

**Health Ministry Announced on Tuesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Increased to 140,877 With 23 More Iranians Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours**

# IRAN NEWS

**In a Tweet on Tuesday, Foreign Ministry Spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh Condemned the Terrorist Attacks in the Afghan Capital's Dasht-e-Barchi Neighborhood Which Lead to Killing of 20 Students**

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## Arab States Accountable For Reinforcing Zionists

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi elaborated on Iran's position against Al-Aqsa Mosque incidents, saying that normalization of relations between some Arab Islamic countries has strengthened Zionist repression.

Addressing his press conference on Tuesday, Bahadori Jahromi referred to Foreign Ministry's contacts with Hamas and consultations with foreign ministers of some Islamic states.

He also pointed to a letter from Iran to the secretary general of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) with regard to condemning the Zionist regime's acts.

Meanwhile, earlier, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Saeed Khatibzadeh said that Muslims must stand united behind the Palestinian cause.

In the wake of the escalation of tension and aggression by the Zionist regime, dozens of Palestinians have been martyred and hundreds injured since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Bahadori Jahromi referred to a lawsuit between Iranian gas company and a French company, saying the French company claimed \$27m and the Iranian company's claim was \$13m. **See Page 7**

## Iran Signs Long-Term Deal With Russia on Supplying Basic Goods

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Alireza Peyman-Pak, Head of Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said that Iran's recent trade conference in Moscow was successful and coordination was made with Moscow to ensure food security.

"We predict that the Ukraine conflict will last and that sanctions will continue to be imposed on Russia. Therefore, the issue of food security, supply of oil, wheat and barley was prioritized, and in this regard, a long-term agreement for the supply of these items was put on the agenda, and necessary measures have been taken in coordination with Russia in this regard," Alireza Peyman-Pak told reporters.

The TOPI head also pointed to a recent Moscow-hosted trade conference between Iran and Russia and said, "The visit of the Iranian delegation to Russia is considered successful. About 40 meetings were held during this event and free trade agreements were signed with 6 Eurasian member states." **See Page 7**

## Iran Needs \$80b Investment To Produce 1.4b cm of Gas



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Oji says according to estimates, Iran needs some \$80b investment in order to produce 1.4b cubic meters of gas, noting that the oil industry has brought the country over \$43 billion of revenues in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20).

Oji made the remarks at a ceremony for signing a cooperation memorandum of understanding (MOU) between Oil Ministry and Tehran Municipality.

Based on the MOU, the two sides are going to cooperate in proposing innovative and knowledge-based solutions for managing and reducing fuel consumption in the transportation sector.

Speaking at the mentioned ceremony, Oji said if the country's fuel consumption is halved the revenues in this sector can be increased even to \$150 billion a year.

According to the minister, nowadays the country's gasoline and diesel refining capacity is close to the demand and consumption, so considering the upward trend of the demand for fuel, the investment capacity in this industry is increasing every day.

The official also put the country's total natural gas production in the previous year at 850 million cubic meters, saying that due to high energy consumption, the country faced a deficit of 250 million cubic meters and therefore gas supply to industries was limited.

"Over \$80 billion must be invested in the gas industry over eight years to increase the country's production capacity to 1.4 billion cubic meters," Oji said.

Mentioning some of the reasons for high gas consumption in the country, the minister said: "Many industries do not have optimal fuel consumption and their added value is low. The average efficiency of power plants in the country is 37 percent, while the average figure is about 48 percent in the world."

He further put the country's current gasoline consumption at 95 million liters per day, saying: "The price of gasoline in the world has now reached 90 cents per liter, so by saving more fuel and increasing exports, a large income will be made for the country."

The oil minister expressed hope that with the signing of this memorandum and by using the capacities and capabilities of knowledge-based companies, energy consumption will be reduced and this will lead to more income for the country.

Cooperation in formulating and implementing standards, national regulations, and comprehensive plans to reduce fuel consumption and environmental pollution, improving energy efficiency indicators in the fields of transportation, construction, and industry, supporting knowledge-based companies and start-ups, and promoting optimal consumption patterns are among the goals covered in the above-mentioned MOU.

Meanwhile Iran's deputy petroleum minister announced Iran's readiness for promoting oil swap.

With regard to developments in crude oil market, the country put promotion of transit and oil swap on agenda, Jalil Salari told IRNA on Tuesday.

And talks on the issue have been held, Salari who is also the managing director of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company added.

The official went on to say that infrastructure has been provided to transfer oil via using capacities of pipelines on land and railroad and being presence in target markets.

About construction of refinery in Syria, the official said studies on the issue have finished; and the project will enter a new phase after a joint investment.

Also several African countries have demanded from Iran for refinery cooperation, Salari noted adding that their demands are under review.

Today, Iran is capable of transferring its technology, the official underlined.

## ViewPoint

### By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## Freedom of Expression or Racism?

Europeans have always claimed they are pioneers of freedom of expression school and have always claimed they are ardent supporter of human rights but when it comes to the rights of others or minorities either ethnic or religious, they forget all of slogans and ignore the rights of others.

In recent years, Europeans especially the racist ones have started Islamophobia under any pretext and they have accused Muslims of different charges like terrorism or anti-human rights while they have themselves acted worse than any Daesh-like Islamist.

Scandinavian countries have been considered as one of the most free and safe part of the world and they have even turned into a haven for refugees either social or political ones. Sweden and Denmark are the leading Scandinavian countries which are proud of their way of administering their countries where people enjoy true freedom especially freedom of speech but each time they take offensive attitude regarding minorities especially Muslims.

Sweden is currently witnessing unrests which have been ignited by an anti-Islam blasphemy which has angered Muslims in this country. Unrest has been reported in several towns for the third day running since Holy Quran burnings caused riots over the Easter weekend. In the Swedish town of Norrkoping, at least three people have been hit by police bullets during clashes between the police and the protesters.

Police and counter-protesters in Sweden have been engaged in fierce clashes over the past few days. The violence erupted on Thursday on the sidelines of a rally in central Sweden's Muslim-dominated area by the anti-immigration and anti-Muslim party led by Danish-Swedish politician, Rasmus Paludan.

The far-right leader, accompanied by police, reportedly put a copy of the holy book on the floor and tried to burn it.

The blasphemous act prompted counter-protesters, around 200 people by local media's estimate, to break into the rally and clash with the members of the far-right party and Swedish police.

The counter-protesters urged police not to allow Paludan to commit the sacrilegious act but the pleas were conveniently ignored, sparking violent clashes and stone-pelting.

Apart from Norrkoping and Linkoping, unrest and violent clashes have been reported in Stockholm, Orebro, Landskrona, and Malmo as well, after police ignored calls to stop the far-right demonstration. **See Page 7**

## Multiple Blasts Rock School in Kabul, More Than 20 Killed

KABUL (Dispatches) - At least two powerful explosions ripped through a boys' school in a Shia-dominated neighborhood of Kabul Tuesday, killing more than 20 students.

The death toll is likely to mount, according to Afghan security officials, as cited by media outlets.

Local reports and eyewitnesses said a suicide bomber targeted a school in west Kabul's Dashte Barchi, a predominantly Shia neighborhood. The blast occurred at the main exit of Abdul Rahim Shahid School when students were leaving the school premises after morning classes.

A suicide bomber struck a school in Kabul's Dashte Barchi, a predominantly Shia neighborhood. The blast occurred in the main exit of Abdul Rahim Shahid School where crowds of students were there, one teacher told me who surprisingly escaped the attack. Fear of high casualties.

Photographs and videos from the aftermath of the powerful explosions showed mutilated bodies lying on the ground, discarded notebooks, and people ferrying the injured in ambulances. Kabul police spokesman Khalid Zadrin in a Twitter post confirmed that the blasts targeted Abdul Rahim Shahid School, which he said had "caused casualties among our Shiite brothers". **See Page 7**

## Iran Fights to Recover Stolen Antiquities

TEHRAN (AFP) - Decorated glazed bricks almost 3,000 years old are on display at Iran's National Museum after a four-decade search disrupted by war and an international legal battle.

Lions and winged cows with human heads, horses and bulls with a goat's horn, kneeling men and women and other mythological figures decorate the work, created by the Mannaean who lived in northwestern Iran in the first millennium BC.

The 51 square bricks are painted with a glazed coating on a black, brown, light blue, yellow or white background. Their discovery and repatriation "is a series of incredible adventures," Youssef Hassanzadeh, an archaeologist with the museum, told AFP. **See Page 7**

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## Pakistan PM Invites President Raisi to Visit Pakistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - New Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Tuesday invited Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi to pay a visit to Pakistan.

Sharif thanked President Raisi for his message last week congratulating his election as Prime Minister of Pakistan, Pakistan's embassy in Tehran wrote in a tweet.

The tweet added that Sharif hoped that he and President Raisi would cooperate to enhance close ties between Iran and Pakistan. Sharif also officially invited Raisi to pay a visit to Pakistan, according to the tweet.

## Transportation Main Hurdle in Way of Tehran-Havana Trade Ties

BY: F. TAHERPOUR

**TEHRAN – Iran and Cuba called for resolving transportation problem and the launch of direct flight for boosting bilateral economic cooperation.**

Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Mr. Gholam-Hossein Shafei met with Cuba's Ambassador to Tehran Alberto Gonzalez Casals and during the meeting both sides called for enhancing economic cooperation through resolving problems and launching direct flights between the two countries.

In the meeting, Shafei pointed to the meeting of Iran-Cuba Joint Economic Commission which will convene next month in Tehran and called for defining a certain model for improving economic cooperation at Iran Chamber of Commerce and this model is signed in the form of a MoU during the joint commission meeting in order that economic cooperation between the two countries would continue in an organized way.

He deplored that Tehran and Havana despite having deep political ties do not have strong economic ties, adding that the common pain of Iran and Cuba is their experience of the U.S. sanctions and since both countries have experience in circumventing these sanctions, sharing these experiences can be useful for both sides.

Shafei also called for exchange of economic and trade information between the two states, adding that lack of information has hurt boosting economic cooperation between the two states. He reiterated that ICCIMA like Iran's government seeks boosting the level of economic ties with Cuba, adding that due to relatively improvement of the pandemic, the chamber is ready for dispatch of trade delegations to Cuba.

Then Cuban Ambassador to Tehran Mr. Casals, for his part, deplored that the trade ties of Iran and Cuba have not progressed well like their political ties, adding that this



trend should be corrected and Cuba is ready for cooperation with Iran.

He added that cooperation between the two states will help circumventing the U.S. sanctions and this is his main task. He added that Cuba needs Iran's help in the energy sector as the two countries had good cooperation during producing COVID vaccine and it should continue. He reiterated that Cuba is eager to have more cooperation with Tehran in the pharmaceutical sector to enjoy Iran's experiences. He noted that Cuba also needs cooperation with Iran in the fields of mining, agriculture, food industries, renovating factories and equipment.

Casals also invited Iran's private sector to attend an exhibition to be held in Cuba with participation of over 80 countries, adding that Cuba likes Iran to have the biggest pavilion in the exhibition to put on display all of its products.

He also called for cooperation in the tourism sector, adding that the direct flight between Tehran and Havana should be launched, adding that for now, both sides can start with chartered monthly flights and it is better to start with a flight carrying Iranian traders for attending the exhibition.

Casals announced readiness of the embassy for accelerating visa process and it is also ready to issue visa card which will be to the benefit of traders and tourists.

Then Shafei then reiterated that transportation is one of the most important problems for enhancing trade ties between the two states, adding that direct flight will have great impact on tourism and even the shuttle of traders and both sides should work on it.

## Iran, Afghanistan Discuss Resuming Khaf-Herat Railway

TEHRAN (MNA) - Economic Adviser to Special Representative of Iranian President for Afghanistan announced the visit of a delegation of Islamic Republic of Iran Railways to Kabul next week regarding the relaunch of Khaf-Herat Railway.

Mohammad-Mehdi Javanmard Ghassab said that Khaf-Herat Railway became operational on Dec. 11, 2020 in the presence of former Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and ex-Afghan President Ashraf Ghani via videoconference.

The rail line of this giant project, as long as 225 km, was constructed in four sections which was put into operation in previous government, which starts from Khaf railway station and continues to Shantigh Border as Lot No.s 1 and 2 of this project. Lot No. 3 of this project, as long as 62 km, starts from Shemigh Border and continues up to Rozanak Station.

Iran and Afghanistan also enjoy three active border terminals of Mahirud in South Khorasan, Dogharoon in Khorasan Razavi and Milak in Sistan and Baluchestan province, he added. Elsewhere in his remarks, Javanmard Ghassab pointed to the volume of trade between Iran and Afghanistan in current administration of President Raisi which is not satisfactory.

The two countries of Iran and Afghanistan enjoy high capacities to boost their trade, he emphasized.

## Iran's "Gaza" Drone Becomes Fully Operational



TEHRAN (IFP) - Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s new combat drone, dubbed Gaza, has successfully passed flight tests and the unmanned aerial vehicle is now fully operational.

The super heavy combat drone, which was unveiled in May last year, has a 21-meter wingspan and a 3,100-kilogram takeoff mass, and is capable of carrying a payload of 500 kg, according to a Monday report by Tasnim News Agency.

The flight duration of the Gaza drone is 35 hours. It can soar to an altitude of about 10,668 meters, equivalent to 35,000 feet, and has a flight speed of 350 km per hour.

"Operational tests of this drone have been conducted, it is fully operational, and can be used in a variety of reconnaissance and combat missions," the report noted.

In addition to military and defense applications, the Gaza drone can also carry out missions in monitoring forests, rescue operations and providing assistance in natural disasters such as floods and earthquakes.

Last month, the IRGC unveiled one of its new kamikaze drones, dubbed Me'raj 504, which is specialized in attacking enemy's defense systems. The unmanned aerial vehicle has been designed and produced by the IRGC's Ground Force and is capable of carrying a 2.5kg explosive payload over 100 kilometers. It uses a reciprocating engine for propulsion.

## Tehran, Nairobi To Ink MoU on Investment, Tourism



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The CEO of Kish Island Free Zone Organization said that a technology institute in the island would sign a memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Kenyan company on investment and tourism.

Mehdi Keshavarz had a meeting with Kenya's Ambassador to Iran Joshua Gatimu in Kish Island to explore possible cooperation.

Keshavarz said that Kish Institute of Science and Technology was ready to sign an MoU with House of Innovation and Tech (iHiT) in Nairobi, Kenya, on cooperation between Iran and Kenya.

He urged Kenyan ambassador to consider Kish Island's economic, trade, and tourism capacities for cooperation.

Mentioning investment opportunities in the Island, including hoteling, maritime entertainment clubs, and football fields, Keshavarz said that Kenya was pioneer in building football and athletics fields and can have joint investments in Kish Island.

He also noted that direct flights between Kish Island and Nairobi could be established to pave the way for expansion of trade and tourism between Iran and Kenya.

The Kenyan ambassador, in turn, mentioned tourism opportunities in Iran, Kish Island in particular, and in Kenya and proposed holding joint marathon competitions as a ground for sports tourism.

## Taliban Pledge to Protect Iran's Diplomatic Missions After Attacks

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Taliban's acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi has assured Tehran of full security of Iranian diplomatic facilities, diplomats and staff in Afghanistan.

Muttaqi gave the assurance during a phone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian late Monday after mobs attacked Iran's Embassy in the capital Kabul and its consulate general in the western Afghan city of Herat.

Expressing deep regret over the incidents, Muttaqi promised that the Taliban would "completely secure the diplomatic facilities, diplomats and staff of the Islamic Republic of Iran in his country".

Online videos last week showed mobs attacking the Iranian Embassy in Kabul and the consulate general in Herat with stones, which damaged the missions.

The Iranian foreign minister criticized Afghan authorities for failing to take necessary measures to ensure the security of the premises, which is a responsibility of the host country.

No one was hurt in the attacks, which came amid fabricated claims of systemic mistreatment of Afghan refugees in Iran.

Despite sanctions and many other problems, Iran has



been hosting millions of Afghans for decades amid wars and harsh living conditions in the Central Asian nation.

During the phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart, Muttaqi thanked the government and people of Iran for their hospitality in difficult times, stressing Kabul's determination to expand relationship and cooperation with Tehran.

He assured that Afghanistan will spare no effort to alleviate Tehran's concerns regarding the security of its diplomatic missions.

Amir-Abdollahian said "millions of Afghan brothers and sisters" living in Iran for the past 40 years have always been provided with necessary services.

The top Iranian diplomat touched on a wave of "malicious, calculated and false propaganda" on some social networks, saying it is spread by the "enemies and opponents of good relations between the two neighboring countries of Iran and Afghanistan."

"The Islamic Republic has a positive and constructive view about Afghanistan," Amir-Abdollahian said.

Iran's exchange of delegations for cooperation between the two countries, sending humanitarian aid and keeping its missions active in providing services to the people of Afghanistan has been within this framework, he added.

## Sweden Turning Into prison for Muslims

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top human rights official has taken the government of Sweden to task over its support for plans by a far-right group to publicly burn copies of the Holy Qur'an, which has sparked violent protests across the European country since Thursday.

The Monday remarks by Kazem Gharibabadi, who acts as secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, came after Rasmus Paludan, the Danish leader of Sweden's far-right Stram Kurs (Hard Line) party, burned a copy of the Qur'an in a heavily-populated Muslim area on Saturday.

Paludan, accompanied by police, went to an open public space in the southern Swedish city of Linköping and reportedly placed the Muslim holy book down and tried to set it on fire while ignoring protests from onlookers.

Taking to his official Twitter page, Iran's rights official said, "Sacrilege to religious sanctities is under no circumstances whatsoever acceptable."

He added that as religious intolerance rages across Europe "Sweden is morphing into a prison for Muslims with the support of the government."

## Iraq Vows to Help Implement Agreements With Iran on Pilgrimage

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iraq's President Barham Salih has pledged to make every effort to help implement agreements aimed at facilitating pilgrimage affairs between the two neighbors.

Salih made the promise at a meeting with head of Iran's Hajj and Pilgrimage Organization Sadeq Hosseini who visited Iraq on Monday at the head of a delegation. Iran's ambassador to Iraq, Iraj Masjedi attended the meeting too.

Hosseini briefed Salih on talks between the Iranian delegation and Iraqi ministers of interior, culture and health.

He demanded the Iraqi president support those talks and help expand the two countries' cooperation on pilgrimage affairs.

Salih referred to brotherly and friendly ties between Tehran and Baghdad and vowed to make every effort in this regard.

The Iraqi president stressed that the two neighbors should further expand their friendly relations. He said that Tehran-Baghdad ties can be the best example of relations between any two countries in the region.

## Iranian Students Gather Before Swedish Embassy

TEHRAN (IP) - A group of Iranian university students held a gathering in front of Sweden's Embassy in Tehran to protest the desecration of the Quran in the Western country.

On Friday, a group of Swedish right-wing extremists set fire to the Quran, the holy book of more than two billion Muslims in the world, under the pretext of the freedom of speech.

The Iranian students called on the Swedish authorities to punish the elements involved in the blasphemous action. They were carrying placards and chanting such slogans as "Our Redline, Prophet, Quran", "Muslim's Silence Betrayal of Quran," and "Muslim Students Supporter of Religion, Quran."

They issued a statement on the condemnation of the desecration, noting that such blasphemies were being led by the Israeli lobbyism and support to desecrate Islamic sanctities and made the Muslims' lives harder in the western countries. The statement said the Swedish groups challenged the respect for beliefs as an example of respecting others' rights, an issue cited in the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR).

The Iranian students noted that Quran was eternal and Islam was flourishing every day.

Shiraz Mayor Mr. Asnafi:

# Urban Management Determined to Materialize Smartization of the City; Eradicate Deprivation

The mayor of Shiraz in the first press conference in 1401, referring to the drafting of the deprivation document, said: "This year, 32 neighborhoods have been targeted, and we hope that with the memorandums that have been written, we will be able to remove part of the appearance of deprivation from the neighborhoods." According to the information base of Shiraz Municipality, Seyed Ehsan Asnafi in the first press conference of this year with the media spoke about the performance report of the municipality and said: The year 1400 ended with a good and brilliant performance of the municipality and despite always being in the performance calendars The municipality has been in turmoil during the years of the council, but good efforts have been made in the last four months of the year. In part of his speech, he presented the financial and economic report of the municipality and stated that the budget for the year 1400 was six thousand and 160 billion Tomans, which increased to 9 thousand and 284 billion Tomans in the budget amendment; While in all metropolises, even Tehran, despite the beginning of the council and the municipality, we had budget cuts in the amendment.

## Realization of budget and amendment of more than 98% of Shiraz Municipality

The mayor of Shiraz, referring to the realization of the budget amendment of more than 98% of the municipality, continued: in terms of realization, about two thousand and 200 billion budget had been realized during the first six months, while in the municipality and by the end of the year, 9 thousand and 150 billion tomans Found and from the budget amendment of 9,270 billion tomans, 9,150 billion tomans, equivalent to more than 98%, has been realized. Guilds by stating that compared to the last two halves of the year; In the first half, 2,200 and in the second half, we had a budget of 6,950 billion tomans, that is, nearly 7,000 billion tomans, he said. The Islamic Council of the city was able to realize this and have it as an honor. He said that the budget for the year has reached 15 thousand 385 billion tomans, and said: "This year we have about 2.5 times the budget compared to last year, and these figures and budget will definitely require special work and we see this in the ability of our colleagues in the municipality."

## Establishing financial discipline in Shiraz Municipality

Guilds pointed to the establishment of financial discipline in Shiraz Municipality and said: Organizing accounts and financial systems is part of the transparency of municipal performance. It has been transparency. According to the mayor of Shiraz: In the field of participation bonds and financing, which is somewhat similar to the field of investment, the last bonds that were approved in 1999 and sold in early 1400 were 500 billion tomans for city trains and 200 billion tomans for buses, which in The last few months of 1400 increased to one thousand and 150 billion tomans. The mayor of Shiraz, stating that the total budget allocated to the cities of the country through the allocation of participation bonds in 1400, was eight thousand billion tomans, of which four thousand billion tomans belongs to Tehran and the rest is for other cities, said: Shiraz municipality It managed to attract 1,150 billion tomans from this figure, meaning that more than 35% of these bonds belong to Shiraz.

Asnafi pointed out: In the field of investment and neglected revenues of the municipality and the real capital of the city, we started a number of projects in the city council, but some of them, including the projects of Maryam, Mersad, Qudusi, etc., which were about 18 projects, were abandoned. Was left. He said that in a schedule of about three months, we tried to solve some problems of the projects, he said: some of these projects had a document problem, some technical problems and now almost all of these projects with a value of 9 thousand billion tomans are ready to participate. And are investments. The senior city manager of Shiraz, stating that in the first step we are looking for an investor partner and in the second step the issue of completion is raised by the municipality itself, expressed hope: these projects will be assigned by the beginning of summer, which is the working season. By completing these projects and receiving liquidity, we will figure out new investment projects, such as the development of Tarehbar Square and job-organizing sites in the eastern part of the city. He further referred to the welfare of the staff and said: "We tried to pay the salaries and benefits of the staff in the last three to four months, about the 28th of each month, and the benefits of the staff and the municipal dental and medical clinic will be ready for use in the coming days." Asnafi stated: Efforts to pay the overdue debts of the municipality and reduce 700 billion Tomans and planning to reduce it have been other programs of the municipality. The mayor of Shiraz pointed to attracting funds from government sources and subsidies in seven areas: bus subsidies, metro subsidies and subsidies in the field of transportation management. He referred to the discussion of receiving the claims of the municipality and stated: Today, about 16 thousand billion tomans of the predicted claims of Shiraz municipality are from other agencies, of which six thousand billion has been agreed and is in the purgatory of the government. Asnafi added: "In the province, with the cooperation of the prosecutor's office and the governor's office, we are seeking to stabilize and calculate the debts of other government agencies in construction companies." He said that last year less than 2% of the municipality's share of driving offenses was paid, he said: the value added of the municipality in 1400, 2.5 times 99 years and it's still more than that.

## Determination of urban management on the realization of smart city

In another part of his speech at the press conference, Asnafi reported on the field of urban planning and said: "We had several good events in the field of urban planning, and the determination and efforts of the council and the municipality were to achieve a smart city and move towards a smart city." The mayor of Shiraz metropolis, referring to the numerous meetings to facilitate the issuance of licenses, said to the plans that are registered in the e-municipality in this area: "Now the schedule of inquiry files has reached a good time and by the end of May It will be answered in less than a week, and that is 17 percent more in terms of licensing and completion. Asnafi stated: "A special effort has been made to complete the municipal building complex and data center, and the construction operation has been completed." "We have taken special measures in the field of technology and the construction of the municipal data center has been completed in terms of construction," he said.

## Significant developments in the underground city of Shiraz

Asnafi, presenting a report in the field of transportation, clarified: with the visit that was done to complete the structure of metro line 2 stations, an attempt was made to collect Adelabad station earlier in the year and the government station, despite the schedule for the end of summer. With the efforts of the city train organization, the contractor, the construction camp of Khatam al-Anbiya (PBUH) and the civil engineering deputy with a length of six kilometers were collected and asphalted on the night of Nowruz. He said that good changes have taken place in the underground city of the metro, he said: the developments of metro line 2 is really tangible and the line that had a debt of 180 billion tomans in the second half of the year, today in addition to paying much of it, another 400 billion tomans There is a charge for this line. The mayor of Shiraz expressed his hope that we will have passengers on this line during the week of Shiraz in 1402, and said: We can have passengers at Amirkabir station for February 13 this year, but the municipality is determined to include Imam Hussein (AS) station as well. Put it into operation. The senior manager of Shiraz Municipality clarified the operation of Imam Hussein (AS) class station: with this operation, the route of the railway network will be completed and lines 2 and 1 will be connected and we will have a significant change in the field of transportation; Because Metro Line 2 is the city's traffic line. He added: "In line one of the subway, we have good highways and accesses, and practically we reach the



peak of performance in line one when we connect the north and south accesses of the city at Imam Hussein (AS) station and we can create more efficiency of the network."

## Supply of wagons as one of the developments in the field of transportation

The mayor of Shiraz referred to the issue of providing wagons as one of the developments in the field of transportation and said: A number of domestically made wagons arrived in Shiraz in February last year and we are trying to allocate about 10 more wagons to Shiraz with justification plans and consultations. Shiraz week in 1402, let it be realized. The guilds also mentioned the purchase of 76 buses as another good event in the field of transportation in 1400: The purchase of 76 buses from Volvo was a good event that was not allocated to Shiraz in the initial agreement and was allocated to small towns. Emphasizing on attracting subsidies of 300 billion Tomans in this field, he said: "In the last week of last year, with 20% payment from the municipality and 80% payment from the Ministry of Interior, we succeeded in purchasing this number of buses and absorbed this subsidy." The mayor of Shiraz added: On the last day of 1400, we managed to get a remittance to supply another 80 buses. The guilds went on to discuss the municipality's performance in the field of civil engineering and stated: Shiraz city has a peripheral ring, parts of which have been worked on and the remaining parts that should be considered. He continued: "Today, we are working and construction operations on almost eight fronts of the Shahid Soleimani Highway project, and it was an engineering masterpiece during the excavation and lining of this tunnel, which has been completed." The mayor of Shiraz metropolis said: those parts that were driven in Mansourabad in 1999 were secured, which was a big project and the project is practically approaching operation. "We hope to be able to open it in the next six months," he said, referring to the Health Defenders Crossing Bridge project, which began in 1999 and has grown by 90 percent in the past six months. The senior manager of Shiraz metropolis, stating that the river bridge of Shahid Ostovar highway in the eastern part of the city, known as the Molavi project, is in its final stages, said: Its construction operations are currently underway.

## Determining the task of the project along the northeast pass of Shiraz with the support of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development

Referring to the assignment of the project along the northeast Shiraz bypass with the support of the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, he said: "The issues between the two sides have been resolved to some extent and in the next month, the municipal share construction operation will begin." Asnafi added: in this project, 30% of the share of the municipality, 30% of the share of the Ministry of Roads and 40% of the contractor is the investor. The mayor of Shiraz, referring to the entrance and exit of Shahid Soleimani Highway in the area of Jam Jam Square, said: "Negotiations with Sada-e-Islami were resumed and the review plan was completed and some of the accesses that were not considered were changed." That the projects must be approved each traffic vote, resolved. He said: The intersection of Shahid Soleimani-Jam Jam-Jomhuri highway, Niayesh roundabout and a nd Nawab Kamarbandi intersection was approved by the Traffic Council in the last meeting last year, and the plans of Jam-Jam intersection are designing raft structures and its construction operations will begin by the first half of May. Asnafi expressed hope that the executive operation of the Niayesh roundabout, which started on Wednesday last week, would be prepared within a 9-month schedule. The Mayor of Shiraz stated: In the area of Nawab-Kamarbandi intersection, both Nawab Safavi Boulevard and Ahmad Ibn Musa (AS) Boulevard, as well as the southern towns, Pars Stadium and Kamarbandi, two three-level bridges will be built that have been combined and their design has been completed. He said that in this case, we were waiting for the decision of the meeting, which was taken on Wednesday in the presence of the Director General of Roads and Urban Development, and said: And our task for the Nawab intersection became somewhat clear.

## Increase safety and resilience of the city \*

The guilds emphasized on piping in the city by the municipal crisis management and said: "We scientifically identified the areas that were likely to be flooded and increased the safety and resilience of the city." Emphasizing on completing and performing surface water piping in the city, Asnafi said: "With the efforts made in the municipal crisis management, the areas where there was a possibility of flooding were scientifically identified and we increased the safety and resilience of the city." The mayor of Shiraz, stating that one of our priorities is the completion of surface piping, said: "With a cost of 267 billion tomans in this regard, we hope to no longer see flooding in the city." Referring to the special package intended for the northwest of Shiraz, he clarified: this region will have a change by the end of summer. The mayor of Shiraz, referring to the forthcoming opening of six sections of the Shiraz-Isfahan freeway by the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development, said: "If this freeway is opened, traffic will enter from the northwest of Shiraz, and there are several approved plans in this regard." He added: The route plan from Beida road from Tang Khayareh to Lepui and Zarghan is a route that is related to the road administration, the second route is from Molusjan pass to Sadra that Shiraz municipality has a part of the route to connect to Ayatollah Mahallati highway. Will put the plans on the agenda after notification. Asnafi said: the work that the municipality has on the agenda is to build a part of this route and connect it to Ayatollah Mahallati Highway. The mayor of Shiraz stated: The connection that will reach Ayatollah Mahallati Highway and then Shahid Soleimani Highway. He added: "The second route, which I say has two options, is one: improving the axis, which we reopened part of in early April, and by the end of May, we will have the second phase of reopening the south side, and this will be done temporarily." In the short-term plan of Jomhuri Eslami Street, I would say that it will be released in this area as well, which will empty part of the traffic load. In the long-term plan, the Gaim-based expansion plan is being pursued by a consultant, and in this optimized plan, the least commercial acquisition is foreseen, and it is planned that the governor will cooperate in providing resources. He added: "The third option of the southern belt of Gaim is known as 55-meter Ayatollah Rafsanjani, which started before Gaim and continues to Ayatollah Hosseini Al-Hashimi Highway near Tang-e-Sorkh Dam. It is 5 km.

## Compilation of deprivation elimination document in the agenda of Shiraz Municipality

Asnafi continued the press conference on the issue of municipal services and said: "We have opened a joint chapter on the issue of deprivation, in which we will discuss the development of a document on deprivation." Referring to the

comprehensive spatial information system in the category of deprivation, he said: "In 1401, 32 neighborhoods were targeted, and we hope that with the memorandums that have been written, we will be able to remove part of the appearance of deprivation from the faces of neighborhoods." The mayor of Shiraz, referring to the plans in the field of greenZspace and television and landscape and urban elements, said: We are moving towards regional management and change in this complex. Asnafi continued: "Investment has been made on municipal greenhouses and local settlements to supply 20 million cubic meters of purified water for Qasrdasht gardens, and with its implementation, we will not have any concerns in this area."

He said that the acquisitions of Qasrdasht gardens should be consolidated so that we can have a garden village in that area and make it available to the citizens. Preservation of gardens is improved by gardeners and owners.

## Special performance of the deputy of municipal services in Nowruz

The mayor of Shiraz metropolis in the field of urban services referred to Nowruz that out of 2.4 million passengers in Fars province, 2.1 million people settled in Shiraz and the number increased to 914 thousand. We witnessed accommodation by Shiraz Municipality in camps, parks, stadiums and Hosseiniyachs. He stated that firefighters rescued 53 people from gas poisoning, adding: "For the first year, we did not have any accidents, deaths or thefts among Nowruz passengers, and this was due to planning in the field of municipal services." Guilds also referred to the field of crisis management and said: We had efforts to upgrade firefighting equipment and we tried to say fire station and Drake in cooperation with Hilar Red be launched.

"We have followed the fire station of Drak Mountain Park and we will have the reconstruction of station one on the agenda," he said.

## Official start of burial in Behesht Ahmadi shrine

The mayor of Shiraz metropolis, referring to the completion of Shiraz Dar al-Rahma and the official start of burial in Behesht Ahmadi shrine, said: The equipment of Behesht Ahmadi shrine is ready for operation and the shrine was to be closed before the year Dar al-Rahma have graves to be transferred to Dar al-Rahma after bathing and issuing a permit in Ahmadi shrine. He stated: the entrance of Kharameh road and its traffic problems prevented this case. In the final part of the conference, the mayor of Shiraz presented a performance report in the cultural field and said: "We have witnessed good developments in this field; While we have witnessed sections of sports activities, cultural centers and social services; It has been closed for the last 2 years due to corona restrictions and we received the reopening notice in the last days of the year.

## The special role of Shiraz Municipality in the obvious changes of national religious and national relations

Asnafi said: the special role of the municipality in the occasions is tangible for all people and changes in the promotion of religious and national rituals are evident. He pointed to the unveiling of the issue of reviving the identity of neighborhoods in the last days of 1400 and said: Reviving the identity of neighborhoods with a focus on mosques was discussed in the fourth council as mosque-centered and this program is more comprehensive and beyond mosque-centered and all activities of neighborhoods should be planned. In the focus of mosques, 50 mosques will start in the first phase and services such as sports and social counseling will be included in this format. The mayor of Shiraz, stating that the reform of the structure of cultural centers has been a priority, continued: "We are looking for a great change in the performance of cultural centers by using consultants."

## Growth and jump of Shiraz Municipality cultural budget

Referring to the growth of the cultural budget of the municipality, Asnafi stated: A jump in the budget of the cultural deputy is considered in 1401, which is about 6% of the total budget of the municipality and has a growth of 825 billion tomans, which is equivalent to 200% growth in socio-cultural and sports. Regarding the lack of mosques and husseiniyachs in Shiraz, he said: "The idea that was proposed by the fourth council is that if the land belongs to the municipality with religious and cultural uses or even other uses and next to the green space is part of the per capita 6% of parks, we can Provide services so that a person or committee in charge of building a mosque or Hosseiniyah in that area, and after reviewing the custodians, the land is given to them so that they can build a mosque or Hosseiniyah according to the regulations.

He stated that the municipality is not in charge of building mosques and husseiniyachs, adding: "What the municipality can do regarding the lack of mosques in Shiraz is to consider areas that have cultural-religious uses for this work." The mayor of Shiraz also said about determining the task of developing the Shahcheragh (AS) shrine: The historical texture of Shiraz is a brick texture, not a stone that we can build a wall around like Persepolis to remain; This means that if we do not revive this tissue, no trace of it will remain for another 50 years. Asnafi said: "Flowing life in the historical context is the first step to solve the problem in Shiraz that we must provide the conditions and historic houses to be used as a library or residence or museum."

## Creating appropriate access routes; Necessity to preserve the historical context

He considered the creation of appropriate access roads as a necessity to preserve the historical context and stated: Why is there resistance against a house that is not inherited at all; But this did not happen in Sang-e Siah neighborhood and around Bibi Dokhtar, and houses that were not historical were bought and access roads were created, and now this area has become one of the ecotourism centers in Shiraz. The senior director of Shiraz Municipality pondered: Why such a decision is not made about the shrines; Because the historical and cultural context must be used and revived so that we can revive the identity of religious historical sites by people living and flowing around the shrines. The mayor of Shiraz said: "Many elders in Shiraz lived in this area, but strange statistics are mentioned today about the percentage of the population of this area that should be studied and pondered."

## Efforts to increase services around the holy shrines

Asnafi stated: All our efforts are to increase the services around the shrines, although we are still a long way from achieving the preservation of the dignity and status of the third shrine of the Ahl al-Bayt (AS). Referring to the plan to revive the social identity of neighborhoods with a focus on mosques, he added: "This year, we have defined joint programs with the joint cooperation of Shahcheragh (AS), Seyyed Alaeddin Hussein (AS) and Ali ibn Hamza (AS) thresholds, and the plan to revive social identity." Neighborhoods with the focus on mosques are implemented in this direction. The mayor of Shiraz stated: In the plan to revive the historical and social identity of neighborhoods centered on mosques, we have considered mosques as small-scale cultural centers and provide services through mosques.

Referring to the activities of 25 cultural centers in the metropolis, he said: "Nevertheless, due to the size of Shiraz, many neighborhoods have been deprived of municipal cultural services and the implementation of the mosque-based project is a way to provide cultural services in different neighborhoods of Shiraz."

## Reviving the social and cultural identity of neighborhoods centered on mosques

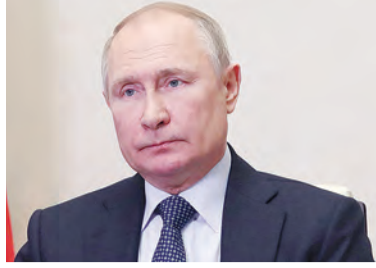
Referring to the development of mosques, the guilds stated: In the plan to revive the social and cultural identity of neighborhoods centered on mosques, cultural and social issues of the context will be examined. The mayor of Shiraz clarified the calculation of this information and said: Now with the help of Imams J We are counting this information in Shiraz city and competent institutions, and of course, each neighborhood has its own requirements..

## Putin Says Western States Hurting Their Own Economies With Sanctions

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian President Vladimir Putin said that Western countries had scored an own goal by imposing sanctions against Russia over Ukraine which he said had led to a "deterioration of the economy in the West".

Speaking on the state of Russia's domestic economy, Putin said that inflation was stabilizing and that retail demand in the country had normalized.

Western countries have imposed unprecedented sanctions on Russia's corporate and financial system since it sent troops into Ukraine on Feb. 24 in what it calls a "special military operation".



## Catalan Independence Leaders Targeted by Spyware

MADRID (Dispatches) - Catalonia's regional leader accused the Spanish government of spying on its citizens after a rights group said his phone and dozens more belonging to Catalan pro-independence figures had been infected with spyware used by sovereign states.

The Citizen Lab digital rights group found more than 60 people linked to the Catalan separatist movement, including several members of the European Parliament, other politicians, lawyers and activists, had been targeted with "Pegasus" spyware made by Israel's NSO Group after a failed independence bid. NSO said the information about the allegations was false.



## Ukraine Says First Civilians Killed in Lviv, Mariupol Holds Out



LVIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said a Russian missile attack killed seven people in Lviv, the first civilian victims in the western city, and the commander of Ukrainian forces holding out in the devastated port city of Mariupol appealed to the pope for help.

Maksym Kozitskyi, the governor of Lviv which lies 60 km (40 miles) from the Polish border, said preliminary reports suggested there were four strikes, three on warehouses that were not in use by the military and another on a car service station.

"It was a barbaric strike at a service station, it's a completely civilian facility," he told a news conference.

Andriy Sadoviy, mayor of Lviv, said the youngest victim among the dead was aged 30. The blast also wounded 11 and shattered windows of a hotel housing Ukrainians evacuated from elsewhere in the country, he added.

"Seven peaceful people had plans for life, but today their life stopped," the mayor said.

A man and a woman were killed in the northeastern Ukrainian city of Kharkiv on Monday when shells hit a playground near a residential building, the local prosecutor's office said in a post on Telegram messaging service.

Russia denies targeting civilians in what it calls a special operation to demilitarise Ukraine and eradicate what it calls dangerous nationalists. It rejects what Ukraine says is evidence of atrocities, saying Ukraine has staged them to undermine peace talks.

Western capitals and Kyiv accuse Russian President Vladimir Putin of unprovoked aggression.

Russia's defense ministry said it had hit hundreds of military targets in Ukraine overnight. It said air-launched missiles had destroyed 16 military facilities in the Kharkiv, Zaporizhzhia, Donetsk and Dnipropetrovsk regions and in the port of Mykolayiv, which are locations in the south and east Ukraine.

It added that the Russian air force had launched strikes against 108 areas where Ukrainian forces were concentrated and Russian artillery struck 315 Ukrainian military targets.

Driven back by Ukrainian resistance in the north, Moscow has refocused its ground offensive in the two eastern provinces known as the Donbas, while launching long-distance strikes at other targets, including the capital, Kyiv.

Russia is trying to take full control of the southeastern port city of Mariupol, which has been besieged for weeks and which would be a huge strategic prize, linking territory held by pro-Russian separatists in the east with the Crimea region that Moscow annexed in 2014.

Major Serhiy Volynia, commander of Ukraine's 36th marine brigade which is still fighting in Mariupol, appealed for help in a letter to Pope Francis, saying women and children were trapped among fighters in the city's steel works.

## Several Dozen Hurt in Days of Unrest in Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - Several days of unrest in Sweden, sparked by a far-right group's plans to burn Holy Quirans, have injured several dozen people, police said on Monday, calling for more resources to deal with the violence.

Protests have turned violent in several cities since Thursday, leaving 26 police officers and 14 civilians injured, police said at a press conference on Monday.

The unrest has been sparked by the leader of the anti-immigration and anti-Islam group Hard Line, the Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan who is aiming to drum up support ahead of September elections.

Paludan -- who intends to stand in the September poll but does not yet have the necessary signatures to secure his candidacy -- has gone on a declared "tour" of Sweden, visiting cities and towns with large Muslim populations with the intent of burning copies of the Muslim holy book Koran as the faithful mark the holy month of Ramadan.

Clashes with police have erupted during protests against the group since Thursday evening, starting in the cities Linköping and Norrköping.

They spread to the city of Malmö, where a school was set alight during a second night of unrest Saturday-Sunday.

"Criminals have profited from the situation to show violence toward society, without any link to the demonstrations," national police chief Anders Thornberg said at a press conference on Monday.

"There are too few of us. We have grown, but we have not grown at the same pace as the problems at the heart of society," he said, asking for more resources for the police.

As protesters burned cars and lobbed rocks at the police in Sunday clashes, officers responded, head of police special forces Jonas Hysing said.

"Some 200 participants were violent and the police had to respond with arms in legitimate self-defence," he said.

Police had earlier said officers wounded three people after firing warning shots during Sunday's "riot".

Eight people were arrested in the city of Norrköping and 18 people were detained in the neighboring city of Linköping, because of the violence.



## U.S., South Korea Urge North to Return to Talks After Missile Tests

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United States' special envoy for North Korea has said that Washington and Seoul agree on the need for "a strong response" to North Korea's recent spate of missile tests, though they remain open to dialogue with the country.

Sung Kim and his deputy, Jung Pak, met South Korean officials, including nuclear envoy Noh Kyu-duk, after arriving in Seoul early on Monday for a five-day visit.

The talks come a day after North Korean state media reported that leader Kim Jong Un had observed the test firing of a "new type of tactical guided weapon" aimed at boosting the country's nuclear capabilities. It was North Korea's 13th round of firings so far this year. "We agreed on the need for a strong response to the destabilizing behavior we have seen" from North Korea, US envoy Kim told reporters after meeting with his South Korean counterpart. "[We] also agreed on the need to maintain the strongest possible joint deterrent capability on the peninsula."

U.S.-led diplomacy to convince North Korea to abandon its nuclear ambitions in return for economic and political rewards has been largely stalemated since 2019, when former President Donald Trump walked out of a summit meeting in Hanoi, Vietnam.

The U.S. has said it is open to talks with North Korea at any time and without conditions, but Pyongyang has so far rebuffed those overtures, accusing Washington of maintaining hostile policies such as sanctions and military drills.

Kim's arrival in Seoul coincided with the start of a nine-day annual joint military drill by US and South Korean forces. The exercise consists of "defensive command post training using computer simulation" and will not involve field maneuvers by troops, South Korea's military said on Sunday.

South Korea's nuclear envoy, Noh Kyu-duk, said he and Kim shared concerns that North Korea will likely continue to engage in acts that raise regional tensions. He urged North Korea to return to talks.

Kim said the allies "have not closed the door on diplomacy" with North Korea and have "no hostile intent" towards the country. He repeated his earlier statement that U.S. diplomats are ready to meet North Korea "anywhere, without any conditions".

## Mexico President Decries Treason After Power Reforms Defeated

MEXICO CITY (Dispatches) - Mexican lawmakers rejected constitutional electricity reforms at the center of diplomatic tensions with the United States, in a blow to President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador, who accused his opponents Monday of betraying the nation.

Lopez Obrador promoted the changes to strengthen the state-owned electricity provider and roll back the effects of liberalization under previous governments that he says benefited private companies.

But his plans alarmed the United States and Canada, prompting warnings that Mexico is in danger of violating its trade commitments by favoring state-run entities heavily dependent on fossil fuels.

After a marathon session in the lower house of Congress on Easter Sunday, the president's Morena party failed to secure the two-thirds majority needed to amend the constitution.

An angry Lopez Obrador denounced "an act of treason against Mexico by a group of legislators who, instead of defending the interests of the people and the nation, decided to be outspoken defenders of foreign companies."

There were 275 votes in favor and 223 against the bill, with no abstentions, the president of the lower house, Sergio Gutierrez, announced.

Gutierrez had earlier accused the opposition of wanting to remain "imperialist lackeys" at the service of foreign companies.

But Jorge Romero of the conservative National Action Party argued that the bill would put the country "back 50 years" in efforts to protect the environment.

Although Lopez Obrador remains popular, with an approval rating of nearly 60 percent, his Morena party and its allies lost its absolute majority in the lower house in legislative elections last year.

Earlier during the debate, his supporters held a rally outside the Chamber of Deputies calling for the reforms to be passed, with one carrying a sign that said "Don't sell out the nation."

The bill's failure represents "a big defeat for Morena and Lopez Obrador because it is one of the central axes of their project to nationalize energy," Jose Antonio Crespo, a political analyst at the Center for Research and Teaching in Economics, told AFP.

'Don't sell out the nation' reads a sign held by a supporter of Mexican President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador at a rally in favor of proposed electricity sector reforms outside Congress.

Washington had warned that Mexico's reforms risk bringing "endless litigation" that would impede investment and undermine joint efforts to fight climate change.



## Le Pen Allies Tone Down Rhetoric on Proposed Hijab Ban

PARIS (Dispatches) - A planned hijab ban if French presidential candidate Marine Le Pen is elected would come "little by little" and be determined by lawmakers, her allies said on Monday, marking a shift in tone less than a week ahead of the final presidential vote.

The far-right core of Le Pen's program has come under closer scrutiny as campaigning enters its final days.

Louis Aliot, the far-right mayor of Perpignan and former life companion of Le Pen, said in an interview with France Inter radio that the hijab ban was one of several political tools to fight "Islamism", but that its implementation needed to come "progressively". The ban should target state-run services first, he said, before being widened "little by little". "There will be a debate in parliament and then the choice will be made," he said.

Another Le Pen ally, David Rachline, the mayor of the Mediterranean town of Frejus, also on Monday appeared to soften his stance. "We don't want to attack people... all those women wearing a hijab are not Islamists", he said.

Le Pen has previously said that the hijab could not be viewed as the sign of a person's religious belief, but was an "Islamist uniform" that needed to be banned from French public space.

Six days ahead of the final vote in the euro zone's second biggest economy, Le Pen has never been closer to the Elysee, but her spectacular rise in opinion polls appeared to stagnate after the first round as Macron stepped up his campaign.

Principal polls still show Macron as the likely winner, albeit with a slim margin.

A Ipsos poll for France Info radio and paper Le Parisien published on Monday showed Macron hitting 56%, up 0.5% from the day before and 3% from the first round. An Ifop poll showed a similar trend, though with his rating unchanged from the previous day at 53.5%.

Both candidates face the challenge of reaching out to left-leaning voters after the elimination of their candidates, while holding on to their political trademarks, a task particularly tough for Le Pen when it comes to Islam and immigration.



**Shanon**  
(adviser)

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J, L.balcony  
marble fl  
Fully Furn

**Shariati Villa (\$3500)**  
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5bdrs, S/p  
S, J, balcony  
marble floor  
Fully Furn

**Parsian**

**Darrous (\$2800)**  
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S/p, S, J, & F.F

**Niavaran Villa (\$3500)**  
1000sq.m, 4bdrs  
S/p, yard, & F.F

**Zaferanieh (\$2600)**  
220sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, F.F

**Velenjak bldg (\$8000)**  
5storey, 15bdrs  
pkgs

**Jordan (\$1700)**  
200sq.m, 3bdrs  
S/p, S, J  
pkg  
Fully Furn

**Farmanieh (\$2200)**  
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## Saudi February Crude Exports Hit Near Two-Year High

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia's crude exports in February rose to 7.307 million barrels per day (bpd), the highest level since April 2020, official data showed on Monday.

Crude oil exports in February rose 4.4% from about 7 million bpd reported for January.

The world's largest oil exporter's February crude production also rose to its highest level in nearly two years at 10.225 million bpd from 10.145 million bpd in the previous month.

Saudi Arabia's domestic crude refinery throughput fell 0.271 million bpd to 2.506 million bpd in February while direct crude burn fell 111,000 bpd to 291,000 bpd.



## China Q1 GDP Tops Forecast, But Slowed in March

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy slowed in March as consumption, real estate and exports were hit hard, taking the shine off faster-than-expected first-quarter growth numbers and worsening an outlook already weakened by Covid-19 curbs and the Ukraine war.

The biggest near-term challenge for Beijing is the tough new coronavirus rules at a time of heightened geopolitical risks, which have intensified supply and commodity cost pressures, boosting global inflation and forcing Chinese authorities to walk a tight rope as they try to stimulate growth without endangering price stability.

Gross domestic product (GDP) expanded by 4.8 per cent in the first quarter from a year earlier, data from the National Bureau of Statistics showed on Monday, beating analysts' expectations for a 4.4 per cent gain and picking up from 4.0 per cent in the fourth quarter.

A surprisingly strong start in the first two months of the year improved the headline figures, with GDP up 1.3 per cent in January-March in quarter-on-quarter terms, compared with expectations for a 0.6 per cent rise and a revised 1.5 per cent gain in the previous quarter.

Analysts say April data will likely be worse, with lockdowns in commercial center Shanghai and elsewhere dragging on, prompting some to warn of rising recession risks.

"Further impacts from lockdowns are imminent, not only because there has been a delay in the delivery of daily necessities, but also because they add uncertainty to services and factory operations that have already impacted the labor market," said Iris Pang, Greater China chief economist at ING.

"Support from fiscal and monetary policy has not been enough to fully offset the damage to GDP created by the lockdowns. We may need to revise our GDP forecasts further if fiscal support does not come in time."

Data on March activity showed retail sales contracting the most on an annual basis since April 2020 on widespread Covid curbs across the country. They fell 3.5 per cent, worse than expectations for a 1.6 per cent decrease and an increase of 6.7 per cent in January-February.

The job market is already showing signs of stress in March, a usually robust month for labour market as factories resume hiring after the Lunar New Year holiday. China's nationwide survey-based jobless rate stood at 5.8 per cent in March, the highest since May 2020, while that in 31 major cities hit a record 6.0 per cent.

The industrial sector held up better with production expanding 5.0 per cent from a year earlier, compared with forecasts for 4.5 per cent gain. That was still down from a 7.5 per cent increase seen in the first two months of the year.

Fixed asset investment, a driver of growth that Beijing is counting on to underpin the economy, increased 9.3 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter, compared with an expected 8.5 per cent increase but down from 12.2 per cent growth in the first two months.

Home sales by value in March slumped 26.2 per cent year-on-year, the biggest drop since January-February 2020, according to Reuters calculations, pointing to a deepening downturn in the property market.

## Indonesia March Exports, Imports Hit Record Highs

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Indonesia's exports and imports hit record highs in March amid commodity price rises due to the impacts of the Ukraine war, helping the resource-rich country book a larger-than-expected trade surplus, statistics bureau data showed.

March exports from Indonesia were worth \$26.5 billion, up 44.36% on a yearly basis and beating a 23.83% prediction in a Reuters poll. Imports rose 30.85% to \$21.97 billion, compared to a 18.30% rise seen in the poll.

That gave Southeast Asia's largest economy a \$4.53 billion surplus last month, the largest since October and far greater than the poll's forecast of a \$2.89 billion surplus.

Prices of Indonesia's top export products, such as coal, natural gas, palm oil, tin and nickel - which were already high due to recovering demand - surged further in global markets in March following Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Moscow calls its action a special operation.

"Indonesia is on the right side of the ongoing commodity rally," said DBS senior economist Radhika Rao, adding its trade surpluses and an improved external position have kept the rupiah relatively stable compared with regional currencies.

Wisnu Wardana, economist with Bank Danamon in Jakarta, revised his projection of 2022 current account deficit to 0.5% of gross domestic product, from 1.9% of GDP due to the surplus.

He said that would help cushion the impact of U.S. monetary tightening measures on Indonesian financial markets.

Among the most dramatic increases were Indonesia's coal exports, which rose nearly 150% on a yearly basis to \$3.9 billion. By volume, coal shipments were up about 22% annually to 35.3 million tonnes.



## Sri Lanka Fuel Prices up Ahead of IMF Talks

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - A key fuel retailer in Sri Lanka raised prices by up to 35 percent on Monday as the cash-strapped government was set to open crucial bailout talks with the International Monetary Fund.

Sri Lanka is in the grip of its worst economic crisis since independence from Britain in 1948. It has led to shortages of fuel, food and essential medicines.

Lanka IOC, a fuel retailer which accounts for a third of the local market, said it raised the diesel price by 75 rupees to 327 a litre while petrol was increased by 35 rupees to 367 rupees (\$1.20).

The state-run Ceylon Petroleum Corporation, which accounts for two-thirds of the market and imposed fuel rationing last week, did not immediately raise its prices, but most of its pumping stations were without fuel.

Lanka IOC, a local unit of the Indian Oil Corporation, said the sharp depreciation of the local currency forced it to carry out the latest revision, three weeks after a 20 percent hike.

Since the start of the year, petrol prices have increased by 90 percent while diesel -- commonly used for public transport -- has gone up by 138 percent.

"The rupee devaluation by more than 60 percent during last one month compelled Lanka IOC to again increase its retail selling prices with effect from today," the company said.

The increase came as Sri Lanka's new finance minister Ali Sabry led a delegation to Washington seeking between \$3 billion and \$4 billion from the IMF to overcome the balance-of-payments crisis and boost depleted reserves.

The government last week announced a sovereign default on its huge foreign debt and the Colombo Stock Exchange announced trading would be halted for five days from Monday amid fears of a market collapse.

Sri Lanka was in a deep economic crisis when the Covid-19 pandemic hit, reducing foreign-worker remittances and crippling the lucrative tourism sector -- a key source of dollars for the economy.

The government imposed a broad import ban in March 2020 to save foreign currency. It is now facing record inflation.

## Bank of America Beats Profit Estimates on Strength in Consumer Lending

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Bank of America Corp beat estimates for first-quarter profit, as strong growth in its consumer lending business helped offset a hit from a slowdown in global deal-making.

The bank reported a 9 per cent rise in consumer banking revenue to \$8.8 billion in the quarter ended March.

"First-quarter results were strong despite challenging markets and volatility," Chief Financial Officer Alastair Borthwick said in a statement.

"Net interest income increased by \$1.4 billion versus the year-ago quarter supported by strong loan and deposit growth. Going forward, and with the forward curve expectation of rising interest rates, we anticipate realizing more of the benefit of our deposit franchise."

However, total investment banking fees plunged 35 per cent to US\$1.5 billion in the quarter.

Big U.S. banks benefited from a deal-making boom last year after the Federal Reserve pumped liquidity into capital markets to mitigate the economic impact of the Covid-19 pandemic.

This year, however, investment banking revenue have taken a hit as companies delayed takeovers and stock market listings amid a surge in volatility in equity markets.

Bank of America's global banking segment, which houses the investment banking business, reported \$165 million of provisions for credit losses, primarily because it built reserves tied to its exposure to Russia and a growth in loans.

The second-largest US bank by assets released \$362 million from its reserves it had set aside for bad loans.

Profit applicable to common shareholders fell nearly 13 per cent to \$6.6 billion, or 80 cents per share, for the quarter ended March 31 from \$7.56 billion, or 86 cents per share, a year earlier.

Analysts on average had expected a profit of 75 cents per share, according to the IBES estimate from Refinitiv.

Shares of the bank were up 1 per cent in premarket trading.

## Russia's CB Governor Flags Further Rate Cut

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russian Central Bank Governor Elvira Nabiullina flagged a further cut in interest rates and said it would take two years to rein back inflation to its 4% target as the economy adapts to the impact of western sanctions.

"The period when the economy can live on reserves is finite. And already in the second and third quarter we will enter a period of structural transformation and the search for new business models," Nabiullina said in her most significant speech since Russia sent its forces into Ukraine on Feb. 24.

She told members of parliament this would be accompanied by a surge in prices for certain goods so inflation - which hit an annual 17% in March - would be above target. But this would be caused by low supply, not high demand.

"Therefore, we will not try to return it lower by any means - this would prevent business from adapting," she said. But "the growth of inflation should not be uncontrollable" and the bank's monetary policy would bring it back to the 4% target in 2024.

The postponement of the bank's key target underscored the challenge facing one of the world's most respected central bankers as she tries to stabilize Russia's economy under the onslaught of western sanctions.

Nabiullina raised the bank's key interest rate to 20% from 9.5% on Feb. 28, four days after Russian forces entered Ukraine, but trimmed it to 17% on April 8.

On Monday she signalled she would seek to cut it further.

"We must have the possibility to lower the key rate faster," Nabiullina said. "We must create conditions to increase the availability of credit for the economy."



She also said Moscow plans to take legal action over the blocking of gold, forex and assets belonging to Russian residents, while adding that such a step would need to be painstakingly thought through.

Foreign sanctions have frozen about \$300 billion of around \$640 billion that Russia had in its gold and forex reserves when it launched what it calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine.

Sanctions had until now mainly affected the financial market, "but now they will begin to increasingly affect the economy," Nabiullina said.

"The main problems will be associated with restrictions on imports and logistics of foreign trade, and in the future with restrictions on exports."

She said Russian companies would need to adapt. "Russian manufacturers will need to search for new partners, logistics, or switch to the production of products of previous generations," she said.

Exporters would need to look for new partners and logistical arrangements and "all this will take time," said Nabiullina.

## Thailand Lowers GDP Target Slightly to 3-4%



BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand Finance Ministry said that it has decided to lower Thailand's GDP target for 2022 to 3 to 4 per cent from its earlier forecast of 3.5 to 4.5 per cent.

Finance Minister Arkhom Termpittayapaisith said the target was being reduced because the country's economy has been hit by several factors. However, he said, the country will still enjoy sustainable economic growth compared to last year.

"There will be a reduction in the range but the average GDP forecast will remain at 4 per cent," Arkhom explained.

"If our economy is badly hit, then the GDP may go down to 3 per cent. Either way, growth will be continual, which is stronger and better than fast growth, which can slow down later. We are confident we can reach the target of 3 to 4 per cent."

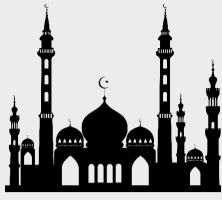
The minister said the government was also looking into how the price of animal feed and fertiliser can be brought down to help farmers.

"The Finance Ministry is waiting for reports from the Agriculture and Commerce ministries, so we can come up with new tax measures to help farmers," Arkhom said.

He added that his ministry will also ensure the tax measures really benefit farmers, not just large corporations.

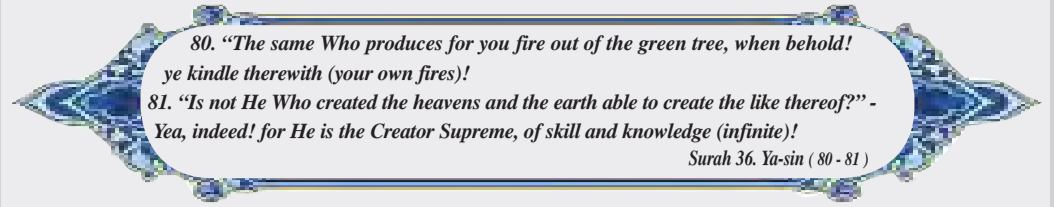
Arkhom added that the factors contributing to economic growth in the second half of the year will be government spending and exports.

He said the Customs Department reported that exports and imports showed a growth of about 12 to 15 per cent in the first quarter.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:03
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:00
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:53
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:23



New CEO of Persian Gulf Star Co. Introduced



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The introduction and welfare ceremony of the outgoing and new managing directors of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company was held in the presence of Deputy Oil Minister and the CEO of National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) Mr. Jalil Salari.

Addressing the ceremony, Mr. Salari said that in his first day when he was involved in the project of construction of Persian Gulf Star Refinery, it was just a piece of land and there were no certain actions for the launch of the refinery but ultimately the project bore fruit due to the trust on the young domestic forces.

He went on to say that in Persian Gulf Star Refinery and due to efforts of young forces, the country celebrated self-sufficiency in gasoline production, adding that wherever the youths have been trusted, the country has shone and good results have been attained.

Then the outgoing CEO of the company Mohammad Ali Dadvar hailed the staff of the company and refinery and said he is only one of some 4,000 personnel of the company who have worked in the refinery for its achievements and today the success is indebted to efforts of any one of the personnel.

He went on to say that if the refinery reached self-sufficiency, it was because the country did not want to bow down to any foreign country especially under the sanctions era and today due to efforts of domestic experts and their efforts, the country is self-sufficient in gasoline production.

Then the new manager of the company Mr. Alireza Jaafar Pour, for his part, pointed to the slogan of this year which has been announced by the leader and called for being focus on production. He went on to say that the company should boost its value added production to avoid crude oil sale. He noted that in recent years and due to sanctions there have been heavy pressures on this refinery and it has been facing problems for exports due to sanctions but the company should work hard for boosting production and exports.

HOSCO Supporter of Vulnerable Orphans

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – In a ceremony held for honoring top benefactors, supporters and donors, the CEO of Hormozgan Steel Complex (HOSCO) Dr. Ataollah Maroufkhani was honored for the company's benevolent activities.



In the ceremony which was held in the presence of the representative of the Velayat-e Faqih to Hormozgan Province Hojjatolislam Ebadi, Hormozgan Province Governor Mr. Mehdi Doosti and some provincial managers, Mr. Doosti awarded Dr. Maroufkhani with plaque of honor for his full support of benevolent activities and his support from the orphans under protection of the Relief Committee of the province.

It should be noted that HOSCO has taken 5,000 orphans of Hormozgan Province under its protection.

Arab States...

FROM PAGE 1

He said that the International Court of Arbitration, while rejecting the claim of the French gas company for \$27 million, fined the company pays 1.5 million dollars of damages to Iran.

He went on to say, "The pursuit of an Iranian lawyer in the success of the arbitration of this case shows the need to strengthen the role of the domestic legal community in international authorities to realize the rights of the Iranian people."

Bahadori-Jahromi also said: "This was a lawsuit the addressing of which lasted for several years. \$ 27 million was the claim of the French company and the claim of Iran was 13 million dollars. The output of this arbitration was a verdict issued in favor of our country, which resulted in the rejection of their [French Company] claimed amount of money, and a total of 1.5 million final payments will be made to Iran."

He also addressed the spending of the frozen resources, which have been released, saying: "As previously announced, the government has taken steps to neutralize the sanctions, including the release of some blocked resources."

"The government will not neglect the interests of the people. These resources are spent in various sectors and with the priority the Leader of the Islamic Revolution determined, and some are spent to liquidate the debts of the government remained from the past and budget deficits."

He added the employment projects to the spending framework.

With regard to the implementation of the Iran-China 25-year plan, he stressed that the implementation of the comprehensive program of cooperation was officially started last year and has nothing to do with the Vienna talks.

Iran Signs...

FROM PAGE 1

He added, "After the agreement with the Russian side, the customs of the strategic port of Makhachkala was reopened, which will have significant benefits for the exports to Russia."

The head of the Trade Development Organization also noted that the country's exports grew by \$ 13 billion last year, adding, "We are trying to control fluctuations in the export sector so that the presence in the target markets would be long-term."

He said Iran will soon enter into a similar agreement with the Azerbaijan republic too.

Peyman-Pak noted that the bulk of export incentives go to knowledge-based firms, noting that good agreements have been made with Russia, Oman and Indonesia for the purpose of trade development of these companies. He said Iran must shift away from selling raw material alone.

Peyman-Pak noted that Iran's exports grew by \$13 billion last year, saying the country is trying to control export fluctuations so that it will have a long-term presence in target markets.

The surge in Iran's trade with foreign nations comes at a time when the Islamic republic is under the harshest unilateral sanctions by the U.S. Iran oil exports have also grown in recent months and the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi says revenues from crude sales are returning to the country despite restrictions on the Iranian banking system.

Meanwhile Iranian ambassador to Russia stressed

that the two countries intend to expand cooperation in the field of energy.

On Monday, the Iranian ambassador to Russia visited the booth of Iran's National Petrochemical Company and talked with the heads of large Iranian holdings present at the exhibition.

The exhibition, which is held in the field of equipment and technology in the oil, gas, and petrochemical industries, is expected to have about 20,000 visitors.

On the sidelines of the 21st Russian Oil and Gas Exhibition, the Iranian Ambassador to Russia, referring to the good and beneficial relations between the two countries said: "Iran and Russia, with their rich oil and gas reserves, have a good opportunity to develop cooperation in this sector."

Jalali said that the presence of Morteza Shah Mirzaei, Deputy Minister of Oil and CEO of Iran's Petrochemical company, along with a number of capable Iranian petrochemical holdings in the exhibition, expresses Iran's will to develop cooperation in this field.

Referring to the significant production capacity of petrochemical products in Iran, Shah Mirzaei mentioned the country's oil and gas reserves as the backbone of this industry and invited the companies present at the exhibition to invest in Iranian projects.

Iranian Deputy Minister of Oil also invited companies to attend the two exhibition events of Iran Plast and the Oil Exhibition.

Multiple Blasts...

FROM PAGE 1

Afghan journalist Zahra Joya said a father had lost all his three sons in the bombing at Abdul Rahim Shahid School. It came two weeks before the first anniversary of the bombing of Sayed Ul-Shuhada High School in western Kabul that killed at least 90 students and wounded scores more, most of them teenage girls leaving class.

TOLOnews, the war-ravaged country's leading private TV channel, said the Ministry of Interior (MoI) has ordered an investigation into the incident, and that details will be made public later.

No group has so far claimed responsibility for the attack, but analysts believe it could be the handiwork of the Daesh terrorist group, which has witnessed a resurgence since the Taliban's sweeping takeover of the country last August.

The group had claimed responsibility for a series of attacks in Hazara-dominated areas in west Kabul between September and December 2021, which were mainly magnetic bombings targeting civilian vehicles.

However, between 2014 and 2019, the group carried out major bombings against the persecuted Shia Hazara community in Afghanistan. The bombing in Kunduz is among the deadliest terrorist attacks in Afghanistan since the US-led invasion 2001, and the first since the Taliban announced a caretaker government in Kabul

The attacks on Ziyarat e Sakhi shrine in western Kabul in 2015, Baqir ul Uloom Masjid in central Kabul in 2015, Al-Zahra Masjid and Imam Zaman Masjid in western Kabul in 2017, Hazara educational center in 2018 are some of the examples of ghastly terror perpetrated by the Daesh terrorist group in Afghanistan in recent years.

Meanwhile, quoting eyewitnesses, TOLOnews and Etalaat newspaper also reported a blast near "Mumtaz" training center in the west of Kabul on Tuesday, which resulted from a hand grenade. At least six people were wounded in the attack.

Freedom of Expression...

FROM PAGE 1

The violent clashes came after the Swedish Prime Minister Magdalena Andersson came out in support of the far-right group, making remarks that have been deemed provocative.



"In Sweden, people are allowed to express their opinions, whether they are in good or bad taste, that is part of our democracy. No matter what you think, you must never resort to violence. We will never accept it," he was quoted as saying on Thursday.

Paludan is notorious for his anti-immigrant and anti-Islam activities. He has regularly been at the center of such incidents in recent years. In 2019, he wrapped the holy book in bacon and tossed it in the air.

Of course it is not the first time in recent decade that Sweden faces such unrests over the anti-Islam moves.

In August 2020, at least 10 people were arrested in southern Sweden and several police officers injured in violence triggered by a protest where a copy of the Quran was burned. Protesters in Malmo city threw stones at police and burned tyres on the streets, with violence escalating as the night wore on, according to police and local media.

In September 2020, Paludan was banned from entering Sweden for two years. Later in October, he was prevented from coming to Germany after he announced plans to hold a provocative rally in Berlin.

This racist act against Muslims is not limited to only Sweden because Denmark is the other center for anti-Islam activities and this country has also faced such unrests or protests riots in the past. Of course France has also been the center for spreading anti-Islam feelings in the Europe and all these so-called supporters of freedom of expression claim that they support freedom of expression and everybody has right to express his opinion no matter it is offensive or not. Of course everybody is well aware that some Europeans do express such anti-Islam opinions intentionally to enrage Muslims for harvesting future purposes and Islamophobia because they know that Muslims do not tolerate any blasphemy regarding the Holy Quran and sanctities of Islam and they will react.

And now that Palestinians have started their new phase of their struggle against the Zionist regime, the scenario of provoking Muslims in different parts of the world has been performed to overshadow the atrocities of the Zionists in Al-Aqsa.

The interesting point is that when Westerners target Islam with blasphemy they call it freedom of expression but when some historical events like the Holocaust are questioned, they get angry and begin legal action against those who have questioned.

Sweden or any other Western country should realize this point that Muslims in the world are awakening and they will not tolerate any blasphemy or injustice and they will react, and Muslims should be on alert that Westerners are playing on the court of the Zionist to provoke their feelings for riots in order to have some justification for suppressing Muslims.

The racist attitude in Europe especially in the Scandinavian states and countries like the Netherlands and France are on the rise but unfortunately their governments act passively against the racism and this encourages the racists to continue their atrocities and what is going now in Sweden will not end and in any moment one can witness such unrests in those countries under banner of freedom of expression and extremism.

Iran Fights to...

FROM PAGE 1

It is also the latest example of Middle Eastern and African countries recovering stolen antiquities which have ended up in Western countries.

According to Hassanzadeh, the story began after the 1979 Islamic revolution when a farmer, Mirza Ali, discovered painted ceramic bricks while cultivating his field. They had been used to decorate a temple near his village in West Azerbaijan province.

"People were looting and selling glazed bricks, taking advantage of the absence of government control," said Hassanzadeh, who organized the exhibition at the museum, where visitors peer at the bricks through glass cabinets.

A few years later in 1985, during war with Iraq, Iranian authorities sent a group of archaeologists, protected by soldiers, to the village. They started to dig and seized some bricks but it was too late for the others.

Smugglers had already shipped some of them overseas, where a number entered private collections and museums, the archaeologist said.

The story took a new turn when the British Museum learned that an Iranian family had offered to sell a set of glazed bricks in Chiasso, on the Italian-Swiss border. In 1991, the museum sent its curator John Curtis to purchase the collection.

But Curtis realised the bricks came from the West Azerbaijan site "and advised the British Museum and other European museums not to buy it, because it is a unique collection which must not be divided and must be returned to its country of origin," Hassanzadeh said.

The Iranian owner of the collection had a different view. He was not prepared to return the artifacts from Switzerland.

"In 2008, the Swiss police seized the objects. The case went to court. French archaeologist Remy Boucharlat, who led excavations in Iran, confirmed the collection's "identity", the Tehran-based museum said in a statement.

Legal proceedings dragged on for more than a decade, with a lawsuit filed by the National Museum in 2015, and pressure from Iranian diplomats.

"Finally on December 20, 2020, the collection returned to us," said Jebrael Nokandeh, curator of the National Museum which is exhibiting the bricks until Tuesday.

A separate drawn-out legal saga concluded in October, 2019 when the National Museum opened an exhibition of around 300 cuneiform clay tablets returned from the United States.

Other artifacts have also come back, but with far fewer complications.

Nokandeh, who is also an archaeologist, said a descendant of a Frenchman who lived in Iran during World War II approached Iran's cultural adviser in Paris last year to say "that he had a collection of Iranian antiquities."

Those 29 pieces, from the Bronze Age to the Islamic period, are now also on display at the museum, while the quest to recover other stolen and lost artifacts from the country's rich history continues.

"We are in talks with the United States as well as with Australia to return objects," Nokandeh said.

## Man City Eyeing AC Milan Striker Rafael Leao

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City are eyeing AC Milan striker Rafael Leao. Italian transfer expert Nicolo Schira is reporting City are interested in the Portugal international. Milan are willing to let the player go for no less than €70m. The club has offered Leao a contract until 2026 with a salary increase of up to €4.5m. The Milanese previously refused to sell the Portuguese to PSG.

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## Mendy Agent Confident Of Real Madrid Stay

MADRID (Dispatches) - The agent of Ferland Mendy is confident he will stay with Real Madrid. The France fullback has been linked with Juventus. But Yves Lee told Tuttosport: "Juventus was interested in Mendy at the time of Lyon, then Real Madrid bought him for €50m and now they do not plan to lose him. Ferland is a regular in the best team in the world." "I always hear that Madrid is an old formation, meanwhile they are in the Champions League semi-final once again and (Carlo) Ancelotti is close to winning the LaLiga too."

# Celtics Stun Nets With Game 1 Buzzer-Beater

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Jayson Tatum converted a last-second Marcus Smart assist into a buzzer-beating layup, giving the Boston Celtics a dramatic 115-114 victory over the visiting Brooklyn Nets in Game 1 of their Eastern Conference first-round playoff series. With the Nets up 114-113 and looking for a clinching basket, Kevin Durant misfired on a 3-pointer with 15 seconds remaining. Al Horford secured the rebound, and after Jaylen Brown found Smart wide open on the left side, the veteran guard passed up the shot and threw across the key to Tatum, whose catch-and-shoot game-winner had to survive a video review. Tatum finished with a team-high 31 points, Brown had 23, and Smart and Horford scored 20 apiece for Boston. Horford also had 15 rebounds. Kyrie Irving had a game-high 39 points for the seventh-seeded Nets, including a 3-pointer with 45.9 seconds remaining that gave the visitors a 114-111 lead. Kevin Durant finished with 23 points for the Nets.

### Heat 115, Hawks 91

Duncan Robinson poured in 27 points off the bench and Jimmy Butler tallied 21 points as host Miami opened its Eastern Conference first-round playoff series by romping past Atlanta. Miami, which is the No. 1 seed in the East, made 18 of its 38 3-point shots, with Robinson hitting on eight of his nine attempts and going 9-for-10 overall from the field. P.J. Tucker, who had 16 points, was 4-for-4 on 3s. The Heat held Hawks scoring leader Trae Young to eight points, though he didn't play in the fourth quarter. He shot 1-for-12 from the field, missed all seven of his 3-point attempts and committed six turnovers. Danilo Gallinari's 17 points paced No. 8 seed Atlanta.

### Bucks 93, Bulls 86

Giannis Antetokounmpo poured in 27 points on 10-of-19 shooting and helped Milwaukee hold off visiting Chicago to open its first-round Eastern Conference playoff series. The sixth-seeded Bulls trailed by just one with 1:36 left to play after an Alex Caruso



layup, but No. 3 seed Milwaukee closed the game on a 6-0 run to secure the victory. Antetokounmpo added 16 rebounds and Brook Lopez went for 18 points. Jrue Holiday supplied 15 points, Khris Middleton scored 11 and Bobby Portis finished with 10 points and 12 rebounds off the bench. Nikola Vucevic paced Chicago with 24 points and 17 rebounds despite just 9-of-27 shooting on the night.

### Suns 110, Pelicans 99

Chris Paul scored 19 of his 30 points in the fourth quarter to help Phoenix deflate a New Orleans comeback attempt and post a victory in the opening game of its Western Conference playoff series. Paul made 12 of 16 field-goal attempts -- including 4 of 6 from 3-point range -- and also contributed 10 assists, seven rebounds and three steals for top-seeded Phoenix, which led by as many as 23 points in the wire-to-wire victory. CJ McCollum registered 25 points and eight rebounds and Jonas Valanciunas contributed 18 points and a franchise postseason-record 25 rebounds for eighth-seeded New Orleans. Brandon Ingram also scored 18 points and Larry Nance Jr. added 14 for the Pelicans.

## Fernandes Fit to Face Liverpool Despite Car Crash



LONDON (Dispatches) - Bruno Fernandes will be fit for Manchester United's Premier League trip to Liverpool despite being involved in a minor car crash on Monday.

No parties involved are understood to have sustained serious injuries and Fernandes took part in training with the rest of the United squad on the eve of the game at Anfield.

"Obviously the accident happened on the way to Carrington, but as far as I know nobody was injured," Rangnick said at his pre-match press conference. "He trained with the team and he was ok. That's why I think he will also be ok for tomorrow."

Both sides are in desperate need of the points for different reasons.

United needed a Cristiano Ronaldo hat-trick to see off bottom-of-the-table Norwich 3-2 on Saturday, but defeats for Arsenal and Tottenham have given Rangnick's men new life in the fight for a place in the top four and next season's Champions League.

"It's only about our situation and after last weekend's results we are still in the race for the top four," added Rangnick. "In order to stay in that race, we have to win almost every game, starting with tomorrow."

## Bale Wants to Stay in LaLiga

LONDON (Dispatches) - Gareth Bale is planning to leave Real Madrid this summer - though not the LaLiga. The Wales captain is off contract in June and won't be offered new terms by Real.

A move within the LaLiga is now being considered, with El Chiringuito's Juanfe Sanz reporting: "One of his options is that of retirement, but there is a World Cup ahead and Wales has to play a phase to qualify."

"Gareth Bale, as we know, is in love with the Spanish climate and golf, and he is considering staying in Spain next season to play in the LaLiga."

"It would not be at Real Madrid. I'm not authorised to say the name of the clubs, but you don't have to think about it too much to find out which clubs Bale could play for."

"They don't rule out either FC Barcelona or Atlético de Madrid."

"There is another possibility, which is the one that the footballer likes least, which is to leave Spain."

## AC Milan Not Distracted By Takeover Talks

MILAN (Dispatches) - AC Milan will not be distracted by a potential takeover of the club and the players are focused squarely on T Coppa Italia semi-final second leg against Inter Milan, manager Stefano Pioli said.

Sources said on Friday that Bahrain-domiciled asset manager Investcorp had entered into exclusive talks to purchase Milan.

"We haven't talked about it and nothing will take away our concentration on the championship semi-final," Pioli told a news conference on Monday. "The club is very close to us. I can say that Milan's present is very solid and the future could be even better."

Milan failed to take advantage of several chances in the first leg, which ended 0-0. The neighbors are also vying for the Serie A title with leaders Milan two points ahead of Inter, who have played a game less. Pioli said the outcome of Tuesday's cup match would have no impact on the title race.



# Nadal Back in Training After Four-Week Rib Injury Layoff

MADRID (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal returned to training on Monday following a four-week rib injury layoff, with just over a month to go before the French Open in Roland Garros.

"Today's first gentle workout after four weeks without stepping on a tennis court. What excitement to step onto clay again!" the world number four wrote on Twitter alongside two photos showing him training indoors on clay.

Nadal picked up the injury in his loss to American Taylor Fritz in the Indian Wells final on March 22, announcing at the time he expected to be out for between four and six weeks.

That defeat ended his perfect 20-0 run to start 2022 which had included winning the Australian Open title.

The 35-year-old missed last week's Monte Carlo Masters and the Barcelona Open, currently underway, but could potentially return for the Madrid Masters on May 1-8.

His main focus will be on being fit for the French Open which begins on May 22. Nadal has won the title at Roland Garros 13 times.

Nadal beat Daniil Medvedev in an epic final in Melbourne after Novak Djokovic was deported from Australia over his Covid vaccination status.

That victory gave him a men's record 21st Grand Slam title, moving him out of a tie with Djokovic and Roger Federer.

During the Spaniard's absence, teenage compatriot Carlos Alcaraz emerged with a Miami Open triumph while Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas claimed a second consecutive Monte Carlo title.

## Djokovic to Be Ready for French Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic has been tipped to be ready in time for his French Open title defence by Greg Rusedski and Daniela Hantuchova after starting the clay swing with a defeat to Alejandro Davidovich Fokina. The retired former WTA world No 7 also explained how the Serb's defeat to the eventual runner-up in Monte Carlo will help him find confidence ahead of his next tournament in Belgrade.

Djokovic has played just two tournaments so far this season, the most recent coming in Monte Carlo where he lost his opening match to world No 46 Davidovich Fokina. The 22-year-old ended up going all the way to the final by defeating the likes of recent Indian Wells champion Taylor Fritz and former top-ten players Grigor Dimitrov and David Goffin, and Hantuchova now believes the loss can actually benefit the world No 1 ahead of his next event.

"In a way I feel like Alejandro helped him to not lose so much confidence and hope because he sees that 'Okay it's one of the best clay court players at the moment,'" she said on Amazon Prime. "So he doesn't feel like 'I lost to someone who I was supposed to really win, I lost to someone who is playing incredible tennis'. So I think that it's going to help Novak looking ahead to Belgrade."



## Quadruple Quest Piles Pressure On Liverpool

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Virgil van Dijk says talk of a historic quadruple for Liverpool belongs to the "outside world" and risks putting extra pressure on the Dutchman and his teammates.

Liverpool are now 11 games away from becoming the first side to ever win the Champions League, Premier League, FA Cup and League Cup in the same season.

Jürgen Klopp's men saw off Manchester City 3-2 in a FA Cup semi-final thriller on Saturday to set up a final with Chelsea next month, who they beat on penalties to lift the League Cup in February.

City stand in their way for the Premier League title with the English champions holding a one-point lead at the top of the table with seven games to go.

And the top two in England could also meet in the Champions League final as Liverpool take on Villarreal and City face Real Madrid in the last four.

"Nobody did the quadruple and there is a reason for it -- because it is almost impossible to do," said Van Dijk.

Liverpool on paper face the tougher run-in for the Premier League title with old rivals Manchester United and Everton visiting Anfield this week desperate for points in their own battles to reach next season's Champions League and avoid relegation respectively.

