

US firm Planet extends Middle East **imagery access delay**

AFP | Paris, France

American firm Planet Labs PBC on Tuesday said it had further delayed access to its satellite imagery of the Middle East to 14 days to protect US-allied countries there.

The California-based Planet had already imposed a 96-hour delay last week for access to its high-resolution satellite images, which are usually available a few hours after they are taken.

"After consulting with ex-

perts inside and outside of government... Planet has decided to take additional, proactive measures to ensure our imagery is not tactically leveraged by adversarial actors to target allied and NATO-partner personnel and civilians," a statement said.

From now on, all data covering "all of Iran and nearby allied bases, in addition to the Gulf States and existing conflict zones" will be blocked for 14 days, it said.

Planet, founded in 2010 by former NASA scientists, did not

say whether this decision was taken in response to a request from United States authorities.

Under existing legislation, any company headquartered in the US that commercially exploits high-resolution satellite images may be subject to restrictions for reasons of national security or foreign policy.

Industry leader Vantor (formerly Maxar) has not commented, but the company has had a long-standing policy of not distributing images of US or allied bases.

Vantor did not respond to AFP's requests for comment on Tuesday.

Unlike the major conflicts of recent years, the war with Iran was triggered by the United States, which has several bases in the region, and by Israel.

During the conflict in the Gaza Strip, Planet had imposed a 30-day delay while still maintaining extensive coverage of the territory.



Doha's skyline

EU urges member states to lower taxes on energy

AFP | Strasbourg, France

EU's energy chief Dan Jorgensen called on member states to lower taxes on energy where possible, as war in the Middle East saw oil and gas prices surge.

European businesses -- and consumers -- have long complained about high energy costs, which firms say put them at competitive disadvantage compared with Asian and North American rivals.

Pressure to address the issue has been heightened by US-Israeli strikes on Iran and Tehran's retaliatory attacks across the Gulf region, which have upended the world's energy and transport sectors.

"If you are at all able to lower taxes on energy, especially on electricity, there is a huge potential" to reduce consumer bills, Jorgensen, the European Union energy commissioner told a press conference at the EU Parliament in Strasbourg.

Electricity taxes and levies account, on average, for 25 percent of households' bills and 15 percent of businesses' energy costs across the 27-nation bloc, according to Brussels.

Reducing levies could save the average household about 200 euros a year, the commission said, as it unveiled a series of recommendations to bring down costs.

Lowering taxation was an effective way to contain energy bills temporarily during the crises, it said.

The Iran war has virtually halted activity in the strategically vital Strait of Hormuz, through which a fifth of the world's crude supplies and a substantial amount of gas normally run.

"It needs to be temporary and targeted measures, so we're not



This combination photo shows people at petrol stations in various countries including Colombia, Switzerland, France, Nigeria, Taiwan, Britain, Myanmar, the United Arab Emirates and the US taken between March 2 and March 9.

Egypt raises fuel prices by up to 30 percent

Cairo, Egypt

Egypt raised domestic fuel prices by up to 30% yesterday, blaming "exceptional" global energy pressures caused by the Middle East war, which has disrupted oil supplies and shipping routes.

The increases, announced by the petroleum ministry, apply to gasoline, diesel and natural gas used in vehicles.

In a statement, the ministry said the adjustments were driven by "disruptions in sup-

ply chains, rising risk levels and higher maritime shipping and insurance costs", which have pushed petroleum product prices to "levels not seen in years".

Oil prices briefly surged above \$119 a barrel on Monday before plunging to around \$84 after US President Donald Trump said the US-Israel war with Iran would end soon.

Diesel, one of Egypt's most widely used fuels, rose by three Egyptian pounds, or

about 17.1%, to 20.50 pounds (\$0.38) per litre, up from 17.50 pounds.

Prices for 80-octane gasoline rose by about 16.9%, to 20.75 pounds per litre, while 92-octane gasoline increased by roughly 15.6% to 22.25 pounds.

Prices for 95-octane climbed by about 14.3% to 24 pounds, the ministry said.

Natural gas used for vehicles saw the largest hike, jumping 30% to 13 pounds per cubic metre.

energy suppliers provide customers with "best tariff advice" on the basis of their specific energy usage.

Removing "unnecessary

technical hurdles" to switching providers and improving transparency and comparability of different supply offers were also cited, among other measures.

Global energy body to discuss releasing strategic oil reserves



Pakistan State Oil tankers line up along a road before entering a fuel storage facility in Sheikhupura district in Lahore. Pakistan's navy has launched an operation to "counter multidimensional threats" to its national shipping and maritime trade, with concerns about fuel supplies due to the US-Israeli war on Iran.

AFP | Paris, France

Member states of the Paris-based International Energy Agency (IEA) will meet later Tuesday for crisis talks to assess "the current security of supply" and the potential release of emergency stocks as the Middle East war roils markets, the body's chief said.

In a statement following a Paris meeting of G7 energy ministers on the economic fallout of the Middle East war, IEA executive director Fatih Birol said he was "in close contact" about the situation with energy producers and consumers around the world.

"In oil markets, conditions have deteriorated in recent days. In addition to the challenges of transit through the Strait of Hormuz, a substantial amount of oil production has been curtailed. This is creating significant and growing risks for the market," he said.

"I have convened an extraordinary meeting of IEA member governments, which will take place later today to assess the current security of supply and market conditions to inform a subsequent decision on whether to make emergency stocks of IEA countries available to the market," Birol added.

He said the G7 meeting addressed "all the available options, including making IEA emergency oil stocks available to the market."

On Monday, a meeting of G7 finance ministers also discussed a possible release of strategic oil reserves, but French Finance Minister Roland Lescure said later the situation was "not there yet".

French President Emmanuel Macron, whose country holds the rotating presidency of the Group of Seven advanced economies, said on Monday the G7 would this week discuss a possible release of strategic oil reserves.

Iraq seeking new oil export routes after Hormuz disruption

AFP | Baghdad, Iraq

Iraqi authorities are exploring alternative routes to export oil after transit through the Strait of Hormuz was disrupted by the Middle East war, an oil ministry spokesperson told AFP yesterday.

Saheb Bazoun said that "much like other countries in the region, oil production and marketing have been severely impacted, leaving the government no choice but to seek alternative" export routes.

Iraq has several oil shipments stuck at sea, he said.

Iraq is a founding member of the OPEC cartel, and crude oil sales make up 90 percent of the country's budget revenues.

Before the war, it was exporting more than 3.5 million barrels per day.

The Strait of Hormuz remains closed to almost all oil tankers, and Iran has vowed that not one litre of oil would be exported from the Gulf while its war with the United States and Israel continues.

Iraq's oil production and exports have sharply decreased, Bazoun said.

Iraqi authorities are considering several options for exports, including a pipeline that runs through Iraq's northern Kurdistan region to the port of Ceyhan in Turkey.

They are also considering transporting oil by land, but many plans will require time to be implemented, according

to Bazoun.

A senior official in Iraq's Kurdistan region told AFP talks are underway to facilitate oil exports from federal Iraq.

He said that Baghdad had requested to "export 200,000 bpd" via the Ceyhan pipeline, which has a capacity of 700,000 bpd.

But regional authorities asked for several measures in return, including that Baghdad facilitates the region's access to US dollars through banks.

"We have made it clear to Baghdad that the relief on dollars should happen first," the Kurdish official said, claiming that there is a "100 percent dollar embargo on Kurdistan".

Since the start of the year, Iraq has seen more restrictions on US dollar operations through banks.



Iraq holds about 145 billion barrels of oil, making it one of the world's largest crude reserves holders and a key supplier to global energy markets.