, as well as activate other deals between them.

Beijing was chosen for the meeting between the foreign ministers as an extension of its positive role in brokering the agreement and facilitating communication between the Saudi Kingdom and Iran, said the sources.

Iran and Saudi Arabia signed on March 10 a Chinese-brokered deal in Beijing to



restore their relations in a period of two months.

According to the joint statement put out by Iran, Saudi Arabia, and China, "The three countries announce that an agreement has been reached between the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia and the Islamic Republic of Iran, that includes an agreement to resume diplomatic relations between them and re-open their embassies and missions within a period not exceeding two months, and the agreement includes their affirmation of the respect for the sovereignty of states and the non-interference in internal affairs of states."

The statement added, "They also agreed that the ministers of foreign affairs of both countries shall meet to implement this, arrange for the return of their ambassadors, and discuss means of enhancing bilateral relations."

According to the Saudi newspaper, the March 10 agreement will be implemented within 60 days.

Iran Air Defense Units Thwart Drone Attack on Isfahan Military Site

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Defense Ministry says the country's air defense units have repelled a drone strike on a military workshop in the central city of Isfahan, where they intercepted and shot down the hostile unmanned aerial vehicle as it was approaching the site.

The ministry made the announcement in a Wednesday morning statement, saying that its Amir al-Mo'menin workshop complex had come under attack from a Micro Aerial Vehicle (MAV) the previous night, but the complex's air defenses successfully thwarted the attack.

The statement noted that the unsuccessful attack did not cause any loss of life or damage to the workshop.

On January 29, the Defense Ministry announced that one of its workshop complexes in Isfahan had come under attack from a number of Micro Aerial Vehicles (MAVs), but the complex's air defenses managed to repel the attack.

The ministry underscored that the botched attack did not cause any casualties and only led to minor damage to the roof of a workshop. The complex, it added, continued its ordinary operations following the attack.

Gov't Not to Link Economy With Foreign World



TEHRAN (MNA) – President Ebrahim Raisi said Tuesday that despite pursuing regional policies and strengthening international cooperation, the government did not link livelihood of people to any foreign will.

President Raisi made the remarks in a meeting with the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, who received a group of government officials for a meeting on Tuesday.

During the meeting with the Leader, the president presented a report on his administration's record in the economic field.

"During last year (1401 which ended on March 21, 2023), investment growth was 7.7%, production growth in industry was 8%, oil and gas growth was 9%, in machinery and equipment the growth was 19%, in auto industry it was 19%, in some heavy industries such as road construction machinery it was up to 101% and in other production categories such as steel and household appliances fields, we witnessed high growth as well," he said.

Raisi also said that "despite pursuing regional policies and boosting international cooperation, the government did not link livelihood of people and the progress of the country to any foreign will."

Iran, Russia to Finalize Rasht-Astara Railway Completion Deal

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Russia will conclude the final agreement on completing the Rasht-Astara railway project by the end of next Iranian month (21 May 2023), a source familiar with the issue said.

"The most important corridor of the country is currently the North-South corridor, and the most important railway project is Rasht-Astara," the Deputy Head of Construction and Development of Transportation Infrastructure Company for Railroad, Ports and Airports Expansion Abbas Khatibi said.

Serious negotiations are underway between Iran and Russia on participating in both the financial and technical parts of the Rasht-Astara railway and the completion of the north-south corridor, Khatibi added.

By the end of 21 May this year, the agreement with Russia will be finalized, he stressed.

Answering a question about the presence of Azerbaijan in the project, Khatibi noted that negotiations are underway and Iran trying to set a bilateral agreement with Russia, after which, with the accession of Azerbaijan, this agreement will become tripartite.

Extending Mandate of Special Rapporteur Null and Void

TEHRAN (MNA) – The secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi has rejected the extension of the mandate of the imposed UN special rapporteur on the situation of human rights in Iran as null and void.

The secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi reacted to earlier today's anti-Iran resolution at the UN Human Rights Council and the extension of the UN Special Rapporteur on the situation of human rights in the Islamic Republic of Iran Javaid Rehman and said "The international community is witnessing the most radical examples of politicizing and instrumental abuse of international mechanisms in relation to the issue of human rights; A process that has

reduced the credibility of these mechanisms, especially the Human Rights Council."

Gharibabadi said that the low vote for the resolution extending the rapporteur's mandate indicates different countries' dissatisfaction with politicizing the human rights issue, saying that the low backing that the resolution received came despite all the existing pressures and threats.

"It was once again proven that this resolution was political in nature rather than being human rights. And it lacks validity and that the legitimacy and acceptability of the reporting mechanism against Iran has greatly decreased," the Iranian judicial official said.

Iran Hails Mauritania's Support for Palestine

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The foreign minister of Iran praised the Islamic Republic of Mauritania for supporting the Palestinian cause.

In a meeting with Mauritania's Minister of Islamic Affairs Dah Ould Sidi Ould Amar Taleb, held in Tehran on Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian congratulated the African country's government and people on the holy month of Ramadan.

Amirabdollahian also thanked Mauritania for participating in the International Exhibition of the Holy Quran in Iran.

He also extended warm greetings on behalf of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Mauritanian President Mohamed Ould Ghazouani.



The Iranian foreign minister further hailed Mauritania's government and people for their support for the Palestinian cause.

The Mauritanian minister, for his part, conveyed warm greetings to the Iranian president and people on behalf of his country's high-ranking officials.

He said Mauritania welcomes the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia, expressing hope that the people of both countries as well as regional and Muslim nations would benefit from the blessings of this deal.

He also praised Iran's support for the Palestinian people and said the Palestinian issue is not exclusively about the people of Palestine, but is related to the entire Muslim community.

Investment in Chabahar Free Zone Hits \$8b

CHABAHAH (IRNA) - The Chief Executive Officer of Chabahar Free Zone Amir Moghaddam has said that investment in CFZ has reached \$8b, adding that the figure is supposed to hit \$14b this year.

Moghaddam hailed the strategic position of Chabahar in Iran, saying that developments in Chabahar will affect Iran's and the world's economies.

He said that \$2b worth of investment has been made in clean energy and construction of solar cell factories has started. He also pointed to the measures that have been taken in line with the developing tourism industry.

Earlier in a meeting with the Japanese ambassador to Tehran, Kazutoshi Aikawa, Moghaddam had said that Iran's Chabahar Free Trade Zone is ready to host Japanese investors and develop scientific and research relations with the country.

He announced this region's readiness to host investors in the field of surface water management, recirculation of wastewater, completion of treatment plants, and water and sewage system based on social responsibilities.

In the meantime, Afghanistan's caretaker of the Commerce and Industry Ministry Nooruddin Azizi said that Iran's Chabahar is linked to international waters of the Indian Ocean, so it is one of the best places for investment by Afghan private and public sectors.

Majlis Reacts to Opening Azerbaijan Embassy in Zionist Regime

TEHRAN (IP) – Majlis lawmakers in a statement condemned the opening of the embassy of Azerbaijan in the occupied lands of the Zionist Regime.

Ahmad Amirabadi, Iranian MP read the statement of 210 representatives as follows:

The government of the Republic of Azerbaijan acted against the interests of the Islamic world and opened an embassy in the center of the Zionist regime and introduced its ambassador to the fake regime. In this regard, we, announce the following points:

1- This action of the Republic of Azerbaijan will have many negative political consequences against them. Later, the Muslims World will consider them accomplices of the Zionist regime in the murder and crime against the oppressed Palestinians.

2- This action is considered against an oppressed country of the Islamic world, Palestine, and causes their inalienable rights to be violated, therefore, we request the Arab and Islamic governments and the Islamic world, especially the Organization of Islamic Cooperation and the Secretariat of the Islamic Inter-Council, and the representatives of the world's freedom-loving people to condemn this action.

3- The Iranian Foreign Ministry, while sending a statement to all Islamic countries, should take the necessary diplomatic steps.

The representatives of the Islamic Republic of Iran expect the Parliament of the Republic of Azerbaijan, together with the Islamic Ummah, while in the holy month of Ramadan, the oppressed people of Palestine are attacked, tortured, and oppressed in the worst ways by the fake Zionist regime, they take a position on this action of the government of Azerbaijan.

Tehran Pleased With Washington Talk of Peace Process in Yemen

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Iran has welcomed a fresh call by the United States to help end the Yemen conflict, saying it is "pleased" with Washington's talk of the peace process in the war-torn country.

US Special Envoy for Yemen Timothy Lenderking on Tuesday urged Tehran to back a political solution to the ongoing crisis in Yemen, as the Saudi-led war enters its ninth year.

"We are pleased that the US government envoy is talking about the peace process in Yemen, a procedure that the Islamic Republic of Iran has emphasized and made efforts toward since the beginning of the war on Yemen," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani responded in a tweet on Wednesday.

Saudi Arabia and its allies launched the devastating war on Yemen in March 2015 with armed and logistical support from the US and other Western powers, leaving hundreds of thousands of Yemenis dead.

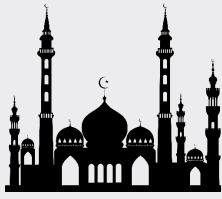
The war has also displaced millions of people, destroyed the country's infrastructure, and spawned the world's worst humanitarian catastrophe.

Ameri Appointed as Iran's Ambassador to UAE

TEHRAN (MNA) – After eight years, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran introduced Reza Ameri as the new ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the United Arab Emirates.

"Reza Ameri" served as the director general of Iranians expatriate department at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

He had also previously served as the ambassador of Iran in Algeria, Sudan and Eritrea. The Islamic Republic of Iran has not had an ambassador in the United Arab Emirates for about eight years, and Ameri is the first ambassador.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:48
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:16
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:42

82. "And Allah by His words doth prove and establish His truth, however much the sinners may hate it!"
83. But none believed in Moses except some children of his people, because of the fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them; and certainly Pharaoh was mighty on the earth and one who transgressed all bounds.
Surah 10. Jonah (82 - 83)

China to Facilitate Visa for Attending Trade Exhibitions

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Ambassador of China to Tehran Chang Hua says his embassy will facilitate visa issuance for Iranians who want to attend the exhibitions in China.

Chang made the remarks in a meeting with the members of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce and a number of Iranian traders and businessmen, who conduct trade with China, held at the place of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in Tehran.

Referring to China's growing economy, the envoy said this year is a good year for Iran-China relations, adding that during the meeting between the leaders of the two countries, important agreements were made, including the implementation of the 25-year cooperation agreement between the two countries, and a number of bilateral cooperation documents were signed in the fields of agriculture, tourism, culture, relief, and rescue, etc.

"In 2022, the value of trade between the two countries reached \$15.8 billion, which has increased by seven percent compared to the same period of the previous year. China has been Iran's largest trading partner for 10 consecutive years. Accordingly, we welcome and support the private sector of Iran to attend Chinese trade fairs and increase cooperation", the envoy stated.

He reiterated that his embassy will facilitate visa issuance for participation in the exhibitions in China. He noted that the embassy will provide special conditions for Iranians who are to attend exhibition in Canto which starts on April 15. He also said that Iran will register a record for arrival of the Chinese tourists after month of Ramadhan.

Meanwhile in the meeting Majid-Reza Hariri, the head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber, also emphasized the desire of Iran's private sector to develop business relations with China and said there are obstacles in this direction. Among other



things, issuing visas for Iranian businessmen, especially for their presence at trade fairs in China, is associated with problems, and facilitating it will definitely help the development of relations between the two sides.

He pointed to the financial and banking restrictions, adding that after President Raisi's visit to China, both countries reached good agreements on financial issues and new mechanism was defined and these agreements are not to be revealed publicly of course these mechanism have still problems and the joint chamber is working to remove the problems.

Meanwhile caretaker of the international affairs of the ICCIMA Ms. Nilofar Asadi, for her part, expressed hope the obstacles in way of trade between Iran and China would be removed and reiterated she expected the ground to be provided for the presence of the private sector especially in the 25-year agreement between the two countries.

According to the data released by China's customs administration, the value of trade between Iran and China stood at \$2.098 billion in the first two months of 2023.

Based on the released data, the two-month trade between the two countries fell 17 percent as the figure was \$2.536 billion in the first two months of 2022.

According to the data previously released by China's customs administration, the value of trade between Iran and China increased by seven percent in 2022 compared to the previous year.

Based on China's customs data, the Islamic Republic and China traded \$15.795 billion worth of commodities in 2022, \$1.035 billion more than the figure for 2021.

Developmental Actions In LSEZ in 1401



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Lamerd Special Economic Zone (LSEZ) took essential steps in last Iranian calendar year 1401 in line with the developmental goals of this big industrial center with 15 active infrastructural projects and two contracts in the petrochemical industry.

According to the public relations of Iranian Mines, Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO), the credit for implementing 15 infrastructural projects of Lamerd Special Economic Zone is 19,000 billion rials and the value of investment for implementing two contracts in the petrochemical industry is \$180m. So these projects were kick started with the goal of developing infrastructures.

This zone beside its infrastructural projects and in line with observing its social responsibility started operation for construction of Lamerd-Parsian Freeway for 50 kilometers. The freeway connects two special economic and energy industries zones of Lamerd in Fars Province and Parsian in Hormozgan Province.

By the way the second lane of the Lamerd-Khonj road is of the other executive projects of IMIDRO which will be constructed in the form of the project of creating infrastructures of big industries with 50% participation of Roads and Urban Development Ministry in a period around 18 months.

Lamerd Special Economic Zone is situated at the southern part of Fars Province and it is one of the sub-sets of IMIDRO which has been able to score the highest points among the affiliated companies of IMIDRO in terms of productivity in the past Iranian calendar year.

Over 10 Petchem Projects To Be Put Into Operation

TEHRAN (MNA) - As announced by Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC)'s Managing Director Morteza Shahmirzaei, more than 10 petrochemical projects will be put into operation in the current Iranian calendar year (started on March 21).



Referring to the slogan of the present year, which is "Inflation Control, Production Growth", the official mentioned production growth as the most important goal of the petrochemical industry this year.

"Also, the amazing plans that were implemented and noticeable measures that were taken by the NPC in the knowledge-based field in the petrochemical industry in the previous year will continue this year", Shahmirzaei further emphasized.

According to the NPC's managing director, the petrochemical sector has the highest added value in the oil industry chain.

The official has put the country's annual petrochemical production capacity at 90 million tons.

"Some products were not considered in the previous periods and we were faced with their import at the cost of five billion dollars", he said, adding, "The products of the propylene chain are of special importance and include 70 percent of the total petrochemical imports. To reduce the dependency, the petrochemical company has focused on the development of value chain projects."

The NPC's managing director further stressed that the petrochemical industry is a value and job-creating industry, which has no risk.

The official said that 69 production units (including three service units that provide services such as water, electricity, and steam for production units) are now active in the petrochemical industry of Iran, which plays a significant role in bringing foreign currency to the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Shahmirzaei stressed that domestic production should be realized in all sectors of the petrochemical industry.

A small part is still remaining so that this target will be achieved, he added.

Petrochemical Research and Technology Company and Research Institute of Petroleum Industry in addition to the other related institutes and centers are taking all efforts in this due, the official added.

Iran Agreements With Belarus to Help Enhance Trade Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - Agreements between the heads of state will considerably help boost trade between Iran and Belarus, Iran's new Ambassador to Belarus Alireza Sanei says.

"The start of my diplomatic mission coincided with two important and gratifying events - the visit of the president of Belarus to Iran and the 30th anniversary of diplomatic relations. This is a good sign. I hope that I will make a contribution to bilateral partnerships," Sanei was quoted as saying by BelTA.

Sanei noted that the visit to Tehran is an important milestone and a serious impetus to bilateral relations.

"Eight agreements were signed during the talks and they should definitely be implemented. Fortunately, our economies are complementary, hence there is good cooperation potential in such areas as manufacturing, agriculture, medicine, electronics and pharmaceuticals. We know that Belarus has retained its industrial potential, and Iran would like to buy your heavy equipment, for example, BelAZ trucks. We are



interested in potash fertilizers. In turn, we are ready to provide our medical equipment," he said.

"If we implement what the leaders agreed on, in the coming years, we will grow bilateral trade several times. I would also like to highlight the benefits offered by the EAEU [Eurasian Economic Union], where Belarus is a member. Iran has a free trade agreement with EAEU and it is supposed to be ratified in the near future."

Sanei emphasized that now is a turning point, as the world order is witnessing a transition from a unipolar world order to a multipolar one. "SCO [Shanghai Cooperation Organization] is going to play a key role. Its members include four nuclear powers and two members of the UN Security Council. The SCO member states are home to 42% of the world's population. Iran and Russia are the largest energy suppliers, and China and India are consumers. Such is the scale and influence. Belarus intends to join SCO and Iran fully supports this aspiration," he said.

Apple Exports Down by Nearly a Half in Volume Terms

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's exports of apple fell by nearly a half in volume terms in the past calendar year, according to a senior official at the country's agriculture ministry (MAJ).

MAJ's head of non-tropical fruit department Dariush Salempour said that apple exports from Iran had reached 0.55 million metric tons (mt) in the 11 months to February 19.

Salempour said that the figure was a major decline from the calendar year to late March 2022 when Iran became the second largest supplier of apple in the world after China with some 0.985 million mt of exports.

The official said, however, that total apple production in Iran in the year to March 20 reached nearly four million mt, down 7% compared to the previous year mainly because of an earlier than expected cold spell that affected the crop.

He said the total area of lands dedicated to apple farming in Iran has increased to 247,000 hectares.

"Iran is the third country in the world in terms of the area of apple farms and is the fourth largest producer of various types of apples," said Salempour.

MAJ's department for trade development announced on Tuesday that it had ordered a removal of all curbs on exports of apple and orange from Iranian borders as of early April.



Iranian Tea Exported to 27 Countries

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian tea has been exported to 27 countries in the first 11 months of Iran's previous year.

According to Iran's customs administration, a total of 33,600 tons of tea worth over \$41 million were exported from Iran during the first 11 months of the previous Iranian year (March 21- Feb. 19).

Iran's tea exports have grown by 62% in value in the first eleven months of 1401 (March 21, 2021-22) and

38% in weight compared to the year before 1400 (March 21, 2021-22), the source added.

Azerbaijan, Jordan, Uzbekistan, Afghanistan, the UAE, Ukraine, Albania, Germany, Bahrain, Belarus, Pakistan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan, Turkey, Switzerland, Sweden, Iraq, Russia, France, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Qatar, Canada, Kuwait, Georgia, the Netherlands, and India have been 27 destinations for Iranian tea.

Gasoline Consumption Rises 5% in New Year Holidays



TEHRAN (MNA) - Average daily gasoline consumption in Iran rose five percent during the New Year holidays (Norouz) (March 21-April 2), the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) announced.

As previously announced by the NIORDC managing director, the average daily gasoline consumption in Iran rose 11 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Jalil Salari also said that the country's average daily gasoline production has reached 115 million liters.

He added: "Unfortunately, gasoline consumption is rising exponentially in the country, as we had a 20 percent increase in gasoline consumption in 1400, while last year we had an 11 percent rise, and without a doubt, special attention should be paid to fuel consumption management."

There are now 29 million cars in the country, and the number is rising, and on the other hand, the amount of fuel consumption in the country is far from world standards, and cars are high-consuming, which should be taken into consideration, the official added.

The NIORDC managing director further explained that the annual entry of one million cars into the country's transportation fleet is equivalent to one billion liters of gasoline consumption, and this requires the construction of a refinery with a daily refining capacity of 150,000 to 200,000 barrels, which takes at least four to five years.

"We must think economically and manage fuel consumption so that production in the value chain is considered and we should not destroy resources and national capital with incorrect consumption", the deputy oil minister reiterated.

Over the past few years, the Islamic Republic has managed to not only become self-sufficient in gasoline production but also become a net exporter of the strategic fuel, however, the significant increase in domestic gasoline consumption in recent months has once again raised concerns about the need for imports.

India Avalanche Kills Seven Near Himalayan Pass to Tibet



GUWAHATI (Dispatches) - An avalanche killed seven tourists in India's Himalayan state of Sikkim near a mountain pass to the Chinese region of Tibet on Tuesday, with rescue workers calling off the search for bodies as night fell.

The army said at least 20 people had been rescued alive after several vehicles carrying tourists to the strategically located Nathu La pass between Sikkim and Tibet were hit by the falling snow.

Local police added that eight survivors were in critical condition.

"We are doing one more check before calling off the rescue operation, since it is getting dark and some more snow has started coming down," senior police official Tenzing Loden Lepcha told Reuters on phone.

Finland Joins NATO In Historic Shift



HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Finland formally joined NATO, its flag unfurling outside the military bloc's Brussels headquarters, in a historic policy shift brought on by Russia's invasion of Ukraine, drawing a threat from Moscow of "counter-measures".

Finland's accession, ending seven decades of military non-alignment, roughly doubles the length of the border that the North Atlantic Treaty Organization shares with Russia and bolsters its eastern flank as the war in Ukraine grinds on with no resolution in sight.

Finland's flag - a blue cross on a white background - was hoisted alongside those of the alliance's 30 other members as a military band played in bright spring sunshine.

"For almost 75 years, this great alliance has shielded our nations and continues to do so today," NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg declared at the ceremony. "But war has returned to Europe and Finland has decided to join NATO and be part of the world's most successful alliance."

Stoltenberg earlier noted that Russian President Vladimir Putin had cited opposition to NATO's eastward enlargement as one justification for invading Ukraine.

"He is getting exactly the opposite. ... Finland today, and soon also Sweden will become a full-fledged member of the alliance," Stoltenberg said.

Finnish President Sauli Niinisto said Finland's most significant contribution to NATO's common deterrence and defence would be to defend its own territory. There is still significant work to be done to coordinate this with NATO, he said.

"It is a great day for Finland and I want to say that it is an important day for NATO," Niinisto said at a joint news conference with Stoltenberg.

The Kremlin said Russia would be forced to take "counter-measures". Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu said Finland's move raised the risk of the conflict in Ukraine escalating further.

In dropping non-alignment, Russia's Foreign Ministry said, Finland was committing a dangerous historical mistake that would fray relations with Moscow and undo its status as a confidence-building presence in the Baltic Sea and Europe at large.

"This is now a thing of the past. Finland has become one of the small members of (NATO) that doesn't decide anything, losing its special voice in international affairs. We are sure that history will judge this hasty step," a ministry statement said.

Russia had said on Monday it would strengthen its military capacity in its western and northwestern regions in response to Finland joining NATO. Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said NATO expansion encroached on Russian security and national interests.

Ukraine also hailed Finland's step. President Volodymyr Zelenskyy's chief of staff Andriy Yermak wrote on Telegram: "FI made the right choice. NATO is also a key goal for Ukraine."

The event marks the end of an era of strategic non-alignment for Finland that began after the country repelled an attempted Soviet invasion during World War Two and opted to maintain friendly relations with neighboring Russia.

But the invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 prompted Finns to seek security under NATO's collective defense pact, which states that an attack on one member is an attack on all.

Mexico Asks China for Help to Control Fentanyl Shipments



MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador said he had sent a letter to his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping urging him to help control shipments of the synthetic opioid fentanyl sent across the Pacific.

Lopez Obrador read out the letter during a news conference in which he defended his country's efforts to curb trafficking of the lethal drug in the face of U.S. criticism.

Fentanyl has been blamed for fueling a surge in overdose deaths in the U.S., and Republican lawmakers have accused the Mexican government of not doing enough to stop drug cartels trafficking the powerful painkiller into the United States.

Trump Pleads Not Guilty to 34 Criminal Charges in New York



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump, the former U.S. president and front-runner for the 2024 Republican nomination, pleaded not guilty to 34 felony counts of falsifying business records after an investigation into hush money paid to a porn star.

Wearing a dark blue suit and red tie, Trump, 76, exhibited little emotion on his face when he waved to a crowd assembled outside the courthouse after he was driven in a motorcade from his New York residence at Trump Tower.

Trump sat with his hands folded as he entered his plea flanked by his lawyers.

"Not guilty," Trump said when asked how he pleaded.

He is the first sitting or former U.S. president to face criminal charges.

Taken together, the charges carry a maximum sentence of 136 years in prison under New York law but an actual prison sentence if he is convicted at a trial would almost certainly be far less than that.

While falsifying business records in New York on its own is a misdemeanor punishable by no more than one year in prison, it is elevated to a felony punishable by up to four years in prison when done to advance or conceal another crime.

Trump, who has called the charges politically motivated, held his fist in the air in a gesture to reporters as he departed Trump Tower.

Looking somber, Trump said nothing as he walked past police and through a hallway in the courthouse before entering the courtroom for the arraignment proceeding. A photo taken by a photographer in the courtroom authorized by the judge showed Trump sitting at the defense table, flanked by his lawyers.

Trump was indicted by a Manhattan grand jury last week in a case stemming from a 2016 hush-money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels, though the specific charges had yet to be disclosed.

From his motorcade, Trump posted on social media: "Heading to Lower Manhattan, the Courthouse. Seems so SURREAL - WOW, they are going to ARREST ME. Can't believe this is happening in America."

Trump was due to surrender to the office of Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg before an arraignment proceeding before Justice Juan Merchan. At an arraignment, a defendant hears charges and can enter a plea. Trump was fingerprinted but no mugshot photo was taken, according to a Twitter post by a New York Times reporter.

Pakistan's Supreme Court Orders Punjab Election on May 14

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's Supreme Court has declared the country's poll panel's decision to delay the assembly elections in two provinces as "unconstitutional".

The top court on Tuesday ordered the government to hold snap polls in the country's most populous province of Punjab on May 14.

The court's verdict followed a petition filed by the main opposition Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party, led by former Prime Minister Imran Khan.

Khan's party had challenged the Election Commission of Pakistan's (ECP) decision to delay the Punjab polls from April 30 to October 8 after the government refused to give funds to conduct the exercise citing the economic crisis.

The PTI in January decided to dissolve the Punjab and Khyber Pakhtunkhwa provincial assemblies it controlled in a bid to force early national elections - a demand Khan has been making since he was removed from power a year ago.

Pakistan historically holds the national and provincial elections together. However, the ECP is also bound by the constitution to hold elections within 90 days of the dissolution of a legislative assembly.

But when the ECP refused to announce dates for the polls, the Supreme Court in February took a suo motu notice and in a split 3-2 verdict, ordered the poll panel to announce the schedule for elections in the two provinces. A suo motu is when a court itself takes note of a matter which it deems is in the public interest and commences proceedings on it.

Last month, the ECP announced the Punjab elections on April 30. On March 22, however, it withdrew the schedule and declared October 8 as the new date, forcing the PTI to move the top court.

The Supreme Court said the ECP exceeded its jurisdiction by delaying the Punjab election date. "The constitution does not give the Election Commission of Pakistan the authority to postpone the elections," it said. On holding the polls in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa province, the top court said a petition should be filed at an appropriate forum.

U.S. Details New \$2.6b Military Aid Package for Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States unveiled details of \$2.6 billion in new military aid for Ukraine's war against invading Russian forces, including ammunition for HIMARS precision rocket systems, artillery rounds and small arms.

"The United States will continue... to provide Ukraine with capabilities to meet its immediate battlefield needs and longer-term security assistance requirements," the Pentagon said in a statement.

The package also features munitions for Patriot and NASAMS air defense systems, as well as ammunition and anti-tank missiles used by Bradley Infantry Fighting Vehicles that Washington previously promised to Kyiv.

And it includes 120 mm tank ammunition, which a senior US defense official told journalists "will support Ukraine's newly formed armored tank battalions as well as Abrams tanks that the United States has committed."

The Abrams tanks are expected to be delivered to Ukraine by fall of this year, while other Western heavy tanks -- British Challengers and German Leopards -- have already arrived.

Most of the aid -- \$2.1 billion -- comes in the form of Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative funds, which pay for procurement of equipment from the defense industry.

The remaining \$500 million is drawn from existing US stocks, meaning it will arrive on the battlefield sooner.

"The war is at an important stage. Fighting continues

in the east, but there have not been significant recent shifts in territorial control. The front lines are relatively static," the senior defense official said.

"Our focus is on supporting the Ukrainians to change the dynamic on the ground. We want to help Ukraine advance and hold its positions in what we expect will be a Ukrainian counteroffensive," the official said, referring to an anticipated spring attack by Kyiv's forces.

The United States has spearheaded the push for international support for Ukraine, quickly forging an international coalition to back Kyiv after Russia invaded in February 2022 and coordinating aid from dozens of countries.

Kyiv has pushed for some items that its international supporters have been reluctant to provide, including Patriot air defense systems and advanced heavy tanks -- which were eventually promised -- and others such as Western fighter aircraft, which have not been pledged so far.

According to the US State Department, the latest package brings total aid to Ukraine since Russia's invasion to more than \$35.1 billion.

The massive influx of international security assistance for Ukraine has sparked concerns that the equipment could be misused.

But the Pentagon has repeatedly insisted that monitoring efforts have not turned up evidence of widespread abuses, with one senior official saying the main danger of illicit diversion comes from equipment captured by Russian forces.



India Rejects China's Attempt to Rename Places in Disputed Areas

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) -

India has rejected Chinese attempts to rename places in what New Delhi regards as its eastern state of Arunachal Pradesh, which Beijing claims as part of its territory.

China and India fought a war along parts of their poorly demarcated 3,800km (2,360-mile) frontier in 1962 and clashes in mountainous regions in recent years have seriously strained relations between the nuclear-armed neighbours.

The latest angry exchange of words was triggered on Sunday when China's Ministry of Civil Affairs issued a statement in which it said it had "standardised" the names of 11 places, including five mountains, in what China calls its southern Tibet region.

The statement included a map that showed the 11 places renamed by China as being within "Zangnan", or southern Tibet in Chinese, with Arunachal Pradesh included in southern Tibet and China's border with India demarcated as just north of the Brahmaputra river.

India's foreign ministry rejected the move.

"We have seen such reports. This is not the first time China has made such an attempt," Indian foreign ministry spokesperson Arindam Bagchi said on Twitter. "Arunachal Pradesh is, has been and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India."

But a spokesperson at the Chinese foreign ministry said the name changes were "completely within the scope of China's sovereignty".

"The southern Tibet region is Chinese territory," the spokesperson, Mao Ning, told a regular media briefing in Beijing on Tuesday.

At least 24 soldiers, including 20 Indians, were killed when the two sides clashed in the Ladakh region, on the western part of their border, in 2020 but the situation calmed down after diplomatic and military talks.

In the aftermath of the 2020 clash, India banned hundreds of mobile applications of Chinese origin, including the popular social media platform TikTok.

Chinese firms operating in India, including cellphone makers Xiaomi and Huawei, have been raided by the tax authorities.

However, bilateral trade remains robust at approximately \$100bn a year, with India importing from China far more than it exports there.

School Closures Spread In Ageing Japan



TOKYO (Dispatches) - As Eita Sato and Aoi Hoshi walked towards their junior high school graduation ceremony, their footsteps echoed in polished halls once crowded and noisy with students.

The two were the only graduates of Yumoto Junior High in a mountainous part of northern Japan — and the last. The 76-year-old school will shut its doors for good when the school year ends on Friday. “We heard rumours about the school closure in our second year, but I didn’t imagine it would actually happen. I was shocked,” Eita, who like Aoi is 15, said.

As Japan’s birthrate plunges faster than expected, school closures have picked up pace especially in rural areas like Ten-ei, a mountainous skiing and hot spring area in Fukushima prefecture, dealing a further blow to regions already struggling with depopulation.

Falling births are an Asian regional issue, with the costs of raising children dampening birthrates in neighbouring South Korea and China. But Japan’s situation is especially critical.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has pledged “unprecedented measures” to boost the birthrate, including doubling the budget for child-related policies, and says maintaining the educational environment is crucial.

But little has helped so far. Births tumbled below 800,000 in 2022, a new record low, according to government estimates and eight years earlier than expected, dealing a knockout blow to smaller public schools that are often the heart of rural towns and villages.

About 450 close every year, government data shows. Between 2002 and 2020, nearly 9,000 shut their doors forever, making it hard for remote areas to lure in new and younger residents.

“I’m worried that people won’t consider this area as a place to relocate to start a family if there is no junior high school,” said Eita’s mother Masumi, also a Yumoto graduate.

Ten-ei, a village of just under 5,000 residents with only around 10 per cent under the age of 18, is in a quiet rural area known for its rice and sake. The Yumoto area has hot spring inns on the mountains and is dotted with ski rental shops and campsites. There are also “beware of bears” signs.

The village at its peak in the 1950s had more than 10,000 residents, supported by agriculture and manufacturing. But the area’s growing inconvenience and remoteness prompted residents to leave.

Depopulation picked up speed after the March 11, 2011 disaster at the Fukushima Dai-ichi nuclear plant less than 100 km (62 miles) away, with Ten-ei suffering some radioactive contamination that has since been cleaned up.

The Yumoto school, a two-storey building located in the centre of the district, had some 50 graduates a year during its heyday in the 1960s.

Photos of each graduating class hang near the entrance, going from black and white to colour — with the number of students visibly and suddenly dropping from around 2000.

There is no picture from the last year. Eita and Aoi, together since three, were in a five-person class through elementary school but were the only two to go on at Yumoto.

Their desks sat side-by-side in the centre of a classroom designed for 20, and during their first year they “fought a lot”, Eita said.

But tensions eased and they adapted, trying to simulate a normal school experience. For the afterschool club activity that is a key part of Japanese schooling they selected pair sports, mainly table tennis.

Harsh Parenting Could Harm Children’s Mental Health



PARIS (Dispatches) - Children who are disciplined harshly from an early age have a higher risk of developing mental health problems in the long term.

So suggests a new study from researchers in the UK and Ireland that invites health professionals and teachers to be attentive to the influence parenting style might have on a child showing signs of poor mental health.

The perfect parent doesn’t exist, but today more than ever, there is much debate around different styles of parenting, ranging from authoritarian attitudes centred on the needs of the parent(s), to so-called positive parenting, focusing on the needs of the child.

Two styles at opposite ends of the spectrum, between which are many approaches partway between the two. A team of researchers from the University of Cambridge and University College Dublin decided to focus on studying the consequences of strict, even harsh, discipline on the mental health of children from a very young age.

Based on 7,507 Irish children from the ‘Growing up in Ireland’ longitudinal study, this research cross-referenced two types of data: those relating to the mental health of children at the ages of 3, 5 and 9, and those concerning the parenting style experienced by children at age 3.

These were classed as warm parenting (supportive and attentive to their child’s needs); consistent parenting (setting clear expectations and rules); and hostile parenting.

According to the researchers, the latter style “involves frequent harsh treatment and discipline, and can be physical or psychological.” For example, children may be subjected to frequent yelling, regular physical punishment, isolation for bad behaviour, and damage to their self-esteem.

Published in the journal *Epidemiology and Psychiatric Sciences*, the results identify a link between harsh or hostile discipline and long-term mental health problems.

Specifically, the researchers found that children experiencing this type of parenting at age 3 were 1.5 times more likely to develop what the researchers call “high-risk” mental health symptoms by age 9.

The scientists said they studied two types of symptoms: internalised, which can take the form of anxiety disorders or social isolation, and externalised, which can take the form of aggressive behaviour or hyperactivity.

“Our findings underline the importance of doing everything possible to ensure that parents are supported to give their children a warm and positive upbringing, especially if wider circumstances put those children at risk of poor mental health outcomes.

Avoiding a hostile emotional climate at home won’t necessarily prevent poor mental health outcomes from occurring, but it will probably help,” explains study co-author, Jennifer Symonds, associate professor in the School of Education, University College Dublin.

In light of this, the researchers believe that it is important for health professionals and teachers to be aware of the influence parenting style could have on a child who may be experiencing mental health problems, and that it may be necessary for parents to be supported in this particular situation.

However, scientists do not intend to call into question an upbringing that sets rules and boundaries for children.

“We are not for a moment suggesting that parents should not set firm boundaries for their children’s behaviour, but it is difficult to justify frequent harsh discipline, given the implications for mental health,” says study co-author, Ioannis Katsantonis, a doctoral researcher at the Faculty of Education, University of Cambridge.



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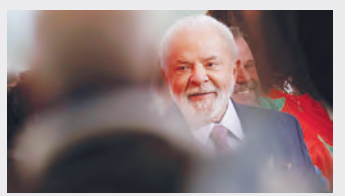
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Lula Says Economy to Grow More Than Pessimists Think

BRASILIA (Reuters) -Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said he believes the country's economy will grow "more than pessimists think" as his administration sets up new programs to be launched on its 100-day mark next week. The new investment plans come as Lula reinforces economic growth as a top priority, calling for investments from both the government and private sector to boost gross domestic product (GDP). Lula said at a meeting with ministers he was particularly optimistic with a proposal for public-private partnerships (PPPs), noting there were a lot of investments to be made in sectors such as industry, agriculture, science and technology.



Turkey's Annual Inflation Eases Further to Almost 50% in March

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Annual consumer price inflation in Turkey eased slightly more than expected in March, official data showed, dropping further ahead of the key May 14 presidential and parliamentary elections.

Driven by easing price gains in energy and transportation, consumer prices rose 50.51% on an annual basis in March, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said, marking a slowdown for a fifth consecutive month.

Month-over-month, the inflation rose nearly 2.3%, the statistical institute said.

The consumer price index (CPI) touched a 24-year peak of 85.51% in October. It fell sharply in December and eased to 55.2% in February with a favorable base effect.

The price rise in March was led by the restaurant and hotel sector, which surged 70.7% year-over-year, closely followed by a 67.9% rise in key food and nonalcoholic drinks prices.

Core inflation, which strips out volatile items like food and energy, slowed to an annual 47.4% last month, down from 50.6% in February.

Another key data reveals that food inflation was at 67.9%, down from an annual 69.3% in February.

The slowdown in consumer inflation was largely down to energy, where price gains slowed to 35.7% from 50% during the same period. Transportation costs rose an annual 28.7%, down from 44.9%.

Evaluating the data, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati stressed the government was aware of the negative impacts of high inflation and therefore said they would not compromise on the fight against price increases.

"We will continue to take our steps with determination without causing a loss of production and employment, and we will gradually and permanently reduce inflation," Nebati wrote on Twitter.

The minister emphasized that 2022 was spent under high inflation pressure, which he said was caused by multiple and multidimensional global crises.

The March reading came in less than a predicted 2.85% in a Reuters poll, which had forecast that consumer prices would increase 51.3% from a year earlier.

The southeastern region was hit almost two months ago by massive earthquakes which killed over 50,000 people in Turkey and left millions homeless.

The quakes are expected to cost Turkey more than \$100 billion (TL 1.92 trillion) and shave one to two percentage points off growth this year.

Last month, Turkey's central bank kept its policy rate steady after easing to 8.5% to support growth and employment after the disaster.

While the latest data still shows strong pricing pressures, the increase in all groups was lower than last year, which helped the drop in the headline, the Dutch banking giant ING said. "The downturn in annual inflation in March is likely to continue in the coming few months mainly due to strong base effects, though currency stability will remain key for the outlook," it said in a blog.

Global Central Banks Keep Up Inflation Fight in March

LONDON (Dispatches) - The pace of interest rate hikes by major developed and emerging market central banks continued at a healthy clip in March though the scale of rises tapered off somewhat as turmoil in the banking sector clouded the outlook for global growth.

March saw six interest rate hikes across eight meetings by central banks overseeing the 10 most heavily traded currencies. Policy makers in Australia, Switzerland, Norway and Britain joined the U.S. Federal Reserve and the European Central Bank in lifting key lending rates by a total of 200 basis points (bps). Policy makers in Japan and Canada kept benchmarks unchanged.

This follows six interest rate hikes delivering 250 bps of uplift across six meetings by G10 central banks in February.

March was a roller coaster for markets and policy makers, with rising expectations that the U.S. Federal Reserve's rate could peak at 6%, before a collapse of a number of U.S. banks and the Credit Suisse crunch rocked global markets, raised concerns over financial stability and clouded growth prospects.

"The Fed and other central banks made clear banking troubles would not stop them from further tightening," Wei Li, global chief investment strategist at the BlackRock Investment Institute, wrote in a note to clients.

"By clearly separating financial and price stability goals and tools, major central banks carried on with rate hikes through the tumult." However, the world's top central banks are openly contemplating an early end to their rate hikes, not least because of the recent financial turmoil.

On the flipside, oil prices surging on Monday on the back of a surprise OPEC production cut could add to fresh inflation pressures, analysts said.



OPEC+ May Spur U.S. Crude Oil Exports

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC's surprise oil production cuts could lead to higher demand for U.S. oil in Europe and Asia and could encourage some other producers to boost output, industry executives and analysts said.

On Sunday, the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies pledged to cut production beginning next month by 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd). Oil prices jumped over 6% on Monday, with U.S. crude futures topping \$80 per barrel.

Middle East producers' curbs will leave markets short by an average of 2.3 million bpd in the second half of 2023, estimated Matt Hagerty, a senior manager for energy consultants BTU Analytics, a FactSet company.

"We could see an additional 200,000 bpd by the end of the year" from U.S. producers, said Jorge Leon, senior vice president at market researcher Rystad Energy. He expects that new production likely would be exported to Europe.

The U.S. pumped nearly 12.5 million bpd in January, according to the latest government data. Production in the largest U.S. shale basin should grow by 400,000 barrels per day this year, estimated energy tech firm Enverus, about half the level in 2019 before the pandemic.

Publicly traded companies probably will hold output levels even with crude futures above \$80 per barrel, but private firms would have an incentive to boost activity, said Mike Oestmann, chief executive of Tall City Exploration.

India's Milk Imports Soar as Disease Hits Local Cattle Stock

KHEJRI BUJURG (Dispatches) - Buying milk is getting expensive in India and the price could soon hit an all-time high, forcing the world's biggest producer to step up imports to boost supplies and ease cost of living pressures.

Farmers are wrestling with a rare double whammy: a lethal condition called lumpy skin disease in their cows and a drawdown in market-ready cattle stock after the coronavirus pandemic slowed breeding.

Milk prices have already jumped more than 15% to 56 rupees (\$0.68) a litre over the past year - the fastest rise in a decade - making it difficult for the government to bring retail inflation below the central bank's target.

The soaring prices of milk and other basic goods is expected to become a political issue heading into state elections later this year.

"Any upside risk coming from higher milk prices is going to pose an additional challenge," said Upasna Bhardwaj, chief economist at India's Kotak Mahindra Bank.

"Since milk has a weightage of 6.6% in the consumer price index, any spike could have a reasonable implication on headline inflation," she said.

A 39% jump in exports of dairy products in 2022, followed by lower milk supplies, has already cut inventories of butter and skimmed milk powder (SMP) in India, even as rising incomes lift demand for protein-rich dairy products, a key source of calcium, vitamins and protein for a large vegetarian population.

Industry officials estimate demand for dairy products to rise 7% this year.

But milk production is likely to have risen just 1% in the fiscal year to March 2023, well below the average annual rate of 5.6% in the past decade, said a senior official of the government-backed National Dairy Development Board (NDDB). The official declined to be named as he was not authorised to speak to the media.

Ramavtar Sharma, a 57-year-old farmer from Khejri Bujurg village in Rajasthan, a major milk-producing state, is keen to cash in on higher milk prices but is struggling to find affordable cattle.

"Cattle prices have doubled as there are fewer cows in the market," said Sharma, who has been raising cattle since childhood.

That contrasts with recent years when prices dived in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic. While cows were cheaper, coronavirus lockdowns weighed on milk consumption.

U.S. Manufacturing Activity Nears 3-Year Low

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. manufacturing activity slumped to the lowest level in nearly three years in March as new orders plunged, and activity could decline further amid tightening credit conditions.

The Institute for Supply Management (ISM) survey also showed a continued reduction in factory employment last month, but inflation pressures subsided, with supplier delivery performance the fastest since March 2009. Rising borrowing costs as the Federal Reserve fights high inflation have cooled demand for goods, which are typically bought on credit.

"Manufacturing activity is moving deeper into the red and the million-dollar question is whether sputtering factory output will spread to the rest of the economy," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York. "New orders are off sharply in March and that could very well lead to production shutdowns and more layoffs later on this spring and summer."

The ISM's manufacturing PMI fell to 46.3 last month, the lowest reading since May 2020, from 47.7 in February. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the index would dip to 47.5.

It was the fifth straight month that the PMI remained below the 50 threshold, which indicates contraction in manufacturing. But so-called hard data have suggested that manufacturing, which accounts for 11.3% of the economy, continues to grow moderately.

Manufacturing expanded at a 4.5% annualized rate in the fourth quarter, the government reported last week. Reports last month also showed orders for capital goods excluding aircraft eked out a small gain in February as did manufacturing output.

According to the ISM, 70% of manufacturing gross domestic product was contracting in March, down from 82%. It, however, noted that more industries contracted strongly last month.



"The proportion of manufacturing GDP (gross domestic product) with a composite PMI calculation at or below 45%, a good barometer of overall manufacturing sluggishness, was 25% in March, compared to 10% in February," said Timothy Fiore, chair of the ISM Manufacturing Business Survey Committee.

Of the six largest manufacturing industries, only petroleum and coal products as well as machinery, registered growth in March. Other manufacturing industries reporting growth were printing and related support activities, miscellaneous manufacturing, fabricated metal products and primary metals.

Twelve industries reporting contraction included furniture and related products, nonmetallic mineral products, textile mills, transportation equipment and computer and electronic products as well as electrical equipment, appliances and components.

Singapore Seen Tightening Monetary Policy



SINGAPORE (Reuters) - Singapore is likely to tighten monetary policy this month, for the sixth time in a row, amid persistent price pressures in the Asian financial hub due to global supply chain disruptions.

Eleven out of the 17 analysts polled by Reuters expect the Monetary Authority of Singapore (MAS) would tighten its policy, perhaps for the last time in the current cycle in April, citing the need to tame the persistent elevated inflation.

Among the 11 analysts who see tightening, five think the MAS would steepen the slope only while six think that it would only upwardly re-centre the mid-point of the band.

Adjusting the mid-point is typically seen as a more "aggressive" tool than adjusting the slope.

Instead of interest rates, the MAS manages policy by letting the local dollar rise or fall against the currencies of its main trading partners within an undisclosed band, known as the Singapore dollar Nominal Effective Exchange Rate, or S\$NEER.

It adjusts its policy via three levers: the slope, mid-point and width of the policy band.

"We firmly believe that policymakers were much more concerned about near-term price pressures last year. We see concerns shifting to the medium-term, hence the return to slope steepening," said analysts at the Bank of America.

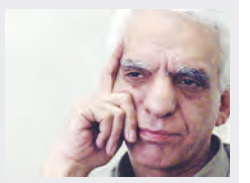
Six analysts expect no change to monetary policy at all, citing the weak economic outlook.

"Although inflation stayed above the official forecasts, domestic supply prices have slowed amidst falling import prices. Business expectations, the composite leading index and non-oil domestic exports have all turned negative," said analysts at DBS.

"Given that Singapore is a price taker in the global economy, keeping the status quo on the SGD NEER policy is consistent with the trend of major central banks moving from dovish hikes towards hawkish pauses," they added.

Veteran Iranian Filmmaker Pourahmad Passes Away

TEHRAN (MNA) – Veteran Iranian filmmaker Kiumars Pourahmad passed away on Wednesday morning. Pourahmad's wife confirmed the news in a brief conversation with Mehr News Agency. Kiumars Pourahmad was born in 1949 in Najafabad, Iran. He started his career as a film critic and assistant director in a TV series in the early 1970s. He made his directorial debut, *Tatureh* in 1983 after making some short films. Children and young adults with their problems are the central characters in most of his films. Pourahmad also published his autobiography as a book named "Unfinished Childhood".



Humans vs. Machines: the Fight to Copyright AI Art

LONDON (Reuters) - Last year, Kris Kashtanova typed instructions for a graphic novel into a new artificial-intelligence program and touched off a high-stakes debate over who created the artwork: a human or an algorithm.

"Zendaya leaving gates of Central Park," Kashtanova entered into Midjourney, an AI program similar to ChatGPT that produces dazzling illustrations from written prompts. "Sci-fi scene future empty New York...."

From these inputs and hundreds more emerged "Zarya of the Dawn," an 18-page story about a character resembling the actress Zendaya who roams a deserted Manhattan hundreds of years in the future. Kashtanova received a copyright in September, and declared on social media that it meant artists were entitled to legal protection for their AI art projects.

It didn't last long. In February, the U.S. Copyright Office suddenly reversed itself, and Kashtanova became the first person in the country to be stripped of legal protection for AI art. The images in "Zarya," the office said, were "not the product of human authorship." The office allowed Kashtanova to keep a copyright in the arrangement and storyline.

Now, with the help of a high-powered legal team, the artist is testing the limits of the law once again. For a new book, Kashtanova has turned to a different AI program, Stable Diffusion, which lets users scan in their own drawings and refine them with text prompts. The artist believes that starting with original artwork will provide enough of a "human" element to sway the authorities.

"It would be very strange if it's not copyrightable," said the 37-year-old artist of the latest work, an autobiographical comic.

A spokesperson for the copyright office declined to comment. Midjourney also declined to comment, and Stability AI did not respond to requests for comment.

At a time when new AI programs like ChatGPT, Midjourney and Stable Diffusion seem poised to transform human expression as they smash records for user growth, the legal system still hasn't figured out who owns the output -- the users, the owners of the programs, or maybe no one at all.

Billions of dollars could hinge on the answer, legal experts said.

If users and owners of the new AI systems could get copyrights, they would stand to reap huge benefits, said Ryan Merkle, the former chief of Creative Commons, a U.S. organization that issues licenses to allow creators to share their work.

For example, companies could use AI to produce and own the rights to vast quantities of low-cost graphics, music, video and text for advertising, branding and entertainment. "Copyright governing bodies are going to be under enormous pressure to permit copyrights to be awarded to computer-generated works," Merkle said.

In the U.S. and many other countries, anyone who engages in creative expression usually has immediate legal rights to it. A copyright registration creates a public record of the work and allows the owner to go to court to enforce their rights.

Courts including the U.S. Supreme Court have long held that an author has to be a human being. In rejecting legal protection for the "Zarya" images, the U.S. Copyright Office cited



rulings denying legal protection for a selfie snapped by a curious monkey named Naruto and for a song that the copyright applicant said had been composed by "the Holy Spirit."

One U.S. computer scientist, Stephen Thaler of Missouri, has maintained that his AI programs are sentient and should be legally recognized as the creators of artwork and inventions that they generated. He has sued the U.S. Copyright Office, petitioned the U.S. Supreme Court and has a patent case before the U.K. Supreme Court.

Meanwhile, many artists and companies that own creative content fiercely oppose granting copyrights to AI owners or users. They argue that because the new algorithms work by training themselves on vast quantities of material on the open web, some of which is copyrighted, the AI systems are gobbling up legally protected material without permission.

Stock photo provider Getty Images, a group of visual artists and owners of computer code have separately filed lawsuits against owners of AI programs including Midjourney, Stability AI and ChatGPT developer OpenAI for copyright infringement, which the companies deny. Getty and OpenAI declined to comment.

Sarah Andersen, one of the artists, said granting copyrights to AI works "would legitimize theft."

Kashtanova is being represented for free by Morrison Foerster and its veteran copyright lawyer Joe Gratz, who is also defending OpenAI in a proposed class action brought on behalf of owners of copyrighted computer code. The firm took on Kashtanova's case after an associate at the firm, Heather Whitney, spotted a LinkedIn post by the artist seeking legal help with a new application after the "Zarya" copyright was rejected.

Zionists Should...

FROM PAGE 1

Kanaani also censured Israeli forces' vicious assault on dozens of Palestinian worshippers inside al-Aqsa Mosque, where they were peacefully observing the holy month of Ramadan, saying that the violent raid attests to the inhumane nature of the Tel Aviv regime.



"The brutal attack by the usurping Zionist regime's military on Palestinian pilgrims and worshippers inside al-Aqsa Mosque has once again laid bare the criminal and inhumane nature of the regime before the eyes of the world," Kanaani tweeted on Wednesday.

"This crime is strongly condemned, and deserves the immediate reaction of the Muslim world, freedom-loving people around the world as well as responsible international bodies," he added.

On Monday, Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations warned that the Islamic Republic will take decisive measures to protect its forces and interests in Syria against any threats posed by the United States or others.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remark in a Monday letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the head of the Security Council, stressing that Iran's presence in Syria is totally legal and at the request of Damascus.

Iravani's letter also came after the US ambassador to the UN wrote a letter addressed to the president of the Security Council in an attempt to legitimize his country's ongoing violation of international law in Syria by accusing Iran of supporting the so-called non-State militia groups.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its inherent right to self-defense under international law and will take decisive measures to protect its forces, interests, and facilities from any threat or unlawful act perpetrated by the United States or others," Iravani said.

Of course everybody knows it well that Israel is supported by the West especially by the U.S. and UK and it is unable to continue its crimes without getting green light from those countries. The problem is that those international bodies which are in charge of keeping peace in the world are silent and countries even the independent ones do not dare to raise their voices against these atrocities and even when they try to do so, the big powers supporting the Zionists veto any action against Israel.

On Tuesday, Supreme Leader Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei pointed to the chaotic state of affairs in Israel, saying the various crises facing the occupying regime have accelerated the illegal entity's pace of collapse before the 25-year timeframe that he had previously predicted.

Stressing that the Zionist regime is reeling from political instability and has changed four prime ministers in four years, the Leader said there is an extreme polarization in the fake regime, which is evident by the demonstrations of hundreds of thousands of people in some cities.

"We had said that [the Zionist regime] would not see the next 25 years, but they are apparently in a hurry and want to leave sooner," the Leader added.

The world should work together to tame the Zionists and give due response to the atrocities of the Zionists. The countdown for the decline and destruction of the false Israel has started and unity among the Muslim world will be decisive in accelerating this decline and destruction and Palestinians and Muslims should not sit and wait for the international bodies' actions because these bodies are unable to take any action against the will of the big powers who are supporting this regime.

Of course the Islamic Republic of Iran will give due responses to the Israeli forces and will not let their crimes go unanswered and the upcoming Quds Day will bring unity for Muslims in strengthening their determination for

Iran Blasts...

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"From Iran's point of view, this resolution is considered a malicious attempt to target and deliberately tarnish Iran's human rights image through fabricating distorted narratives, negative stereotypes and false accusations," Bahraini underlined.

The Iranian diplomat said the Islamic Republic's achievements in observing human rights over the past four decades demonstrate the country's determination to respect, protect, and realize human rights.

"The instrumental use of human rights is unacceptable and endangers human rights cause," Bahraini said, adding, "This approach neither helps preserve and promote human rights, nor is compatible with facts on the ground as well as the history and background of the Iranian culture and civilization."

At the 52nd regular session of the Human Rights Council on Tuesday, Cuba, China, and South Africa delivered speeches in favor of Iran and warned of the instrumental and political use of human rights.

The resolution, which extended the mandate of the UN special rapporteur on the rights situation in Iran for another year, accused the Islamic Republic of "crackdown" on violent riots that erupted across the country last September.

Tehran to Help Syria...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, General Qalandari stated that Iran has assisted many of its neighbors and friendly countries "not only in terms of equipment and arms, but also in the field of technology of manufacturing military equipment."

He also highlighted the growing interest in the purchase of Iranian military and defense equipment, saying "After the removal of a UN arms embargo against Iran in 2020, we are witnessing many countries that seek to employ Iranian weapons."

The Israeli regime frequently violates Syrian sovereignty by targeting military positions inside the country, especially those of the resistance movement Hezbollah, which has played a key role in helping the Syrian army in its fight against foreign-backed terrorists.

Syria's official SANA news agency quoted an unnamed military source as saying that the Israeli regime had launched a fresh missile strike against Syria, this time targeting positions in the vicinity of the country's capital city of Damascus.

The new missile attack was carried out early Tuesday from the direction of the occupied Golan Heights, and in addition to Damascus, hit some other areas in the southern part of the country.

The military source added that the country's air defenses intercepted Israeli missiles, shooting down most of them. The attack, however, left two civilians dead and caused some material damage.

IOM Assistance...

FROM PAGE 1

The Sri Lankan envoy spoke about the measures that have been taken by the Embassy of Sri Lanka to tackle migration issues and assist Sri Lankan workers in the marine sector in coordination with the relevant authorities of Iran.

Apprising the Chief of Mission on the current developments in Sri Lanka, the Ambassador requested assistance from the IOM Tehran Office to speed up the repatriation process of Sri Lankans stranded in Azerbaijan and Iran, providing training programs to the Embassy staff, sharing IOM information with the Sri Lankan Mission in Iran and facilitating accommodation and other required assistance for Sri Lankans stranded in Iran.

In response, the IOM Chief stated that her willingness to facilitate IOM assistance to Sri Lankans stranded in Iran and to provide training for the Embassy staff. Concluding the meeting, the UN Migration Chief of Mission in Iran expressed her gratitude to the Ambassador of Sri Lanka and his staff for arranging the timely discussion.

Leader Says...

FROM PAGE 1

As regards the cultural field, the Leader stressed the need to observe the Islamic Hijab in accordance with the religious and constitutional rules.

He further said that political divisions and polarization have put the United States on a downward spiral with every new president leaving a weaker nation behind than the preceding one.

"The U.S. under [Barack] Obama was weaker than the one under [George W.] Bush; the US under [Donald] Trump was weaker than the one under Obama, and the U.S. under this incumbent [president] is weaker than the one under Trump," the Leader said.

"Why is it that we say it is weak?" he added. "First of all, bipolarity emerged in the United States over the elections two or three years ago. This polarization still remains strong; this is a weakness and of paramount significance."

Ayatollah Khamenei noted that the recent congressional vote proved that bipolarity is still strong in the U.S.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader stressed that the world is facing an important political change, which means the state of the world order is changing.

"Today, I would like to say that this global development is fortunately aimed at weakening the front of the Islamic Republic's enemies; this is an important thing," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Underlining that the changes are happening very fast, the Leader said, "In the issue of [the country's] foreign policy, we should increase the pace of our initiatives ... We must increase initiatives, agility, and activity, and take advantage of this opportunity."

Meanwhile he said that removing the hijab in society in front of unrelated men is religiously and politically banned.

He added that if those who remove their headscarves in public knew who is behind this whole scenario, they would not do it.

Ayatollah Khamenei was referring to the removal of hijab by some girls and women in violation of the dress code of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Elsewhere, in his remarks, the leader turned to the issue of corruption in Iran. He said fighting corruption is a must for all.

He underlined that corruption makes people disappointed and must be tackled.

He then referred to inflation, saying a minority benefits from soaring prices and fill their pockets at the expense of others. This, Ayatollah Khamenei noted, breeds corruption.

Iran Calls for...

FROM PAGE 1

He reiterated that it is important to note that the establishment of nuclear-weapon-free zones, including in the Middle East, should be supported by the NWSs. Almost 50 years ago, Iran initiated such a proposal for the Middle East, and it is regrettable that this noble goal, endorsed in many international fora, including by the 1995 NPT RevCon, is still pending and facing obstacles, particularly the Israeli regime backed by the US government.

The regime possesses all types of weapons of mass destruction, including nuclear weapons, and threatens to use them against regional countries. It is not a party to the NPT and has not accepted the IAEA safeguards on its principal nuclear activities. Furthermore, the regime has committed various terrorist attacks against nuclear scientists and

initiated different sabotage attacks against nuclear facilities. Therefore, it must be forced to join all related instruments, including the NPT, without any precondition, and as a non-nuclear weapon party. It must place all its nuclear facilities and activities under the comprehensive safeguards of the IAEA.

He stressed that Iran believes that outer space and other celestial bodies are humanity's common heritage and must be used only for peaceful purposes for the benefit of all countries. The prevention of an arms race in outer space can be a first step towards achieving this goal and averting a severe threat to international peace and security. Therefore, further measures, including a legally binding instrument with appropriate and effective verification provisions, should be developed promptly by the CD.

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Italian Police Arrest Four For Stealing Leclerc's Watch

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian police have arrested four people wanted in connection with the theft of a luxury watch from Ferrari's Formula One driver Charles Leclerc last year. The police said in a statement that they found two "valuable watches, the provenance of which will be investigated further," while searching the house of one of the suspects. Leclerc, who is from Monte Carlo, had his exclusive Richard Mille timepiece stolen from his wrist in the Italian seaside resort of Viareggio last April.

FIFA Bans Former Peru FA President for Life

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Former president of the Peruvian Football Association Manuel Burga Seoane has been banned from all football-related activities for life by FIFA for participating in bribery schemes, world soccer's governing body said. Seoane was also ordered to pay a fine of 1 million Swiss francs (\$1.10 million) for breaching articles in FIFA's Code of Ethics related to conflicts of interest, bribery and corruption, and offering and accepting gifts or other benefits among others.

Sharpe, Murray Shine In Victories; Hawks Win

MINNEAPOLIS (Dispatches) - Shaedon Sharpe scored 27 points, Kevin Knox II added 19 points and short-handed Portland beat playoff-hopeful Minnesota. Trendon Watford had 15 points and Skylar Mays finished with 13 points and nine assists in his second game with Portland, which had lost 11 of 12 and was without four regular starters. Anthony Edwards scored 37 points for the Timberwolves. They have lost three in a row.

BUCKS 117, 76ERS 104

Giannis Antetokounmpo had 33 points, 14 rebounds and six assists and Milwaukee beat the Philadelphia 76ers to move one step closer to clinching the top playoff seed in the Eastern Conference. The Bucks have a two-game lead over Boston with four games left. Boston won the season series with Milwaukee and has the tiebreaker. Philadelphia is third in the East. Brook Lopez scored 21 points, Khris Middleton had 19 and Jrue Holiday and Bobby Portis each added 18 as the Bucks shot 57.5%. Middleton also had nine assists. Tyrese Maxey had 29 points and Joel Embiid had 28 for the 76ers.

SPURS 142, KINGS 134 (OT)

Doug McDermott scored 22 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter and overtime and San Antonio denied Sacramento a chance at clinching the Pacific Division. After clinching their first playoff berth since 2006 on Wednesday night on the road, the Kings were hoping to wrap up their first division title in 20 years in front of their home fans but fell short against the struggling Spurs. De'Aaron Fox scored 28 points for the Kings.

HAWKS 132, MAVERICKS 130 (OT)

Trae Young made two free throws with 1.8 seconds remaining in overtime to give Atlanta the lead and the Hawks beat the Dallas Mavericks 132-130 on Sunday night to keep pace in the Eastern Conference play-in race.

Young was fouled by Kyrie Irving, who scored 41 points, with the game tied at 130 on what Young said was "kind of a lucky play for us and unlucky for them."

Young said he accidentally stepped on the foot of Mavericks guard Josh Green before crashing into Irving. "I just got in Kyrie's way," Young said.

Following Young's free throws, Luke Doncic, who scored 22 points, missed a last-second 3-pointer.



The Hawks (39-39) moved back into eighth place in the play-in race. Toronto and Chicago put pressure on the Hawks with wins before Atlanta's game. The Hawks have the tiebreaker advantage over Toronto. The Hawks are only one ahead of the 10th-place Bulls for the final play-in spot in the Eastern Conference and play at Chicago on Tuesday night.

KNICKS 118, WIZARDS 109

Jalen Brunson and Quentin Grimes each scored 27 points and New York beat Washington to wrap up a playoff berth.

Immanuel Quickley added 22 points and Obi Toppin had 21 for the Knicks, who won their fourth in a row and will be in the postseason for the second time in three years. They had missed the playoffs the previous seven seasons.

Mitchell Robinson contributed eight points and 11 rebounds for the Knicks, who have won both games since losing All-Star forward Julius Randle to a sprained left ankle. Corey Kispert led Washington with a career-high 29 points.

LAKERS 134, ROCKETS 109

Anthony Davis scored 40 points, LeBron James had 18 points, 11 assists and 10 rebounds to tie Jason Kidd for fourth place with his 107th triple-double and Los Angeles beat Houston. The Lakers (40-38) moved two games over .500 and into a tie for seventh with New Orleans in the Western Conference with four games to go. Los Angeles has won six of its last seven games and owns the tiebreaker over the Pelicans.

Jalen Green scored 24 points for Houston. Alperen Sengun had 18 points and 15 rebounds.

SUNS 128, THUNDER 118

Kevin Durant scored 35 points and Phoenix held off Oklahoma City for its fifth straight victory. Durant — once a hero in Oklahoma City after leading the Thunder to the 2012 NBA Finals, but roundly booed nearly every time he touched the ball Sunday — scored 13 points in the fourth quarter, helping Phoenix hold the lead after Oklahoma City cut a 15-point deficit to three. The Suns are 6-0 with Durant in the lineup.



Mitrovic Gets Eight-Match Ban for Shoving Referee

LONDON (Dispatches) - Fulham striker Aleksandar Mitrovic has been handed an eight-match ban and a 75,000 pounds (\$94,000) fine for shoving the referee during their FA Cup loss at Manchester United last month, the Football Association said.

Serbian Mitrovic was sent off after confronting referee Chris Kavanagh and pushing him with his shoulder.

"We claimed the standard punishment which would otherwise apply to Aleksandar Mitrovic for the sending-off offence of violent conduct that he committed towards the match referee around the 72nd minute was clearly insufficient," the FA's independent Regulatory Commission said in a statement.

"The forward separately admitted that his behavior and language after being sent off was improper, abusive, insulting and threatening."

Mitrovic will not be able to play for Fulham again until May.

During the second half of the 3-1 loss to United at Old Trafford, a confrontation broke out after Fulham's Willian was red-carded for handling the ball in the penalty area following a VAR review.

Fulham manager Marco Silva will also serve a touchline ban for two games along with a 20,000 pounds fine.

Silva angrily addressed the fourth official before being shown a red card.

The London club were fined 40,000 pounds for failing to prevent their players surrounding the referee.

Switzerland Named Hosts for Women's Euro 2025

LISBON (Dispatches) - Switzerland will host the 2025 Women's European Championship, European football's governing body UEFA said.

Switzerland last hosted a major football tournament in 2008, staging that year's edition of the men's Euros along with neighbors Austria.

"This is a historic day for Switzerland, the SFA and women's football," Swiss FA president Dominique Blanc said in a statement.

"This major step will shape the development of women's football at all levels."

The Swiss FA said it would set up a body responsible for the organization of the event, adding that the "first workshops and visits to the venues with UEFA are already planned for April and May".

"The tournament will take place over four weeks in June and July 2025 at the planned venues of Basel, Bern, Geneva, Zurich, St. Gallen, Sion, Lucerne and Thun," the Swiss FA said.

"The existing infrastructure will be used (or, as in the case of the turf base in Thun and Berne, modified) and the construction of additional stadiums, hotels or training grounds is not necessary according to the current state of knowledge."

In October, UEFA said it had received four bids to host the tournament, including bids from France and Poland as well as a joint bid from Denmark, Finland, Norway and Sweden.

"We believe we submitted a good application with a clear plan on how to create the best Euros ever," Norwegian Football Federation president Lise Klaveness said.

"We always knew that the competition would be tough, and we can only congratulate Switzerland who came away with the victory."

Ukraine had also expressed interest in hosting the event before the Russian invasion.

The previous edition of the tournament was held in England in 2022, where the hosts won the title after beating Germany in the final at Wembley Stadium.

Svitolina Criticizes Useless WTA



PARIS (Dispatches) - Ukrainian players do not get enough support from women's tennis governing body WTA amid Russia's invasion of their country, Elina Svitolina said.

Svitolina, back on the tour at the Charleston Open after a maternity break, spoke to support fellow Ukrainian player Lesia Tsurenko, who said she withdrew from the Indian Wells tournament because of a panic attack brought on by a conversation the 33-year-old had days earlier with WTA chief executive Steve Simon about tennis's response to the Russian invasion.

"We are afraid, we feel empty. What is happening to Lesia is very sad. People who haven't experienced it can't really understand what it feels like to have no home, to feel safe nowhere, to have family in Ukraine, under the bombs, to know that Ukrainian cities are being destroyed. It's both fear and a great emptiness," Svitolina, who was the world number 20 when she took a break from the tour to give birth, told French sports daily L'Equipe.

"The WTA should have done more, much more, on many issues. Now it's too late. There have been a lot of press releases, a lot of interviews. It was useless," she said.

The WTA, along with men's body ATP, welcomed Wimbledon organizers' decision to lift a ban on Russian and Belarusian players last Friday, allowing them to compete in the grasscourt Grand Slam this year as "neutral" athletes.

Messi Likely to Leave PSG at End of Season

PARIS (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi is "much more likely" to leave Paris Saint-Germain at the end of the season than sign a new deal, a source close to the club told AFP.

"The dynamics have completely changed with PSG less pushing to renew (his contract)," the source said, adding that there was "no deal, no exit yet. But exit is much more likely."

World Cup winner Messi, who will turn 36 in June, joined in 2021 on a two-year deal which expires at the end of this campaign.

On Sunday, the Argentine's name was jeered by some PSG fans as the teams were announced prior to the 1-0 home defeat against Lyon in Ligue 1.

Supporters of the Qatar-owned club are unhappy at the malaise around the team since they were eliminated from the Champions League in the last 16 by Bayern Munich last month.

PSG have lost eight times in 18 games in 2023, a run which has seen them go out of the French Cup prematurely although they remain six points clear at the top of the French table.

"The fans have changed things completely," the source said of the chances of Messi's deal being renewed and the supporters' reaction at the weekend.

Messi has scored 29 goals and set up 32 more in 67 appearances for PSG in all competitions.

Yet his form has dipped since he led Argentina to glory at the World Cup in Qatar at the end of last year. Some fans see him as a symbol of all the club have done wrong in focusing on superstar signings while failing to build a genuinely competitive team.



Nadal, Alcaraz, Auger-Aliassime to Miss Monte Carlo Masters

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal will miss next week's Monte Carlo Masters having failed to recover in time from an injury that has sidelined him for months, he said, shortly before top-10 players Carlos Alcaraz and Felix Auger-Aliassime also pulled out of the tournament.

Nadal was forced to skip the Masters 1000 event in Indian Wells last month as well as the Miami Open that ended last week, as he continues his recovery from a hip issue that ended his Australian Open title defence in the second round in January.

"Unfortunately I am still not ready to compete and will miss one of those special tournaments I always love to play," Nadal said in a statement.

"Monte Carlo is and has been a key event in my career, but unfortunately I will have to miss it again since I am still not ready to compete without the risk of getting injured. I will continue the process of getting ready to come back."

His absence from competitions means that Nadal days ago dropped four places to 13th in the rankings, ending his record 912-week stay inside the top 10.

The Spaniard, who has won Monte Carlo 11 times in his career still hopes to be fit for the French Open in May, a clay court tournament he has dominated for years, having won there 14 times.

World number two Alcaraz, who had an injury-plagued start to the season, was last in action at last week's Miami Open, where he was beaten in the semi-final by Italian Jannik Sinner.

"After two months of competing, I am happy to be back home but sad that I finished my semi-final match in Miami with discomfort," the U.S. Open champion said in a post on social media.

