

**IRAN NEWS Congratulates
All Muslims on the Auspicious
Eid-ul Fitr and National Holidays.
The Next Issue Will Hit the
News-Stands on Saturday, May7**

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2 DOMESTIC

**Gov't Pursues Justice
In Distribution of
Sports Facilities**



> SEE PAGE 2

**Politicization of Syria's
Chemical-Weapons File
Harms OPCW Credibility**

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy permanent representative to the UN has decried the politicization of the Syrian chemical-weapons file by certain countries, stressing that the move will endanger the credibility and authority of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW), the global chemical watchdog.

Zahra Ershadi made the remarks in an address to the UN Security Council session titled "The situation in the Middle East: (Syria - Chemical)" on Friday, during which she strongly condemned the use of chemical weapons anywhere, by anyone, and under any circumstances.

Ershadi stressed the implementation of the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC) and said the treaty aims to protect humanity from the devastating repercussions and scourge of the use of chemical weapons.

"We reiterate our call for the full, effective, non-political, and non-discriminatory implementation of the CWC, and preserving the OPCW's authority as well. We believe that politicizing the implementation of the Convention and exploiting the OPCW for politically motivated agendas endangers the Convention's credibility and also the Organization's authority," the Iranian envoy to the UN said.

See Page 7

**IRGC Navy Not to Allow Enemies
To Encroach on Iran Interests**



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - On the eve of the Persian Day, the Commander of IRGC Navy Forces said that the maritime borders of the country are in the best possible condition, reiterating that the country's Navy Force will not allow enemies to encroach on its interests.

Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri reiterated that Iran's Navy Force is ready to strongly respond to enemies' threats to its maritime borders with all its might and power.

IRGC Navy Force will not allow any trans-regional or other counties to encroach on its interests and maritime borders, Tangsiri highlighted.

The IRGC Navy force strictly monitors all movements and provocations of enemies and foreigners, he highlighted.

See Page 7

3 DOMESTIC

**Iran, Qatar Agree
To Have 400 Direct
Flights Per Week**



> SEE PAGE 3

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



**Zionists' Collapse
Not a Boast**

The Zionist regime in recent years have tried to stop the progress and influence of the Islamic Republic of Iran both by creating Iranophobia or threats of attack but all have been in vain and the Islamic Republic has marched ahead with full strength and now it has turned into a global player and a real threat to it something that does not please the Zionists.

On Friday many people worldwide and in Iran marked the Quds Day by holding massive rallies in support of the Palestinian cause while the Quds Day is one of the initiatives of the Islamic Republic which has been welcomed by the freedom-loving and independence-seeking people in the world.

On Friday one of senior Iranian military men revealed one of the most important achievements against the Zionist regime which shows that the Islamic Republic forces have full dominance on the Zionist and they have been unable to stop Iran's progress and influence.

See Page 7

CEO of Shadegan Steel Co. Announced:

**Most Important Achievement of Shadegan Steel
in 1400 was in Field of Production**



Shadegan Steel Company with leadership of its CEO Engineer Hossein Taghi Kahzad has been able to achieve significant successes that we had an interview with him as it follows:

Q: Mr. Kahzad, as the first question, would you kindly tell us about the future plans of Shadegan Steel Company for the year 1401?

A: In the field of production, our program, like last year, is to produce over 800,000 tons of suitable quality products. Regarding the projects, we have put on our agenda to bring the steel project to a 90% progress rate and also to start the executive operation of the steel project of 1.2 million tons of slabs.

Q: Mr. Kahzad can you explain more about the production record of Shadegan Steel Company which was broken in 1400 and Shadegan Steel Company surpassed the nominal production of 800,000 tons?

A: Our most important achievement in 1400 was in the field of production, which after four years we were able to exceed the nominal capacity of the factory (800 thousand tons) and

produce 807033 tons to achieve the highest annual steel production in provincial projects. It is worth mentioning that the previous record of Shadegan Steel was 674,000 tons, and in other words, we had a 20% increase in production in 1400. In addition to increasing the quantity of production, we also made great efforts in the field of production quality, and fortunately we were able to eliminate quality fluctuations and achieve a stable quality.

Q: Mr. Engineer, regarding the slogan of the year that the Supreme Leader of the Revolution stated as the year of production, knowledge-based and job-creating, what is the plan of Shadegan Steel regarding implementation and operationalizing this slogan?

A: One of the main missions of Shadegan Steel is to create jobs in the deprived area of Shadegan, which fortunately has had a good performance in this field so far, and God willing, with the launch of the steel unit and the implementation of the company's development plans, more young people in this area will be employed. We have also taken good steps in the field of localization of parts and equipment using the capacities of the region, and in the near future I will announce good news in this field.

Q: Mr. Kahzad, what is the plan of Shadegan Steel in the field of steelmaking?

A: In steelmaking, our plan is to reach the production of 2 million tons of billets and slabs, which will be achieved by launching 800,000-ton billet steelmaking in 1402 and 1.2 million ton steelmaking in 1404.

Q: Mr. Kohzad, Shadegan Steel Company, in addition to development programs, what plans does it have to focus on the environment?

A: In order to protect the environment, we have contracted the construction of 15 hectares of green space, industrial wastewater treatment plant, increasing the efficiency of dust collectors.

Q: In the end, if there is a word that I mentioned, please?

A: The steel industry is a vast industry from mining to final products, without which the logical and effective communication

of the various parts of the chain cannot make rational and effective decisions for the industry. But recently, we are witnessing that the decisions to create the hour without a survey of activists and experts in this field are increasing, and the continuation of this procedure can deal severe blows to the body of this industry, which in recent years has borne the main burden of industrial development. And therefore I ask all those involved to pay special attention to this important issue.



IAEA Chief Grossi's Trip to Iran Refuted

TEHRAN (MNA) - According to the latest reports, no plans have been made for the IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi to visit Iran.

Some unofficial reports announced that Rafael Grossi, Director General of the International Atomic Energy Agency, will visit Iran soon.

According to the official procedures, information about Iran's interactions with the IAEA is provided only through the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), and naturally, the release of such news without any information from the AEOI is not accepted.

Gov't Pursues Justice In Distribution of Sports Facilities

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Speaking in a meeting with athletes, coaches and sports directors of the country on Friday evening, while thanking the efforts of athletes and coaches in international arenas and obtaining colorful medals from various competitions, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said, "Sports is a manifestation of pride and national identity".

Emphasizing that all sports, including championship and public sports, should be developed, the President said, "The development of sports can lead to greater social vitality and health in society, and prevent many social problems".

Raisi described the will of the people and justice-oriented government to be the realization of justice in various fields of sports and specified, "Justice in sports, including the level of awards and promotion and employment of efficient manpower, must be achieved".

He said, "Justice does not mean equality, but putting everything in its place leads to justice. Justice requires thinking about all regions of the country and all sport fields".

Referring to the request of a number of athletes about the lack of necessary resources for being sent to world events in some sports, the President said, "Athletes and champions should not worry about the costs of attending world events".

Regarding the process of selecting the Minister of Sports and Youth, Raisi clarified, "Before the elections, when I met with a number of sports heroes, I was



asked to choose the Minister of Sports from among athletes, because in the last 40 years, the Minister and sports officials were chosen from among politicians".

Emphasizing that the athletes' livelihood problems must be solved, the President said, "It is not acceptable for me at all that an athlete who wants to get ready for an events, is suffering from livelihood problems".

Raisi also said about the collective request of the athletes to solve their employment problem, "In the government, we have decided to solve the employment problem of the champions and hire them, and no champion should worry about his job".

In another part of his speech, the President stressed the need to pave the way for increasing the attractiveness of sports among young people and also to pave the way for the expansion of women's sports.

At the end of his speech, President Raisi expressed his hope that our national football team would excel in the Qatar World Cup

Iran's Trade Balance Rises

TEHRAN (IP) - Deputy Minister of Customs Affairs of Iran announced that the country's trade balance had surpassed 800 million dollars in the first month of the Persian year (March 21, April 20, 2022) due to an increase in the value of the exported cargoes.

Foroud Asgari stated that in the first month of the year, Iran's non-oil exports reached 7,324,000 Tons and were valued at \$ 3.699 billion, increasing 25 percent in value despite a 10 percent drop in weight over the same period last year.

He pointed out that Iran's imports in the mentioned period were 2,252,000 tons of goods worth 2.824 billion dollars, growing 10% in terms of weight and 1% in value compared to the same period the previous year.

The deputy minister of customs affairs further said: "Considering Iran's exports of 3.699 billion dollars and imports of 2,824 billion dollars in the first month of Persian year (March 21, April 20, 2022), the country's trade balance shows a positive 756 million dollars."

Qatar Selected Guest of Honor At Tehran Book Fair 2022

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Qatar, the host of World Cup 2022, has been selected as the guest of honor at the 33rd Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF), the director of the event said.

Yasser Ahmadvand said that the selection has been done in a specialized process and Qatar has been selected for its cultural and religious commonalities with Iran.

He added that Qatar's culture minister, director of Doha International Book Fair, and a group of Qatar authors and publishers have been invited to attend the TIBF 2022.

Ahmadvand said that this is an opportunity to hold meeting and sessions between Iranian and Qatari authors and publishers to exchange views and share literary, industrial, cultural and new sales methods.

Qatar will host the FIFA World Cup this year and Iran has signed agreements with the country to provide assistance in some areas, including hoteling, tourism, etc.

Quds Day Defeated Cognitive Warfare of Enemies

TEHRAN (MNA)- Saying that Quds day defeated the cognitive warfare of the enemies, the secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) noted that the sound of breaking the bones of the Zionist regime is being heard louder in world.

The Secretary of the Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) wrote on his tweeter account that Quds day defeated the cognitive warfare of the enemies.

Imam Khomeini's call for freedom and confronting oppression has penetrated deeper than ever into the hearts of the lovers of the Islamic Revolution, Rear Admiral Ali Shmakhani said.

Today, the sound of breaking the bones of the Zionist regime is being heard louder and louder at the international level, he stressed.

Quds Day, officially called International Quds Day, is an annual event held on the last Friday of Ramadan that was initiated by the Islamic Republic of Iran in 1979 to express support for the Palestinians and oppose the occupying regime of Israel.

Islamic Ummah Not to Trade Off Quds Liberation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Ummah won't trade off the cause of liberation of Quds, Iran's Parliament Speaker said on Saturday.

Speaking at the beginning of the open session in the Iranian Parliament - the Majlis - Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said that Muslims take to streets and chant mottos on liberation of Palestine to show their unity against the criminal occupying Zionist Regime.

All the justice-seekers of the world chanted the motto of annihilation of the cancerous tumor called Israel, Qalibaf said.

He noted that Palestine has a different time now, as the exemplary resistance of the Palestinian people has frustrated the Zionist regime's attempts to confront Palestinians' massive demonstrations.

The speaker also said that the resistance has eclipsed all the efforts made by the international dominance system to normalize the political life of the regime and has increased the cost of betrayal by the officials of Muslim states.

The Islamic Ummah won't trade off the cause of Quds for anything and will achieve the goal of liberation of the Holy Quds, he underlined.

Persian Gulf Not a Sheer Geographical Unit, But an Identity

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili has underscored that the Persian Gulf is not only a geographical unit but also an identity and a historical document of brave people of this region.

Esmaili made the remarks in a message on the occasion of the Persian Gulf National Day on 10th day of Ordibehesht (April 30), noting that the Persian Gulf is the waterway of peace, justice, love and sacrifice. The glory and dignity of this region has its roots in the ancient history of the Orient, he wrote, adding that the Persian Gulf is named the cradle of human civilization and that this honor will remain forever thanks to sacrifices of the people of the region.

The Persian Gulf National Day is an event to mark civilization of a nation, who has been the flag-bearer of monotheism and justice, the minister emphasized, adding that the nation maintained the culture in spite of all plots to preserve cultural and historical achievements of the glorious territory.

Concurrent with the Persian Gulf National Day, the 12th International Cultural and Artistic Seminar of the Persian Gulf is being held to protect national identity of Iran, he added. The participation of researchers, artists, writers, and journalists in the seminar plays a key role in enriching the national event, Esmaili concluded.

Tehran, Damascus to Continue Cooperation Until Defeat of ISIL Terrorism

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Syria achieved a great achievement in the fight against terrorism, and the war is not over until the defeat of ISIL terrorism, the Iranian envoy to Damascus said, stressing that regional states are Iran's real allies.

Speaking in an interview with Lebanese Almanar TV, the Iranian Ambassador to Damascus said, "Syria and Iran have strategic relations in some areas. We have always sympathized with Syria, and this strategic relationship is based on our identity and common relations."

Referring to Iran's cooperation with Syria in the fight against terrorism, Sobhani said, "We have achieved a great achievement in the fight against terrorism, and

this war is not over until the defeat of Takfiri terrorism."

Stressing that regional countries and Resistance groups are Iran's real allies, the Iranian diplomat noted that Tehran had never relied on any world power.

In another part of his interview, the Iranian ambassador spoke about the Yemeni people, saying that these people should determine their own destiny.

Sobhani also called on the aggressors to apologize for the crimes committed against the oppressed people of Yemen.

He also stressed that those who oppress the Yemeni people and deprive them of their rights must allow this nation to live in security and prosperity.

Statements on Corridors Around Communication Routes Unacceptable for Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Governor of Syunik Province of Armenia Robert Ghukasyan received Ambassador of Iran to Armenia Abbas Badakhshan Zohouri. The meeting was also attended by Mayor of Kapan Gevorg Parsyan and head of the Syunik department of Police Alexander Mamikonyan, the Governor's Office said.

The main topic discussed at the meeting was the Consulate of Iran that is going to open in Kapan and in this context the actions to be taken to deepen and strengthen the cooperation between Syunik and Iran in different areas.

Governor Robert Ghukasyan thanked the diplomat for the visit, stating that the relations with Iran are very important for Armenia, especially for Syunik, and the governorate is ready to do everything to make the bilateral ties more effective.

In his turn the Iranian Ambassador said that despite the close cultural ties, the economic relations between the two countries are not at a desirable level, stressing the need for efforts on this direction. He also thanked for helping Iranian citizens who appeared in a difficult situation in the inter-state highway because of heavy snows this year in March.

The Ambassador reminded the position of Iran on the inviolability of Armenia's internationally recognized borders and said that all countries should respect it. "Statements on corridors around communication routes are unacceptable for us, we believe that Armenia should preserve its territorial integrity", he said.

The Governor of Syunik and the Mayor of Kapan thanked the Ambassador for Iran's official position on "corridor". "Your opinion is important and is appreciated by each resident of Syunik", Robert Ghukasyan said.

9 months ago the Iranian side reached an agreement to open a consulate in Kapan, and the Ambassador said that the purpose of this is to develop the relations in all areas. He also introduced the consul at the meeting, adding that they will soon present the staff of the consulate to the Armenian foreign ministry.

The Iranian side also talked about its interest to the section of the North-South highway passing via Syunik and informed that there are Iranian companies who expressed readiness to participate in the construction of that section.

The sides also discussed economic, cultural, educational and other issues. Gevorg Parsyan informed that the teaching of Persian will start in the community's educational institution from September.

At the end of the visit the Iranian guests observed sites for the future consulate building in Kapan.

IME Posts Higher Records in Weekly Trade Value, Volume

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 1,805,449 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$667m, posting growths of 5% in volume and 21% in value of trades compared to the figures of the previous week.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange traded on its metals and minerals trading floor 1,296,000 tons of commodities valued at more than \$401m.

Commodities sold on this floor included 1,040,026 tons of cement, 367,633 tons of steel, 53,500 tons of sponge iron, 8,450 tons of aluminum, 6,000 tons of iron ore, 5,000 tons of copper, 194 tons of zinc, 150 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 40 tons of lead and 13 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 319,092 tons of commodities worth almost \$250m.

The exchange customers purchased on this floor 80,285 tons of bitumen, 79,318 tons of polymeric products, 60,000 tons of lube cut, 43,900 tons of vacuum bottom, 40,625 tons of chemicals, 10,880 tons of sulfur, 4,041 tons of base oil, 100 tons of insulation and 50 tons of argon.

On its agricultural trading floor the exchange saw offering of 5 tons of saffron.

Last but not least was the IME's side market with 5,778 tons of commodities traded on it.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:10
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:37
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:11

13. And when they are cast, bound together into a constricted place therein, they will plead for destruction there and then!

14. "This day plead not for a single destruction: plead for destruction oft-repeated!"

Surah 25, The Criterion, The Standard (13-14)

Iran, Qatar Agree To Have 400 Direct Flights Per Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Vice-President and Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones says Iran and Qatar have agreed to increase their weekly direct flights between the two countries by 400, adding that five cruise ships will also transfer passengers between Kish Island of Iran and Qatar.

Saeed Mohammad in an interview explained details of the infrastructures on Kish Free Zone for supporting 2022 Soccer World Cup and revealed the conditions of Qataris for accepting Iranian travel agencies.

Touching upon the actions taken in two free zones of Kish and Qeshm for the upcoming World Cup in Qatar, he said that Iran had four years to prepare cities and areas for supporting the World Cup but no action has been taken in this period.

He went on to say that since last October, they pursued actions for preparing free zones close to Qatar and recently a Qatari delegation visited infrastructures and capacities of this area and expressed their satisfaction and they reiterated Kish is similar to Qatar and both sides reached good agreements on support of tourists and World Cup fans.



Mohammad went on to say that in this short period, the required infrastructures on Kish Island were completed, adding that although it was not an easy job, the number of five-star hotels has increased and 10,000 beds of five-star hotels will be allocated to the passengers.

He reiterated five football pitches and gyms will be completed in the next three months. He noted that the capacity of Kish terminal has been increased and the existing Kish Airport terminal is ready for transfer of 5.1m passengers and the new terminal with capacity of 6m passengers will come on stream in 6 months.

He also announced agreement between Iran and Qatar to increase their daily direct flights to 400 per week and Qatar Airways and Kish Air will cooperate.

He also said that two cruise ships have been provided for the shuttle of passengers between Kish and Qatar and three more will be added till the World Cup kicks off.

Mohammad also urged Iranian travel agencies which are interested to operate during the World Cup to announce readiness and Qataris after reviewing the quality and conditions of the agencies will approve the qualified ones to operate during the World Cup.

Iran Oil Show 2022 To Kick Off on May 13

TEHRAN (MNA) - The 26th International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition of Iran (Iran Oil Show 2022) is scheduled to kick off on May 13 at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds, Shana reported.

As reported, all Covid-19 related permits have been obtained from the National Headquarters to Combat Coronavirus Pandemic and the four-day exhibit will be held in full compliance with health protocols and standards.

Iran Oil Show is among the most significant oil and gas events in the world in terms of the number of participants and its diversity.

The event covers a variety of oil industry areas, including upstream industries, universities and science centers, start-ups, and science and technology parks, petrochemicals and related industries, gas and related industries, pipes and tubes, valves, refining and distribution and related industries, rotary machines, as well as products exporters, and etc.

9,000-Meter Warehouse of Shahid Beheshti Port Comes on Stream



IRA NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Director General of Maritime and Ports Organization of Sistan and Baluchestan Province announced the construction and pre-schedule exploitation of the construction project of 9,000-meter multifunctional warehouse in Shahid Beheshti Port of Chabahar.

Behrouz Aqaei said that investment projects for improving the storage capacity and hosting ships carrying the basic goods will come on stream ahead of the scheduled plan.

He went on to say that the executive operation for construction of a depot for goods started in November 2020 with private sector investment on a land around 1.7 hectares which is aimed at increasing the capacity of depotting goods, acceleration in load and unload, standard goods depot, increasing the capacity of hosting ships and storing the exporting, importing and transiting goods., adding that the project kicked off on a 20-year long based contract and BOT contract at Shahid Beheshti Port which came on stream ahead of the schedule.

Aqaei noted that development of the logistic infrastructures of Chabahar Port with using projects of the private sector and developing port businesses and creating sustainable jobs are of main goals of the organization this year.

IMF Says Iranian Government Debt Soared Since 2018

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian government debts have soared since 2018, when the US imposed tough sanctions on the Islamic Republic, International Monetary Fund's figures show.

According to IMF's Middle East and Central Asia economic outlook report, Iranian government's net debt equaled to 41.5% of nominal GDP or \$591 billion (based on official USD rate at 42,000 rials) in 2021. It was only \$45 billion during 2000-2018 on average, or 11.8% of nominal GDP. The figure reached \$214 billion in 2019 and increased to \$351 billion in 2020.

During last three years only 70% of government's annual budget has been realized due to US sanctions and plunging oil exports. Therefore, the government had to borrow a huge amount of money from the Central Bank, The National Development Fund and other internal financial entities to compensate the budget deficit.

Last year, the Supreme Audit Court of Iran announced that the government's net debts reached 10,000 trillion (10 quadrillion) rials by May 2021, which equals \$238 billion based on official USD rate or \$37.5 billion based on USD rate in open markets (1 USD: 26,500 rial).

The Supreme Audit Court hasn't released a new report, but last year it warned that government debt is increasing rapidly, rising 72% only during March-May 2021.

The heavy borrowing from the central bank leads to printing money and a dangerous rise in liquidity since 2017, which in turn fuels inflation currently standing at more than 40 percent.

Iranian government spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi said on April 19 that export revenues, especially from oil shipments, have substantially increased, but the government had to allocate 100 trillion rials per month to pay off mature debts.

IMF put the country's total exports (oil, non-oil and service) at \$54 billion in 2020, but the figure increased to \$91 billion in 2021 and expected to reach \$140 billion during the current year.

IMF also predicted that the government's net debts remain unchanged in 2022. International organizations to a large extent have to rely on official figures issued by Iran, as they have no representatives on the ground and do not visit the country.

Iran's oil and gas condensate export declined from 2.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) in 2018 to 320,000 b/d in 2020 due to the US sanctions, but increased to around 670,000 b/d during last year, according Kpler data intelligence firm. The oil price has also been increasing from \$41 in 2020 to above \$100 now.

Iran-Tajikistan Trade Exchange Witnesses 453% Growth

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The spokesman for Iran Customs Administration announced on Saturday that Iran-Tajikistan trade in the past Iranian calendar year (ending on March 20, 2022) has seen a 453-percent growth compared with the preceding year.

Rouhollah Latifi said that the value of trade exchange between the two countries has been over 131 million dollars in the past year.

The figure has been for over 139 tons of commodities, which shows 489 percent increase in weight in the mentioned period compared with that of the previous year, the official added.

He noted Tajikistan's exports to Iran in the same period hit 91.6m which shows 459% growth.

Iran's trade exchange with Tajikistan has accelerated in recent three months, according to Latifi.

Construction materials, agricultural products, foodstuff, various vaccines and medicines, detergents, shoes, cloths, glass tableware, electronic tools, toys, etc. have been among Iran's exports to Tajikistan.

Owji Meets With Iraqi Minister of Electricity

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister Javad Owji and the Minister of Electricity of Iraq emphasized the development of cooperation between the two countries in the oil and gas sector.

Javad Owji in a meeting with Adel Karim, Minister of Electricity of Iraq and his accompanying delegation stressed the need to further develop cooperation in the field of oil and gas, and said: "I hope good decisions

will be made during your stay in Iran."

In this meeting, the Iraqi Minister of Electricity called Iran a friendly country, and added: "I am happy to meet you for the second time, we are your friends and we would like the cooperation between the two countries to continue."

During the meeting, the two sides stressed the need to further develop cooperation, especially in the gas sector.

Baghdad to Pay Iran Energy Debts Soon

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chairman of the Iran-Iraq joint chamber of commerce, Yahya Al-e Eshaq, said that according to the latest agreements between the two countries, Iran will pay Iran energy debts in the coming days."

Referring to the recent visit of Iraqi Minister of Electricity Adel Karim to Tehran, Al-e Eshaq said that Iran and Iraq have always had good ties with each other in this field, and such cooperation is being done by the private and governmental sectors.

He added that the governmental sector exchanges are mostly in the field of energy, and Iran's governmental sector should receive \$1 billion from Iraq, and according to the agreements, this energy debt to Iran will be paid by Iraq."

Al-e Eshaq added that Iran's private sector claims \$9 billion dollars from Iraq, and paying this amount is also underway. Iraqi Minister of Electricity Adel Karim on April 5, 2022, underlined that Iraq has not struck a deal with littoral states of the Persian Gulf; thus, Baghdad requires gas import from Iran for coming years.

The Iraqi minister made the remarks in a TV talk show, promising a different summer in comparison to previous summers, saying that the Ministry of Electricity makes all-out efforts to get ready for a hike in electricity consumption during this hot summer.

Karim acknowledged that creating a power grid connection with Arab littoral states of the Persian Gulf would be very costly, noting that the Iraqi government does not accept the prices proposed by these Arab countries.

Iran Expanding Pharmaceutical Market Abroad

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's head of the Food and Drug Administration says a fine line has been set up to export medicine to pave the way for expanding the Iranian pharmaceutical market in other countries.

In recent years, U.S. sanctions have targeted Iran's medical and pharmaceutical equipment, disrupting the lives and treatment of terminally ill and cancer patients. But Iranian companies, relying on domestic experts' knowledge, produce many drugs in the country and even export them.

Attending a press briefing on Saturday, Bahram Daraei stated: "We have signed memoranda of



understanding with the syndicates to facilitate the conditions for drug exports."

He announced that a particular line had been set up for the export of medicine to pave the way for expanding the Iranian pharmaceutical market in other countries.

Three years after Iran's drug list closure, 21 items of medicine for particular and incurable patients entered the list.

"With the opening of the drug list, we will allow companies to continue research and development and import new drugs and technologies," Daraei said.

Housing Price Drops 2.4% In Tehran City

TEHRAN (MNA) - Average housing price fell 2.4 percent in the capital Tehran during the first Iranian calendar month Farvardin (ended on April 20), compared to its previous month, according to a report by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

Based on the CBI data, the average price for one square meter of a residential unit in Tehran stood at 342.7 million rials (about \$1,228) during the mentioned month.

The average housing price in the said month also increased 16.9 percent in comparison to the same month in the previous fiscal year.

As reported, the number of real estate deals stood at 3,400 in the capital city in the first month of this year, falling 49.9 percent from the previous month, while increasing 63.7 percent from the same month of the past year.

As previously reported by the CBI, the average housing price rose 16 percent in the capital Tehran during the last month of the past Iranian calendar year 1400 (ended on March 20), compared to the same month in the preceding year.

Based on the CBI data, the average price for one square meter of a residential unit in Tehran stood at 351.2 million rials (about \$1,377) during the last month of the past year, up 6.2 from its previous month, and 16 percent from the same month of the preceding year.

Housing prices in Iran have been constantly rising over the past three years due to various internal and external factors.

Two South Koreans Arrested For Spying for North

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Two South Koreans, including a serving army captain, have been arrested on charges of stealing military secrets for a suspected North Korean agent who paid them in cryptocurrency, Seoul police said.

The nuclear-armed yet impoverished North — which is technically at war with the South — is known to operate an army of thousands of well-trained hackers who have attacked firms, institutions and researchers in South Korea and elsewhere.

But this is the first case where a South Korean “civilian and an active-duty military captain were caught trying to obtain military secrets, at the behest of a North Korean agent,” the police said in a statement.



Zelensky, Putin Invited To G20 Summit

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky has been invited to the G20 summit in November, which will also be attended by Russian President Vladimir Putin, the leader of host nation Indonesia said.

Indonesia, which holds the G20 presidency this year, has been under heavy pressure from the West, led by the United States, to exclude Russia following its invasion of Ukraine, but Jakarta has argued it must remain “impartial”.

“I have invited President Zelensky to attend the G20 summit,” said President Joko Widodo, suggesting a compromise had been reached following pressure from US President Joe Biden and others to allow Ukraine’s participation to strike a balance.



Ukraine Claims Russia Taking Colossal Losses in Eastern Battle



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine acknowledged it was taking heavy losses in Russia’s assault in the east, but said Russia’s losses were even worse, as U.S. President Joe Biden called on Congress to send as much as \$33 billion to help Kyiv withstand the attack.

The body of a journalist from U.S.-backed broadcaster Radio Liberty was found in rubble in the Ukrainian capital, killed in a Russian missile attack during a visit by the U.N. secretary-general.

President Volodymyr Zelenskiy praised Biden’s offer of help, which amounts to nearly 10 times the aid Washington has sent so far since the war began on Feb. 24.

Having failed in an assault on Kyiv in the north of Ukraine last month, Russia is now trying to fully capture two eastern provinces known as Donbas.

Ukraine has acknowledged losing control of some towns and villages there since the assault began last week, but says Moscow’s gains have come at a massive cost to a Russian force already worn down from its earlier defeat near the capital.

“We have serious losses but the Russians’ losses are much much bigger...They have colossal losses,” presidential adviser Oleksiy Arestovych said, without elaborating. Western officials said Russia had been suffering fewer casualties after narrowing the scale of its invasion but numbers were still “quite high”.

Zelenskiy’s office said Russia was pounding the entire front line in the eastern Donetsk region with rockets, artillery, mortar bombs and aircraft. The Ukrainian general staff said Russia was shelling positions along the line of contact to prevent the Ukrainians from regrouping. A U.S. official said the Russian offensive in Donbas appeared to be behind schedule.

By pledging tens of billions of dollars in aid for Ukraine, Biden has dramatically increased U.S. involvement in the conflict. The United States and its allies are now sending heavy weapons including artillery, with what Washington says is an aim not just to repel Russia’s attack but to weaken its armed forces so it cannot menace its neighbors again.

“We need this bill to support Ukraine in its fight for freedom,” Biden said. “The cost of this fight - it’s not cheap - but caving to aggression is going to be more costly,” read more

Zelenskiy tweeted: “Thank you @ POTUS and the American people for their leadership in supporting Ukraine in our fight against Russian aggression. We defend common values - democracy and freedom. We appreciate the help. Today it is needed more than ever!”

While the proposed U.S. aid amounts to more than 20 percent of Ukraine’s 2020 GDP, the World Bank estimates the war will cut more than 45 percent off Ukrainian GDP this year and hit growth elsewhere around the world.

Taliban Supreme Leader Urges World to Recognize Gov’t

KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan’s supreme leader called again for the international community to recognize the Taliban government, saying the world had become a “small village” and proper diplomatic relations would help solve the country’s problems.

No nation has formally recognized the regime installed by the Taliban after they seized power in August and reintroduced the hardline Islamist rule that is increasingly excluding women from public life.

In a written message ahead of the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of Ramadan, supreme leader Hibatullah Akhundzada did not mention international sticking points -- including reopening secondary schools for girls.

Instead, he said recognition should come first “so that we may address our problems formally and within diplomatic norms and principles”.

“Undoubtedly, the world has transformed into a small village,” said Akhundzada, who has not been seen in public for years and lives reclusively in Kandahar, the Taliban’s spiritual heartland.



Germany Considers Sending Howitzers to Ukraine

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany is considering sending long-ranged howitzers to Ukraine, a security source told Reuters on Friday, confirming a report published by Welt am Sonntag newspaper only days after Berlin first decided to supply heavy weapons to Kyiv.

The move follows warnings by the Kremlin that Western arms supplies to Ukraine posed a threat to the security of the European continent “and provoke instability”.

Ukraine’s pleas for heavy weapons have intensified since Moscow shifted its offensive to the Donbas, an eastern region with largely flat, open terrain seen as better suited for tank battles than the areas in the north around the capital, Kyiv, where much of the earlier fighting took place.

Berlin is in talks with the Dutch government on delivering the Panzerhaubitze 2000 to Ukraine, the source said, referring to one of the most powerful artillery weapons in the Bundeswehr inventories that can hit targets at a distance of 40 km (25 miles).

The Dutch aim to supply a “limited number” of the same howitzers to Ukraine, ANP news agency reported on Tuesday, as Germany has offered to provide training and ammunition for the weapons built by German defense company KMW.

Critics, including Ukraine’s ambassador to Germany, have accused Berlin of dragging its heels on giving heavy weapons to Ukraine and on other measures that could help Kyiv repel Russian forces, such as an embargo on Russian energy imports.

Most of the heavy weapons NATO countries have sent to Ukraine so far are Soviet-built arms still in the inventories of east European NATO member states, but the United States and some other allies have started to supply Kyiv with Western howitzers.

On Thursday, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said the Western military alliance was ready to maintain its support for Ukraine in the war against Russia for years, including help for Kyiv to shift from Soviet-era weapons to modern Western arms and systems.

North Korea’s Kim Calls for Stronger Military

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korean leader Kim Jong Un called on the country’s military to “bolster up their strength in every way to annihilate the enemy”, state media reported, as new satellite imagery showed increased preparations for a possible nuclear test.

Kim made the remarks during photo sessions with troops, state media broadcasters, and others involved in a massive military parade staged on Monday, which marked the 90th anniversary of the army’s founding.

Photos released by state media showed Kim perched on a white horse and wearing a white, military-style tunic with gold trim as he reviewed the troops.

Monday’s parade had featured several of the North’s latest missiles, including its largest intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM), the Hwasong-17, and a recently tested hypersonic missile.

The display demonstrated the “modernity, heroism and radical development of the armed forces of the Republic and their matchless military and technological superiority,” Kim told troops at the photo session, state news agency KCNA reported.

North Korea says it opposes war and that its weapons are for self-defense, but at Monday’s parade Kim said the mission of its nuclear force goes beyond

detering war to also include defending the nation’s “fundamental interests.”

Last month North Korea resumed testing its largest ICBMs, and there are signs it could soon test a nuclear weapon for the first time since 2017.

“Current satellite imagery indicates that preparations are well underway and should not be discounted as insignificant activity,” the U.S.-based Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) said in a report on Thursday.

Analysts and South Korean and U.S. officials have said that the North appears to be restoring Tunnel No. 3 at its Punggye-ri Nuclear Test Site, used for underground nuclear blasts before it was closed in 2018 amid denuclearisation talks with Washington and Seoul.

Kim has since said the country is no longer bound by that self-imposed moratorium on tests, but North Korea has not commented on the work or confirmed its purpose.

Commercial satellite imagery from Monday shows construction of new buildings, movement of lumber, and an increase in equipment and supplies immediately outside the new entrance to Tunnel No. 3, CSIS said.

“The date of a seventh nuclear test will undoubtedly depend exclusively upon the personal decision of Kim Jong Un,” the report said.



Solomon Islands Not to Accept Militarization of Pacific

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - The Solomon Islands signed a security pact with China because a similar deal with Australia was inadequate, Prime Minister Manasseh Sogavare said, adding his country knew the cost of war and would not be part of any militarisation of the Pacific.

Addressing parliament, Sogavare made his first public comments since talks with White House Indo-Pacific coordinator Kurt Campbell, who visited Hoinara days after the security pact with China was announced.

China’s attempts to extend its military influence in the Pacific have put Western allies on guard, and the security pact with the Solomons has roiled the Australian election campaign.

While details of the pact with China have not been disclosed, Sogavare has ruled out a military base and said it covers domestic policing.

Sogavare said on Friday the security agreement with China was needed because an agreement with traditional partner Australia was “inadequate”.

Opposition parties have criticized the government’s secrecy over the terms of the pact with Beijing, and Western allies are concerned that it could provide a gateway for a Chinese military presence.

Australia and New Zealand have warned the pact could upset long standing regional security cooperation.

Sogavare said Campbell and a separate Japanese delegation had warned him against allowing China to build a naval base because it was not in the region’s interests. Sogavare, who has previously said that there were no such plans, said he agreed with the delegations.

“We don’t need to be reminded of the cost of war,” Sogavare told parliament.

He said the Solomon Islands would never accept the militarization of the Pacific after what it experienced in World War Two, and criticized the United States for failing to include the islands in funding for post-war reconstruction.

Campbell had agreed to speed up the removal of unexploded World War Two ordnance, Sogavare said.

Echoing comments made by China’s foreign ministry, Sogavare also criticised Australia’s signing of the AUKUS defense alliance with the United States and Britain last year without consulting Pacific island nations.



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Parsian

Mahmoodieh (\$3000)

260sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, pkg
marble floor
L.balcony
fireplace
Fully Furn

Elahieh Villa (\$5000)

2000sq.m
6bdrs, S/p
S, J, terrace
green yard
Nicely Furn

Farmanieh (\$1700) 2bdrs
Farmanieh (\$2200) 3bdrs
Farmanieh (\$2800) 4bdrs
All with S/p, S, J, & F.F

Shahrak-e-Gharb Villa (\$5000)
1400sq.m, 5bdrs, S/pool, S, J
terrace, green yard, & F.F

(\$2000)
Dibaji Apt
150sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, S, J, & F.F

Darrous (\$1800) 3bdrs
Darrous (\$2600) 4bdrs
Both with S/p, S, J, & F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$8000)
5storey, 20bdrs, S/p
yard, storages, & pkg

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2storey bldg, 3units
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OPEC+ Likely to Stick to Existing Deal

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ is likely to stick to its existing deal and agree another small output increase for June when it meets on May 5, six sources from the producer group told Reuters on Thursday, even as Russia expects its output to shrink further. The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and allies led by Russia, collectively known as OPEC+, have been unwinding record output cuts in place since the COVID-19 pandemic took hold in 2020. Under a deal reached in July last year, the group is set to increase output targets by 432,000 bpd every month until the end of September, to unwind its remaining production cuts. Last month, it agreed to go ahead with the planned output increase for May.



Inflation Concerns Fueling Low Economic Confidence in U.S.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Americans' confidence in the economy remains very low, and mentions of economic issues as the most important problem in the U.S. are at their highest point since 2016. Inflation, which registered as the top economic problem last month and continues to be, was previously at this level in 1984.

Gallup regularly tracks Americans' ratings of national economic conditions as excellent, good, only fair or poor, as well as their views on whether the economy is getting better or worse. The combined responses are used to create the Gallup Economic Confidence Index (ECI), which has a theoretical range of +100 (if all respondents say the economy is excellent or good and that it is getting better) to -100 (if all say it is poor and getting worse).

In the latest Gallup poll, conducted April 1-19, four in five U.S. adults rate current economic conditions in the country as only fair (38%) or poor (42%), with few describing conditions as excellent (2%) or good (18%). Furthermore, 76% of Americans say the economy is getting worse, 20% say it is improving, and 3% think it is staying the same.

The resulting -39 Economic Confidence Index reading is identical to last month but well above the record low of -72 in October 2008, during the Great Recession. The ECI has been in negative territory since July 2021 as Americans have watched the inflation rate climb to its highest levels since 1981 and felt its effects on their own finances. In addition to rising inflation, the U.S. public is increasingly worried about high fuel prices.

Roughly four in 10 Americans name economic issues as the most important problem facing the U.S. This figure includes 17% who mention inflation or the high cost of living, 12% who name the economy in general and 6% who say fuel prices. Each of these specific economic issues is mentioned less than the government, which remains a top problem for 20% of U.S. adults.

Mentions of the coronavirus have dwindled to 4% in the latest poll after consistently rating as one of the top issues for the past two years.

The percentage of U.S. adults who cite any economic concern as the country's most important problem has edged up four percentage points this month to 39%, the highest level in six years. Still, this is well below the highs seen during economic recessions in February 2009 (86%) and March 1991 (73%).

As was the case last month, mentions of inflation are at their highest point since 1984.

Republicans and Republican-leaning independents are more likely than Democrats and Democratic-leaning independents to cite economic issues (42% vs. 33%, respectively) and inflation specifically (20% vs. 14%) as the nation's top problem. Likewise, more Republicans than Democrats mention the government/poor leadership (24% vs. 17%) and illegal immigration (12% vs. 3%). For their part, Democrats (8%) are significantly more likely than Republicans (1%) to name race relations.

Economic confidence remains sharply low but still well above readings during the Great Recession. However, if inflation continues to rise and gas prices remain elevated heading into the summer months, economic confidence in the U.S. may well fall further.

Algeria Threatens to Scrap Gas Contract With Spain

ALGIERS (Dispatches) - Gas giant Algeria threatened to break a contract to supply gas to Spain if Madrid transferred it onwards to "a third destination", amid tensions with regional rival Morocco.

Algeria's state-owned energy giant Sonatrach supplied more than 40 percent of Madrid's natural gas imports in 2021, most of which was supplied directly through the 750-kilometre (465-mile) Medgaz deepwater pipeline.

Algeria, Africa's largest gas exporter, previously also supplied gas through a second GME (Gaz Maghreb Europe) pipeline, which links Spain to Algeria via Morocco.

But Algiers in November shut supply through the GME due to a diplomatic rupture with Rabat, depriving Morocco of Algerian gas.

On Wednesday, Algeria's Energy and Mines Minister Mohamed Arkab said his Spanish counterpart informed him that Madrid was to "authorise the operation, in reverse flow" of the GME pipeline, and that this would start "today or tomorrow", an energy ministry statement said.

It did not mention the country the gas would be sent to.

However, in February, Spain said it would help Rabat to "guarantee its energy security" by allowing it to transport gas through the GME.

Algiers warned that any routing of "Algerian natural gas delivered to Spain, whose destination is none other than that provided for in the contracts, will be considered as a breach of contractual commitments."



Soaring Food Prices May Stoke Unrest in Africa

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Surging food and energy prices stoked by the war in Ukraine may lead to "social unrest" in Africa, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) warned.

Most countries south of the Sahara are already seeing a slowdown in economic growth from last year, and the impact will be amplified by the rising cost of cereals and fuel, it said.

"The war in Ukraine has triggered a sharp increase in energy and food prices that could undermine food security in the region, raise poverty rates, worsen income inequality, and possibly lead to social unrest," the Fund said in its annual Regional Outlook for Africa.

"The war compounds some of the region's most pressing policy challenges, including the social and economic scarring effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, security risks in several countries, and the challenges posed by climate change."

GDP growth in African countries in 2021 was 4.5 percent, an upward revision from the earlier estimation of 3.7 percent, but this is expected to slow to 3.8 percent over 2022, the IMF said.

The head of the IMF's African department, Abebe Aemro Selassie, told AFP he was "very worried" by the twin impact of food and higher fuel costs -- something that was particularly felt in the great majority of African countries that are not oil or gas exporters.

"This is a shock that hits in a laser light, directed at the poorest," he said.

"Fuel price increases feed into transportation costs, and people providing goods and services will raise their prices because they are now facing higher input costs," he said.

Food prices monitored by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) surged 12.6 percent between February and March, reaching their highest levels since the index was launched in 1990, the UN's agency said on April 8. The previous record high was set in 2011.

The IMF report placed the spotlight on the price of wheat.

China to Cut Coal Import Tariffs to Zero From May 1

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China will cut import tariffs for all types of coal to zero from May 1, 2022, until March 31, 2023, the finance ministry said on Thursday, as Beijing strives to ensure energy security amid soaring global prices and supply disruption concerns.

Top Chinese officials, including President Xi Jinping, have repeatedly addressed the vital role of coal in China's energy mix despite climate pledges to gradually reduce coal use and to bring the country's carbon emissions to a peak by 2030.

Import tariffs for anthracite and coking coal, mainly used in steelmaking, will be cut to zero from the current 3%, and rates for other kinds of coal will be down from 3-6%.

China imported 323.33 million tons of coal in 2021, about 8% of its total coal consumption.

However, the removal of coal import tariffs is seen having little impact on China's coal purchases in 2022, as domestic output holds at record levels while sea-borne prices have surged to historically highs. Some traders said the move could benefit its imports from Russia.

Australian thermal coal futures linked to benchmark Newcastle prices are hovering around \$326 a ton after touching as high as \$440 a ton in early March.

China's spot coal prices are around 1,200 yuan (\$181.61) a ton, with term-contract prices capped by the government at 770 yuan.

"The tariff cuts will make no difference to Indonesian coal imports, as the tariff rates have been at zero, and no impacts on Australian coal due to imports ban," said a Beijing-based coal trader.

"Then we can only make a guess that it will benefit coal imports from Russia, which is at 6% for thermal coal."

China's imports of Russian coal fell 30% in March from a year earlier but some Chinese traders in recent weeks have begun asking for cheap Russian cargoes following a planned embargo from the European Union.

"The problem for China at this moment is not about supply, but the weak demand," said another coal trader in China.

Indonesia Suspends All Exports of Palm Oil

JAKARTA (AFP) - Indonesia began imposing a complete ban on palm oil exports, as the world's largest producer of the commodity risked destabilizing a global vegetable oil market already hitting peak prices.

The archipelago nation is facing a domestic shortage of cooking oil as well as soaring prices, with consumers in several cities having to queue for hours in front of distribution centers to buy the essential commodity at subsidized rates.

Authorities in Southeast Asia's most populous country fear the scarcity and rising costs could provoke social tensions and have moved to secure supplies of the product, which is used in a range of goods such as chocolate spreads and cosmetics.

In a last-minute reversal late Wednesday, they clarified the embargo would include all exports of the oilseed and not only products intended for edible oils, as indicated a day earlier.

"All products," including crude palm oil, "are covered by the Ministry of Trade regulation and will be enforced," said Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs Airlangga Hartarto.

President Joko Widodo said supplying the country's 270 million residents was his government's "highest priority".

"As the world's largest palm oil producer, it is ironic that we are having difficulties getting cooking oil," he said.

Indonesia produces about 60 percent of the world's palm oil, with one-third consumed by its domestic market. India, China, the European Union and Pakistan are among its major export customers.

The months-long shortage has been exacerbated by poor regulation and reluctance among producers to sell at home due to high international prices that have made exports more profitable.

Jakarta plans to resume exports when the price of bulk cooking oil in local markets has fallen to 14,000 rupiah (97 cents) per litre, having rocketed 70 percent in recent weeks to 26,000 rupiah (\$1.80).

Vegetable oils are among a number of staple food items that have seen prices hit record highs in recent weeks, following Russia's invasion of agricultural powerhouse Ukraine, according to the United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization.

The supply of palm oil has been problematic since the beginning of the year, with people often spending hours in lengthy queues at distribution centers to obtain it.

"Cooking oil was difficult to find, even in bulk," Lius Antoni, a consumer, told AFP. "I finally decided to reduce the use of cooking oil."

India Tells Its States To Step Up Coal Imports



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has urged its states to step up coal imports for the next three years to build up inventories and satisfy demand, four sources told Reuters, a move set to benefit global prices of the fuel, already running high because of war in Ukraine.

The decision to boost imports underscores the severity of India's fuel crisis as coal inventories are at the lowest pre-summer levels in at least nine years and electricity demand is seen rising at the fastest pace in nearly four decades.

India, the world's second-largest coal importer, could drive up global demand until 2025, as Power Minister R K Singh has set a longer timeline for a federal push to increase imports that had until now been seen as a temporary measure.

"The states were asked to continue importing because the private sector will take till at least early 2025 to produce significant output," said a power ministry official who attended Singh's meeting with state officials on Tuesday.

In addition, the state-run rail network suffers a persistent shortage of trains to move domestic coal, the official added.

The sources, two state officials who attended the meeting and two power ministry officials, declined to be identified, as the matter is private.

At the meeting, states were asked to sign long-term import deals to ensure supply and lower prices, as well as buy rail wagons to resolve the logistics problems, said another ministry official who was briefed on it, but did not attend.

Higher coal imports could benefit miners such as Indonesia's Adaro Energy, Australia's Whitehaven Coal Ltd, and India's biggest coal trader, Adani Enterprises, whose controversial Carmichael mine in Australia started producing coal this year.

COVID-19 Kills 11 More Iranians Over Past 24 Hours

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The number of deaths from the coronavirus pandemic in Iran increased to 141,083 with 11 more Iranians killed by the deadly disease over the past 24 hours, Iran's Health Ministry announced on Saturday. Some 11 more Iranians have died from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) over the past 24 hours bringing the total deaths to 141,083, Iran's Health Ministry said on Saturday. 532 new cases of infection with the COVID-19 were found over the past 24 hours, 109 of whom were hospitalized, it said.



China-EU Honeymoon Sours Over Ukraine War

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - China and Europe may not be in a cold war, but bilateral relations are increasingly chilly.

China's failure to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine, considered an existential threat to European security, is the latest and gravest in a series of challenges by Beijing to the rules-based order on which the European Union professes to operate.

Reflecting a bilateral relationship centered on economics, Europe has often taken disagreements with its top trading partner China in stride.

However, China's support for Russia – rooted in Chinese leader Xi Jinping's close relationship with Russian President Vladimir Putin – has altered European calculations.

"The sense of urgency to protect Europe from authoritarian threats wasn't as strong before as it is now. Russia's invasion of Ukraine is a game-changer," Zsuzsa Anna Ferenczy, an assistant professor at Taiwan's National Dong Hwa University and a former political adviser in the European Parliament, told Al Jazeera.

Brussels initially hoped Beijing would use its influence with Moscow to broker peace. "There is no alternative," the EU's Foreign Policy Chief Josep Borrell told Spanish newspaper El Mundo in March. "It has to be China."

Instead, China abstained in a UN vote to condemn Russia's invasion of Ukraine and denounced a "cold war mentality based on bloc confrontation," a jab at NATO. In a virtual summit with EU leaders on April 1, Chinese Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Zhao Lijian blamed the United States for the conflict. Washington, Zhao said, is "the culprit and leading instigator of the Ukraine crisis".

Such claims do not resonate in Europe, where the US plays a crucial security role. "Beijing is so blinded by wanting Europe to be 'strategically autonomous' from the US that it prevents it from understanding the security infrastructure in Europe," Sari Arho Havrén, a European-China policy analyst at the Mercator Institute for China Studies (MERICS) in Berlin, told Al Jazeera.

"Wolf warrior diplomacy has not won China any friends in Europe," Sarah Kirchberger, head of Asia-Pacific Strategy and Security at Kiel University's Institute for Security Policy, told Al Jazeera, referring to the pugnacious approach to foreign affairs pursued under Xi.

Kirchberger noted that European views on China hardened during the early days of the pandemic when Beijing hoarded medical supplies even as it denied the severity of the outbreak in Wuhan, sent Europe defective Chinese-made testing kits and face masks, and refused to cooperate with an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus.

As Beijing doubles down on its "no limits" partnership with Moscow, "there is an awakening in Europe to the fact that some states are not goodwill actors and will not follow the rules," Kirchberger said. "We must reduce our vulnerability to and dependency on China."

Though Europe's expectations were low for the recent EU-China Summit, Beijing's performance still managed to underwhelm. China refused to commit to withholding military or economic support from Russia, a key European objective for the summit. Josep Borrell described the talks as "a dialogue of the deaf".



"During the EU-China Summit, China was reluctant to even touch on Russia's invasion of Ukraine and wanted to talk about 'positive' things – while there is a war on European soil," said Arho Havrén, the MERICS fellow.

"This is again a sign of not understanding the seriousness of the situation in Europe and wanting to stay out of it, despite being a permanent member of the UN Security Council."

Beijing's objectives for the summit were nebulous. Xi has been preoccupied with domestic affairs as he works to secure an unprecedented third term at the Chinese Communist Party National Congress in the latter half of the year.

Although the summit produced no joint statement, Chinese state media still spun it in a positive light.

"In a turbulent world facing the raging COVID-19 pandemic and a struggling global economic recovery, the fact that Chinese and EU leaders had in-depth and candid discussions on major issues concerning global peace and development itself injects positive energy to the world," Deng Li, Chinese vice foreign minister, was quoted as saying by Xinhua News.

That rosy view aside, Beijing appears to at least recognize its relationship with Europe is increasingly troubled. Last week, it sent a delegation of diplomats to central and eastern Europe led by Huo Yuzhen, China's special representative to China-Central and Eastern Europe Cooperation.

"Beijing is now trying the exact same charm offensive in eastern Europe as during the EU-China Summit. It didn't work then, and it won't work now – except perhaps in Hungary and Serbia," the most pro-Beijing countries in the region, Arho Havrén said.

Zionists' Collapse...

FROM PAGE 1

The head of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) on Friday hailed a successful operation by two unidentified drones over the Israeli-occupied territories, which the usurping Tel Aviv regime tried to keep secret.



Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani was giving a speech in the northeastern city of Mashhad in commemoration of the International Quds Day on the last Friday of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

Qa'ani said the successful operation was conducted several months ago.

During the operation, he said, the "Zionist entity sent 41 fighter jets and reconnaissance aircraft to The IRGC official stressed that the drone operation put Israel on "high alert," but the Zionist regime "did not disclose the truth of what happened," and then lied to its people by claiming to have conducted surprise drills.

"The regime was not man enough to tell the truth about the drone operation, where the drones came from, who they belonged to and what they were supposed to do," Qa'ani said. "They lied to their own people; they said they were conducting drills."

Elsewhere in his speech on Friday, Qa'ani said the glorious Quds Day commemoration would continue until all the Zionists were eliminated and that the resistance front would day by day become stronger more than ever before until the demise of the occupying regime.

In September 2021, Israel's minister of military affairs acknowledged Iran's drone power, saying the Islamic Republic is in possession of "accurate" and "destructive" drones that can cross thousands of kilometers.

In an article published in July the same year, the Ha'aretz newspaper said, "Tehran's growing use of drones reflects an old Iranian ethos of combining technological progress with self-reliance."

These are just few confessions of the Zionist regime officials to the power of the Islamic Republic which is growing more than ever.

Last week according to some reports, Iran had warned Israel that it was in possession of intelligence on the locations of all its nuclear weapons sites, and that the country's Armed Forces will strike the sensitive targets in the occupied territories in the event of any aggression against the Islamic Republic.

"Tehran had sent to Israel, through a European country, photos and maps of the Israeli nuclear weapons stores," Qatar's Al Jazeera television news network quoted an unnamed Iranian source as saying.

"Most of the pictures are terrestrial and not satellite," the report said, suggesting that other forms of intelligence gathering rather than surveillance drones had been involved.

The source said Tehran confirmed that it would target the regime's stores and facilities if Israel decided to ignite a war with Iran. Israel has previously changed the locations of its strategic warehouses, but the file sent by Tehran included the locations of the new stores, it added.

"Tehran red flagged all chemical, biological and nuclear weapons storages and facilities of Israel and that they will be the first targets, in case Israel decides to start a war with Iran," the source added.

The report once again showed how the Islamic Republic has improved its intelligence regarding its enemy No. One in the region and it is fully ready to give a proper response to any mischief of this savage and fake regime of Israel.

As Qa'ani said in his speech, "It is better for the Zionists to return to their original homelands in Europe or any other place from which they came before it is too late. Israel is heading towards extinction."

And this is not a dream any longer and the countdown for the collapse of the fake Zionist regime has begun and the Islamic Republic of Iran will be the leader of this anti-Israel movement which has been welcomed by the Palestinians and all Muslims in the world and the collapse of the Zionists is definite but it is just a matter of time. And what the Islamic Republic claims about the imminent collapse of the Zionists is not a boast and is reality and soon the world will get rid of this savage and blood-sucking regime.

Iran, Russia Stress Finishing Rasht-Astara Railway Project

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development said Saturday that Iran and Russia had reached an agreement on expanding road, rail, sea and air cooperation and completing the North-South Rail Corridor.

Ghasemi said that during the visit to Russia, he had expressed Iran's readiness to exchange experiences and export construction materials such as cement, stone and tiles to Russia, and described the exchange of trade delegations in that industry as a way to develop cooperation in that regard.

The Iranian road minister held a meeting with Russian Railways Chief Executive Oleg Belozorov during the visit and they discussed with the Russian official ways to expand bilateral cooperation, including the completion of joint projects and the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding on the completion of the INSTC.

Belozorov in the meeting called for enhancing the level of cooperation between the two countries and called for the development of rail cooperation between the two countries in the transportation of goods.

After the end of his talks with the Minister of Transport of Russia Vitaly Savelyev, Ghasemi signed a comprehensive agreement on cooperation in the field of transport, and both officials noted the importance of establishing a railway connecting the north and south of the continent. The two countries stressed the need to complete the Rasht-Astara part of the mega railway project (North-South Railway Project) as soon as possible.

He also met with Russian Minister of Construction Irek Faizullin.

Referring to Russia's capacity in the field of housing and construction, Faizullin stressed the implementation of the Memorandum of Understanding between the two countries within the framework of the Joint Economic Commission and called for operationalizing the Housing Cooperation Working Group and an increase in the number of Iranian architecture students in Russia.

The Iranian minister arrived in Moscow on Wednesday to discuss various transportation, transit, and operationalization of the INSTC, as well as to develop cooperation in the air, sea, and rail fields.

IRGC Navy...

FROM PAGE 1

"If we feel a threat which jeopardizes interests of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Iran's IRGC Navy Force would strongly respond to the threat of enemies and will regret them," Real Admira Tangsiri added.

Meanwhile Iranian Foreign Ministry issued a statement on Friday to mark the National Persian Gulf Day, which falls on the April 30.

Describing the Persian Gulf as the symbol of peace, friendship and co-existence among the regional nations, the Iranian Ministry of Foreign Affairs called on the outsiders to respect the establishment of security and peace in the Persian Gulf in the hands of its littoral states.

What follows is the text of the statement, released by the Foreign Ministry's website:

"Throughout the history of the region, which has been full of ups and downs, the Persian Gulf, this civilization-making span of water, has constantly been named the Persian Gulf or called by its equivalents in all foreign languages.

From millennia B.C. up until now, the Persian Gulf has always been referred to with the same ancient name or the 'Persian Sea' in a variety of books, travelogues, documents, maps, historical researches, and numerous international documents written in different languages. Historians and researchers have emphatically used the same name particularly in credible Islamic and Arabic sources of reference.

While laying emphasis on the policy of neighborliness, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran hopes that this body of water will be a sanctuary of regional security and stability as well as a symbol of peace, friendship and co-existence among regional nations, and that others will respect the establishment of peace and security in the Persian Gulf by the littoral states.

We offer congratulations to all Iranians and those who have done their utmost to safeguard this soil and its waters on this great occasion, which is reminiscent of the expulsion of colonialists from the region, and pay tribute to the honorable martyrs of the Persian Gulf."

Politicization of Syria...

FROM PAGE 1

"We also emphasize that any investigation into the use of chemical weapons must be impartial, professional, credible, and objective in order to establish the facts and reach evidence-based conclusions, and in doing so it must strictly adhere to the provisions and procedures within the framework of the Convention; no deviation from the Convention shall be permitted," she added.

Underlining Syria's strenuous efforts to meet its CWC obligations, she said the country has shown its willingness to collaborate with the OPCW.

"However, it is disappointing that certain States Parties have politicized the Syrian chemical weapons file, preventing the OPCW from confirming Syria's compliance with its obligations, which could have resulted in constructive dialogue and cooperation with Syria," Ershadi said.

"We recognize the critical importance of the Syrian government's efforts to fulfill its obligations under the Convention," she further added.

Ershadi also expressed Iran's support for the approach taken by OPCW and Syria to hold a

high-level dialogue and hoped that the initiative would yield positive results.

Ershadi's remarks came after the U.S. accused Syria of flouting the CWC and obstructing the OPCW's inspectors on Friday, which marked the 25th anniversary of the implementation of the landmark treaty.

Responding to the U.S. accusations, Syrian ambassador Bassam Sabbagh said the inspectors had been denied access because of a "lack of objectivity and professionalism."

Sabbagh also accused the OPCW and the CWC of political bias.

Russian Ambassador Vasily Nebenzya said the convention had become a "punitive" instrument wielded in the interests of a "narrow group of countries" against Syria.

"At its 25th anniversary, the OPCW has very serious systemic problems and a tarnished reputation," Nebenzya noted. "Russia unconditionally supports the CWC and is committed to its letter and spirit. What gives rise to question to us is how its provisions are being implemented by the OPCW."

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Tiger Plays at Southern Hills Ahead of PGA Championship

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods played a practice round at Southern Hills Country Club in Tulsa, Oklahoma, on Thursday, three weeks ahead of the start of the PGA Championship at the famed course. The 15-time major winner made his return to competition earlier this month at the Masters after suffering severe leg injuries 14 months ago in a car crash. He made the cut but struggled over the last 36 holes and finished 47th.

Greenwood to Remain on Bail Over Rape Allegations

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United forward Mason Greenwood will remain on bail until mid-June over allegations he raped and assaulted a young woman. The 20-year-old was arrested in January after images and videos were posted online. He was also questioned on suspicion of making threats to kill. Greenwood was released on conditional bail, which was due to expire on Saturday.

Suns Clinch Series, Sixers, Mavs Advance

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Chris Paul produced a perfect display of shooting to lead the Phoenix Suns to a series-clinching victory over New Orleans as Philadelphia and Dallas also advanced in the NBA playoffs.

The 12-time All-Star Paul made 14-of-14 shots from the field to set a new postseason record as the Suns defeated the Pelicans 115-109 to complete a 4-2 series victory in the Big Easy.

It marked an emotional return to New Orleans for Paul, who began his professional career in the city with six seasons for the then-Hornets between 2005 and 2011.

The Suns were also buoyed by the return from injury of Devin Booker, whose 13-point haul included a crucial three-pointer late in the fourth quarter to edge Phoenix ahead.

"Having Book back was everything," Paul added. "Down the stretch they started to blitz and they forgot we had Devin Booker standing over there on the wing."

Booker paid tribute to the 36-year-old Paul. "I've been watching him since I was eight years old," Booker said. "It doesn't surprise me.

"It gives you the utmost confidence, playing alongside him, knowing he's going to take care of the ball, knowing that the ball is going to find the right person, on time, on target."

The Suns will play the Dallas Mavericks in the Western Conference semi-finals.

The Mavericks dug deep to defeat Utah 98-96 on the road in Salt Lake City to complete a 4-2 series win over the Jazz.

Luka Doncic and Jalen Brunson scored 24 points apiece as Dallas fought back from a 12-point third-quarter deficit for a gutsy win.

Utah's Bogdan Bogdanovic missed a wide-open three to win the game on the buzzer as Dallas escaped with victory.

The Philadelphia Sixers made sure there was no chance of a game seven decider as they thrashed the Raptors 132-97 in Toronto to seal a 4-2 series victory.

Philadelphia now face Eastern Conference top seeds Miami for a place in the conference finals.

Sixers star Joel Embiid, who has been bothered by torn ligaments in his thumb in recent games, delivered a dominant



33-point display which also included 10 rebounds, three blocks and two steals.

MVP candidate Embiid was given backing by Tyrese Maxey with 25 points while James Harden also came up big with 22 points, 15 assists and six rebounds.

It was a welcome return to form for the Sixers, who had looked vulnerable after losing games four and five to Toronto, having led the series 3-0.

Maxey said the Sixers had been ready for a "fight."

The Sixers edged into a 62-61 lead at halftime after two hard-fought opening quarters. But Philadelphia erupted after the break to outscore Toronto 37-17 in the third quarter and effectively ice the contest.

The Sixers kept the hammer down in the fourth quarter, never giving Toronto any kind of opportunity to cut into Philadelphia's double-digit lead.

Tobias Harris added 19 points for Philadelphia while Danny Green also posted a double-digit total with 12 points.

Chris Boucher led the Raptors with 25 points off the bench while Pascal Siakam added 24.

Sixers coach Doc Rivers is relishing the prospect of a series against in-form Miami. "They're deep, they're veterans, they're grown men," Rivers said. "We're looking forward to the challenge."



Salah, Kerr Win English Football Writers' Awards

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool forward Mohamed Salah has been voted footballer of the year by sportswriters in England, while Chelsea's Australian striker Sam Kerr won the women's award.

Salah took 48 percent of the vote for the Football Writers' Association award, ahead of Manchester City midfielder Kevin De Bruyne and West Ham midfielder Declan Rice.

Salah, whose 30 goals this season have spearheaded Liverpool's bid for a quadruple of trophies, is in talks about a new contract, with the club increasingly hopeful the Egyptian international will stay at Anfield.

The 29-year-old wins the football writers' award for the second time.

Players from the two clubs locked in the Premier League title race, Liverpool and Manchester City, dominated the votes, with nine of manager Jurgen Klopp's Liverpool squad nominated and a total of six City players recognized.

Kerr, whose 18 goals have helped Chelsea top the Women's Super League table, claimed 40 percent of the vote with Arsenal's Dutch international forward Vivianne Miedema in second place and Lauren Hemp of Manchester City third.

Azarenka Finds No Sense in Wimbledon Ban

MADRID (Dispatches) - Belarus' Victoria Azarenka said the Wimbledon ban on players from Russia and her country makes no sense and the former world number one called on the tennis governing bodies to take action against the decision.

The All England Lawn Tennis Club, which hosts the grass court Grand Slam, took the decision in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the stand was swiftly condemned by the men's and women's tours.

The ATP and the WTA denounced the AELTC decision as "discriminatory", with Steve Simon, the women's tour chief, last week warning of "strong reactions".

"If you are asking me if I agree with Wimbledon or I see their reasoning after being on a personal call with them, I don't see their reasoning," Azarenka, who sits on the WTA players' council, told reporters in Madrid on Thursday.

"It does not make sense and it does not connect to what they are saying."

The 32-year-old Azarenka, ranked 17th in the world, won her opening round at the WTA 1000 event in Madrid on Thursday but her fellow Belarusian Aryna Sabalenka's title defence ended with a 6-2 3-6 6-4 defeat to unseeded American Amanda Anisimova.

Tennis governing bodies have banned Russia and Belarus from international team competitions following the invasion, but individual players from the two countries are allowed to continue competing as neutrals.

The 2022 Wimbledon championships will be the first time that players have been banned on the grounds of nationality since the immediate post-World War Two era, when German and Japanese players were excluded.

"I think there should be a reaction to that, that is all I want to say," said Azarenka, who won the Australian Open in 2012 and 2013.

"I have made my stance very clear on the issue. I will never, ever support war. I will never support violence. I will never find any justifications for that. That is all I can say right now."



extensions with the Premier League club.

Klopp, who joined Liverpool from Borussia Dortmund in October 2015, had said in March he would remain in charge of the club beyond the end of his previous contract in 2024 only if he had the energy levels.

Klopp Signs New Contract Until 2026

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has signed a two-year contract extension that will keep him at Anfield until 2026, giving the club a huge boost ahead of a defining period in which they could win an unprecedented quadruple.

Liverpool confirmed in a statement that assistant managers Pep Lijnders and Peter Krawietz had also signed contract

After signing his new deal, he said there was a freshness about the club still that "energises" him.

"There are so many words I could use to describe how I am feeling about this news... delighted, humbled, blessed, privileged and excited would be a start," Klopp said in a statement.

"For as long as I have been here, our owners have been unbelievably committed and energetic about this club and it is clear that right now this applies to our future as much as I've ever known.

"There is just so much to love about this place. I knew that before I came here, I got to know it even better after I arrived and now I know it more than ever before."

Klopp, 54, has won five trophies in seven years since swapping the Ruhr valley for Merseyside, guiding Liverpool to the Champions League, Club World Cup and UEFA Super Cup victories in 2019 before lifting the Premier League the following year.

Rangnick Commits To Man United Role Despite Austria Links

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United's interim manager Ralf Rangnick has confirmed he will stay at the club in a consultancy role when Dutchman Erik ten Hag replaces him on the bench at the end of the season.

The German, who took over at United following the sacking of Ole Gunnar Solskjaer in November, had an agreement to work as a consultant for two years when he took the job.

Reports in Austria said the Austrian Football Federation was hoping to appoint him as their new national team coach but Rangnick declined to comment when asked about that prospect.

However the former RB Leipzig coach said the consultancy role would leave time for him to have another job in the game.

"Let us speak tonight about Manchester United, this is the issue. I can confirm I will definitely continue in the consultancy role," he told Sky Sports.

"So far me and Erik haven't spoken. But I am more than happy and willing to help and change things for the better.

"It would leave space for another job but that is what we agreed in November last year," he added.

Later Rangnick told reporters his role as a consultant would be focused mainly on identifying and recruiting new players for Ten Hag.

Asked directly during the post-match news conference whether he had an agreement to take over Austria, Rangnick again said he only wanted to discuss matters related to United.



23.5m Tickets Sought in Latest World Cup Sale

DOHA (AFP) - FIFA said that 23.5 million World Cup tickets were requested in the latest round of sales for the tournament that starts in Qatar in less than seven months.

Applications from Argentina, Brazil, England, France, Mexico, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United States dominated, the world body said highlighting the "enormous demand".

The most popular games are the final on December 18 alongside some of the group games which are already known: Argentina v Mexico, Argentina v Saudi Arabia, England v United States and Poland v Argentina, FIFA said in a statement.

For matches where demand exceeds the number of tickets available, the requests will go into a random lottery. All the successful applicants will be told from May 31. Any remaining tickets will then go on general sale on a first-come first-served basis.

Ticket prices are on average about 30 percent higher than for the Russia World Cup in 2018. The cheapest tickets are for Qataris and the army of migrant workers in the state who will pay as little as \$10 to watch a first round group match.

But for the final, the most expensive tickets cost more than \$1,600 -- a 45 percent hike on 2018. Some 804,186 tickets were snapped up in the first round of sales in January-February.

Demand this 23 day window for applications was higher, as it followed the World Cup draw on April 1 which revealed when and where each team will play.

About two million tickets are available to the general public, with 1.2 million others going to sponsors and other backers.

The first match between Senegal and Netherlands is on November 21 and the final on December 18 at the 80,000 capacity Lusail stadium.

Qatar is predicting that up to 1.4 million people will visit the wealthy Gulf state for the first World Cup in an Arab country.

