

Health Ministry Announced on Wednesday That the Number of Deaths From the Coronavirus Pandemic in Iran Reached 141,357 With 4 More Iranian Killed by the Virus Over the Past 24 Hours

IRAN NEWS

Officials Raised the Alarm Over Extravagant Use of Water by Households in Tehran, Calling on the Public to Join Efforts to Protect the Country's Water Resources Through Adherence to Conservation Methods

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IAEA Politicizing Iran Nuclear Work Under Israeli Pressure

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's nuclear chief has slammed the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for politicizing the country's peaceful nuclear program under the Israeli regime's pressure regardless of Tehran's extensive cooperation with the UN nuclear watchdog.

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami made the remarks in an exclusive interview with Iran Press in response to a question about a resolution, proposed by the US and its European allies, which was recently passed during a meeting of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA)'s Board of Governors accusing Tehran of failing to fully cooperate with the agency.

He said Iran did not expect at all that such a resolution would be passed under the influence and political pressure of the Israeli regime.

The Iranian nuclear chief expressed hope that the UN nuclear watchdog would be released from the "Zionists' captivity" so that the international prestige of the IAEA and its director general would not be undermined further more.

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Iran Plans Test-Launches Of Satellite Carrier for Research Purposes

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran says it plans to conduct two test-launches of the Zoljanah satellite carrier, which was designed and developed by experts at home, for research purposes, as the country speeds up efforts to promote its space industry.

"Three launches of the Zoljanah satellite carrier were planned for research; one has so far been conducted and two others will be carried out later," said Ahmad Hosseini, spokesman of the Space Division of the Iranian Defense Ministry, on Wednesday.

The performance of the three-stage carrier, which uses compound fuel, can be evaluated in each launch, he said.

The satellite carrier, the official added, weighs 52 tons and is 25.5 meters in length. It can carry loads of up to 220 kilograms at an orbit of 500 kilometers above the surface.

Last week, the Iranian Space Agency said work has been underway to prepare seven more satellites for launch into the orbit. In March, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Aerospace Force launched its second homegrown satellite, dubbed Nour-2, into a low Earth orbit, on a range of military and civilian missions.

The first version of the satellite, called Nour 1, was successfully shot and placed into the orbit 425 kilometers above Earth's surface in April 2020.

Leader Stresses Iran Neighbors First Policy



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, at a meeting with visiting Turkmen President Serdar Berdimuhamedow, hailed the Iranian administration's policy of expanding relations with neighbors as a good policy.

Accompanied by a delegation, Berdimuhamedow arrived in Tehran on Tuesday afternoon on an official two-day visit intended to sign long-term cooperation agreements with Iran.

President Ebrahim Raeisi officially welcomed the Turkmen president on Wednesday morning, after which the two chief executives oversaw the signing of nine memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to broaden bilateral cooperation in different fields.

After the signing ceremony, Berdimuhamedow met with Ayatollah Khamenei, who said the deepening of bilateral relations would benefit the two nations.

"The policy of the administration of the Islamic Republic of Iran is to expand relations with neighboring countries, and this is a completely correct policy," the Leader noted.

He said a strong will is required on both sides to remove obstacles in the path of the expansion of bilateral ties. "Of course, friendly relations between Iran and Turkmenistan have regional and international opponents, but nevertheless, the obstacles must be overcome," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

He added that a joint cooperation commission needs to be activated to finalize bilateral agreements through continuous follow-ups.

Berdimuhamedow, for his part, said his administration also focuses on developing ties with neighbors and strives to strengthen the good relations between Turkmenistan and Iran in various fields - especially gas, electricity, and transportation of goods, as well as the implementation of major projects - based on the agreement deals signed earlier in the day.

Referring to the 30th anniversary of Tehran-Ashgabat relations, the Turkmen president thanked Ayatollah Khamenei for his support for the deepening of Iran's ties with Turkmenistan.

Earlier in the day, Iran and Turkmenistan signed a set of documents and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) to broaden bilateral cooperation in different fields.

President Ebrahim Raisi and his counterpart from Turkmenistan, Berdimuhamedow, presided over a ceremony in Tehran on Wednesday morning to sign the agreements.

Nine MoUs were signed in the meeting to boost cooperation in various fields, including politics, economy, trade, transportation, investment, new technologies, environment, sports, energy, judiciary, education, research, and tourism.

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World in Race for Stockpile of Nukes

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

It seems what countries in the world especially big and powerful ones claim that they are opposed to increasing nuclear bombs or military nuclear activities is a mere lie as they are moving to enhance their nuclear weapons as a deterrent weapon especially after recent global developments and Ukraine war.

On Monday, Swedish arms watchdog in a report said nuclear arsenals are expected to grow in coming years, reversing a decline seen since the Cold War. The global stockpile of nuclear weapons is expected to rise in coming years for the first time since the Cold War due to global tensions, a leading arms watchdog has said.

In its annual report published on Monday (PDF), the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI) said on Monday that all nine nuclear-armed countries are increasing or upgrading their arsenals.

"There are clear indications that the reductions that have characterized global nuclear arsenals since the end of the Cold War have ended," said Hans Kristensen, associate senior fellow with SIPRI's Weapons of Mass Destruction Programme and director of the Nuclear Information Project at the Federation of American Scientists (FAS).

Russia with 5,977 warheads and the U.S., with 5,428, together still possess about 90 percent of all nuclear warheads in the world, according to the report. In 2021, the number of nuclear warheads in both countries declined further, but this was mainly due to the dismantling of discarded warheads, which the military had already abandoned years ago.

Their useable military stockpiles remained relatively stable and within the limits set by a nuclear arms reduction treaty, SIPRI said.

There was a slight reduction in the total number of nuclear warheads to an estimated 12,705 worldwide, this number will probably grow again in the course of the coming decade, the report said.

For decades, the number of nuclear weapons worldwide has been decreasing steadily. It is now less than one-fifth of what was in the arsenals of the nuclear powers at the height of the Cold War in the 1980s. Last year, however, SIPRI had already identified a trend reversal towards more modern nuclear weapons.

The five UN veto powers, including China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States - all of which are nuclear weapon states - declared at the beginning of the year their intention to take action against the further spread of nuclear weapons.

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Belarus to Attend Iran Agrofood Expo

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Belarus will present its national exposition at the Iran Agrofood International Agriculture and Food Exhibition that will be running on 17-20 June at the Tehran International Exhibition Center.

Belarusian manufacturers will display a variety of products. For example, the lineup of the Belarusian confectionery Vitba will include more than 100 items, including cereals, waffles and cookies. The National Academy of Sciences of Belarus will demonstrate innovative developments in several areas: veterinary drugs and bioadditives based on nanoparticles for farm animals, low-protein products with reduced phenylalanine content, bioconservatives and new types of dry yeast for food industry, including those of functional purpose (low-protein, specially designed for people suffering from such diseases as phenylketonuria), technologies for in vitro multiplication of fruits, berries, hazelnuts, and grapes, and also the latest crop varieties with high productivity and yield potential.

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Right Time to Revitalize Iran-Korea Economic, Cultural Ties

SEOUL (Dispatches) - Iran and South Korea should revitalize economic and cultural relations and prepare for strengthening future bilateral cooperation, Iranian Ambassador Saeed Badamchi Shabestari and The Korea Herald CEO Choi Jin-young said during a meeting last week.

Links between the two countries go back 1,000 years to the time of Persia and Silla, the ancient kingdoms of Iran and South Korea, respectively. The long-standing relationship is symbolized in the street names of Teheran-ro in Seoul and Seoul Street in Tehran, the ambassador said.

"The two countries are celebrating a meaningful 60 years of diplomatic ties this year," Shabestari said, adding that Iran has a deep interest in boosting Iran-Korea media relations and solidifying people-to-people contact.

"The Korea Herald is a known newspaper in Iran, and it can play a significant and historic role in this regard," he said.

Stressing the need for further Iran-Korea economic cooperation, Shabestari said that while most Korean investments in Iran have been focused on energy and infrastructure, new areas offering abundant opportunities for Korean companies are rising in Iran.

More firsthand reporting about the Middle East in Korean media reports is needed, Shabestari said.

"There is a need for news coverage through direct sources between the two countries, rather than using news sources of third countries while reporting on Iran, the Middle East and Korea," the Iranian ambassador said.

Choi said that in the 1970s, many Koreans went to Iran and the Middle East for employment.

"The old generation of Koreans still seems to have ample consciousness, memories and gratitude to Iran and the Middle East as a whole," Choi said. He added that there is also a need to create awareness and strengthen people-to-people contact among millennials and Generation Z, those born between 1980 and 1995.

"Most Koreans seek peace, and endorse the idea of global citizenship and hope for amicable relations with Iran," Choi said.

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10% Reduction in LPG Loss in Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The CEO of the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) announced a 10% decrease in liquefied petroleum gas (LPG) consumption in the country over the last seven months compared to the same period last year.

Majid Chegeni talked about the measures taken by the Ministry of Petroleum to prevent the loss of LPG and increase its production and exports, saying: "Liquefied petroleum gas is a valuable product in the natural gas production chain that in addition to being used as fuel is used in many industries, including the petrochemical industry."

Stronger Tehran-Islamabad Ties To Ensure Regional Security

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi stressed in a meeting with Pakistan's foreign minister that strengthening Tehran-Islamabad comprehensive relations will lead to strengthening the regional security.

President Raisi said in his meeting with Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready for improvement of comprehensive cooperation with Pakistan, adding that "we have the required capacities for providing Pakistan's needs in various fields, including providing oil, gas and electricity for that brother and neighboring country".

He referred to the deep-rooted and centuries-old relations between the two nations that have roots in the hearts and beliefs of the two nations, that are not only neighbors, but also each other's relatives, setting example that most of the foreign pilgrims of Imam Reza (AS) are from Pakistan, which reveals that nation's deep love for the pure progeny of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and a strong bond between the two nations.

President Raisi said that Iran considers Pakistan's security as its own security, although some countries are not happy about the excellent relations of the two Muslim, neighboring, friend, and brother countries, which will lead to stronger regional economy and security.

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran considers no limits for expansion of relations with Islamabad, announcing Tehran's readiness for improvement of comprehensive ties with Pakistan, including in exporting oil, gas and electricity.

President Raisi said that in addition to the energy field, Iran and Pakistan can cooperate in transit field and cooperation in regional crisis resolving, adding that such bilateral talks



must first turn into bilateral shared decisions and then into cooperation documents.

He also announced Tehran's will for finalizing the past agreements in security, economic and energy fields.

Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, too, expressing delight for having a chance to visit Iran, said: "As much as I am a son of Pakistan, I am also a son of Iran."

Appreciating Iran for exporting electricity to Pakistan, Bhutto-Zardari said that Islamabad is fully ready for finalizing the past talks in security, commercial and energy fields.

He also said he agreed with President Raisi about the Pakistani people's love for Imam Reza (P), announcing that Islamabad is planning to facilitate the Pakistani pilgrims of Imam Reza's trips to the Holy Mashhad.

The Pakistani foreign minister also appreciated the Islamic Republic of Iran for assisting his country in extinguishing the mountain forest wild fire in Pakistan's Baluchistan province.

Iran, Turkmenistan Ink MoU to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - A joint Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) was inked between Iran's Caretaker Minister of Labor, Cooperatives and Social Welfare and Turkmen Minister of Labor and Social Protection in Tehran on Tuesday to bolster cooperation.

Under the Memorandum of Understanding, cooperation between the two countries will be enhanced in the fields of social protection, retirees, social security, welfare and technical and vocational training services.

During the meeting, Iranian Caretaker Minister of Labor Mohammad-Hadi Zahedivafa pointed to the friendly and amicable relations between the two neighboring countries and said that the two countries of Iran and Turkmenistan have established very good relationship over the past 30 years ago in a way that Iran was the first country that recognized independence of Turkmenistan.

Iranian Ministry of Labor holds many economic enterprises working in the fields of rail and maritime transport and can pave suitable ground for enhancing bilateral cooperation in relevant fields, he emphasized.

Zahedivafa then pointed to the gas swap between Iran and Turkmenistan and added that effective steps have been taken in this field and Iran welcomes to forge further cooperation with Turkmenistan.

The two countries of Iran and Turkmenistan enjoy high trade and economic capacities to broaden volume of their trade exchanges more than doubled, he added.

Turkmenistan Minister of Labor and Social Protection, for his turn, expressed hope that suitable MoUs will be signed between the two countries following the visit of Turkmen President to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Energy and transport areas are prioritized fields of cooperation between the two countries and effective steps must be taken by officials of the two countries in this respect.

Iran-Oman Trade Expected to Reach \$2b by March 2023

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce said the trade between the two countries is expected to reach \$2 billion by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 20, 2023).

"Considering the upward trend of trade with this country [Oman], it is predicted that by the end of the year, we will record 1.2 billion exports and \$2 billion of trade," Mohsen Zarabi said in the annual ordinary general assembly of the mentioned chamber held at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

Last year, the trade between the two countries reached \$1.336 billion, indicating a growth of 57 percent

compared to the preceding year, Zarabi said.

He said that in the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21), exports to Oman reached \$283 million with a growth of 28 percent, noting that the figure in the import sector increased by 187 percent to \$128 million dollars.

According to Zarabi, the trade between the two countries reached \$331 million in the mentioned two months, registering a growth of 145 percent.

The official further noted that agreements have been reached to increase Iranian exports to the Arab country, saying: "One of the ways to increase trade is to introduce Iranian commodities to Omani traders and raise awareness; This is possible by sending trade delegations and holding exhibitions in this country."

Khaji to Head Iran's Team in Syria Talks

TEHRAN (IP) - All negotiating parties for the Astana-format Syrian peace talks have confirmed their participation in the event, which is scheduled to be held in the Kazakh capital on June 15-16, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Aibek Smadiyarov told reporters.

The 18th Astana talks in the Kazakh capital Nur-Sultan this week will discuss the return of Syrian refugees, Kazakhstan's Foreign Ministry said on Tuesday.

"All parties to the Astana process on Syria have confirmed their participation in the talks to be held in the capital of Kazakhstan on June 15-16. Delegations from the guarantor countries: Russia, Turkiye, and Iran, as well as the Syrian government and the Syrian armed opposition will take part," TASS cites Smadiyarov.

According to him, the Russian delegation will be headed by Russia's Special Presidential Envoy for Syria, Alexander Lavrentiev, and Turkey will be represented by Selcuk Unal, Foreign Ministry's Director General of Multilateral Relations. The Iranian delegation will also take part; it will be headed by Ali Asghar Khaji, the country's foreign minister's senior advisor for political affairs.

The Foreign Ministry Spokesman explained: "A UN delegation led by Robert Dunn, Principal Political Affairs Officer of the UN Office, Special Envoy for Syria, a Jordanian delegation, representatives of the UN High Commissioner for Refugees and the International Committee of the Red Cross will participate in the meeting as observers."

Iran-Pakistan Promising, Flourishing

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said here on Tuesday evening that the deep-rooted relations between the two great and influential Islamic world countries, Iran and Pakistan are growing rapidly and are hope inspiring.

The Iranian foreign minister in a tweet Tuesday night on his Pakistani counterpart, Bilawal Bhutto-Zardari, wrote: "Today in Tehran, I hosted my dear brother FM @BBhuttoZardari."

He said that relations between Iran & Pakistan, two great nations of the Muslim world, have always been promising & flourishing.

"We had important exchanges on political & security issues, tourism, pilgrimage, trade, sanctions removal & Afghanistan," Amir Abdollahian added.

FM Urges Enhanced Tehran-Ankara Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian stressed the need for further expansion of cooperation between Iran and Turkey, especially on trade and consular issues.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a phone conversation with his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu.

The two foreign ministers discussed issues of bilateral importance mutual interest.

The Turkish foreign minister, for his part, condoled with the Iranian counterpart on a deadly building collapse in southwestern Iran and another deadly train crash in the county in which dozens were killed.

Cavusoglu prayed for immediate recovery of those injured in the incidents.

He invited Amirabdollahian to pay a visit to Turkey in the near future.

Iran, Iraq Discuss Fighting Against Terrorism

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian envoy to Iraq Mohammad Kazem Al-e Sadegh and the leader of the National Wisdom Movement, held a meeting to discuss the latest regional developments, including fighting against terrorism.

Stressing that the stability of Iraq is in favor of the regional stability, Sayyid Ammar al-Hakim said that maintaining the balance is the basic basis for achieving stability.

He also called on the religious and governmental institutions to take the necessary measures for facilitating the participation of pilgrims from different Islamic countries in the pilgrimage of Ashura and Arbaeen.

Tehran-Baghdad bilateral ties and ways to expand the relations were other topics discussed by the Iranian envoy and Sayyid Ammar al-Hakim.

Imam Khomeini's School, Based on Sacrifice, Jihad

BEIRUT (IP) - Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah in Lebanon said that Imam Khomeini's school is based on sacrifice and jihad, and no country can maintain its independence without jihad.

The conference "Islamic Revolution from the Perspective of Hezbollah in Lebanon" was held on Tuesday in Beirut with the presence of various walks of life, political and religious figures, and Sheikh Naem Qassem, Deputy Secretary-General of Hezbollah in Lebanon as a special guest.

The conference, sponsored by the Al-Maaref Al-Hokmiya Institute, was also attended by key figures in the Lebanese resistance.

At the conference, Sheikh Naem Qassem pointed out the importance of the Islamic Revolution and said that the services of the Islamic Revolution to the people of Iran and other nations are admirable.

Sheikh Naem Qassem, emphasizing the impact of Imam Khomeini's personality in the region and the world, said: "Imam Khomeini's school is based on sacrifice and jihad, and no country can maintain its independence without jihad." Justice is very important, and it cannot be said that its implementation is easy because the implementation of justice needs preparations," he added.

Regarding Lebanon's political situation, Sheikh Naem Qassem also stressed that those who seek to disarm the resistance want to humiliate the Lebanese people.

Forced Deportation of Asylum Seekers Historical Shame for London

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman reacted to forced deportation of asylum seekers, including a few Iranians, from Britain to Rwanda, and said that the act is a historical shame for London.

Saeed Khatibzadeh said that the move is not only a shame for the British government, but also for all those who have tried very hard to conceal the colonialist background of Britain and present quite a clean face of London.

"Forced deportation of the asylum seekers to a third country and the deadly silence of the self-proclaimed flag-bearers of human rights and the concerned international organizations is not only a shame for them all, but also obvious breaching of the asylum seekers' human rights," he added.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman added that the ongoing process is the other side of the coin of deception of London, that tries to present an unreal, engineered face of Iran's realities in a systematic media campaign.

He said that the Persian language opponent media, based in London both present and engineered false image of Iran, and a fabulous false image about the living conditions in Europe, providing the path for the perilous and dangerous exit of some Iranian citizens from their own country.

Khatibzadeh said that although those few people do unjust against themselves, and as a result against their own country, the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the framework of its sovereign responsibilities, emphasizes that those people, under Convention 1951 and its related protocol, have rights that need to be respected and deporting them to a 3rd country is a dangerous method that abolishes the remainder of the international regime to safeguard the asylum seekers.

He reminded the international society that despite the economic hardships with which Iran is entangled, Iran is generously hosting millions of asylum seekers from different countries, including Afghanistan, but the self-proclaimed flag-bearers of human rights cannot tolerate the presence of a few thousands of them, who have been deceived by them themselves, and have tolerated the hardships of homelessness.

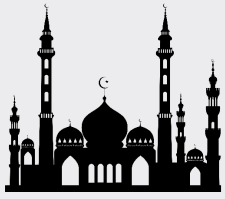
Health Diplomacy on Agenda of Iranian Health Ministry

TEHRAN (IP) - Health Minister says health diplomacy to revive better medical relations with the region's countries is on the ministry's agenda

Iranian Minister of Health Bahram Einollahi made the remarks at the signing ceremony of a memorandum with his Turkmen counterpart.

The meeting between the Iranian health minister and his Turkmen counterpart Nurmuhammet Amanepesov took place at the Iranian Ministry of Health on Tuesday evening. The two sides attended a presser at the end of the meeting, answering reporters' questions.

In response to reporters' questions, Einollahi expressed hope that good memoranda of understanding would be signed with his Turkmen counterpart to expand health diplomacy with Turkmenistan. He noted that appropriate plans had been made for holding scientific conferences with Turkmen scientists.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:43
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:48

74. And those who pray, "Our Lord! Grant unto us wives and offspring who will be the comfort of our eyes, and give us (the grace) to lead the righteous."
75. Those are the ones who will be rewarded with the highest place in heaven, because of their patient constancy: therein shall they be met with salutations and peace,
Surah 25. The Criterion, The Standard (72 - 73)

Tehran, Ashghabat Seek Boosting Cooperation on Gas

TEHRAN (Shana) – Oil Minister says in a meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet for Oil and Gas Affairs of Turkmenistan, the other side asked him to increase gas swaps to Azerbaijan and other neighboring countries, to which we announced our readiness.

Javad Owji after meeting with Shahin Abdul Rahmanov told reporters that the 13th administration has made good achievements in the field of energy diplomacy over the last 10 months, saying: "In the first months of this administration, a gas swap agreement was signed from Turkmenistan to the Republic of Azerbaijan through Iran, and currently 1.5 to 2 billion cubic meters of gas is being swapped annually."

He underlined his recent visit to the Republic of Azerbaijan in line with strengthening energy diplomacy, and said: "During this visit, the Azerbaijani side asked us to double the gas swap from Turkmenistan, which was welcomed by Iran."

The Oil Minister continued: "In a meeting with the Deputy Chairman of the Cabinet for Oil and Gas Affairs of Turkmenistan, the Turkmen side also asked us to increase gas swaps to Azerbaijan and other neighboring countries, and we announced our readiness."

Referring to the existence of the necessary infrastructure and extensive gas transmission network in the country to increase the swap, Owji said: "While negotiating with the Turkmen side the increase of the gas swap, one of the highlights of my talks with the Turkmen official was the revival of the Turkmen gas export contract with Iran."

He stated that the payment of Iran's gas dues to Turkmenistan is one of the topics of talks today, adding: "According to the negotiations, the receivables from the gas exports to Iraq for gas debts will be transferred from Iraq to the account of the Turkmen side."

Referring to Turkmenistan's decision to develop its oil and gas fields, Owji added:



"Considering the capabilities of Iranian companies to develop oil and gas fields, we announced our readiness to the Turkmen side in the field of export of technical and engineering services, development of oil and gas fields, construction of petrochemical units and petro-refineries by Iranian companies."

Owji said that the export of petroleum and petrochemical products, as well as the catalysts needed in the industry, as another focus of talks with the Turkmen official, and said: "Our proposal was fortunately welcomed by the Turkmen side."

Emphasizing that Iran's energy diplomacy in Latin America has been very active in recent months, he said: "At present, good events and contracts have been signed and are being formed in the field of the export of crude oil and petroleum products, the export of technical and engineering services and the use of the empty capacity of the refineries in this field."

The Oil Minister noted the existence of 20% of the world's oil and gas reserves in Venezuela, and said: "Given the ability of Iranian contractors, we have begun negotiations to develop the country's oil and gas fields, as well as increased capacity and overhaul of refineries in Venezuela and we have reached good agreements in this country."

"Recently, the first Iranian-made tanker was delivered to Venezuela and we are planning to build another tanker. This shows that sanctions on the Iranian oil industry have not worked in recent decades and our exports of crude oil and gas condensate have never stopped, because today the world needs to our products," Mr. Owji went on to add.

Chadormalu Creates 987 Jobs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

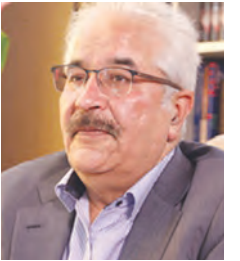
TEHRAN – The CEO of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company says the company has created jobs for 987 people under its small and home-based businesses plan.

In line with materializing the Supreme Leader's guidelines regarding the resistance economy in the current economic condition of the country, one of the successful and effective actions of Chadormalu Company in the field of observing its social responsibility has been the participation in implementing economic resistance and creating home-based jobs aimed at empowering talented families for strengthening their economic power.

Eng. Naser Taghizadeh said that Chadormalu with strong determination and after studying the past experiences prepared a model in which the company granted loans in collaboration with Resalat Gharz-ol Hasaneh Bank for running jobs by the qualified families in towns of Ardekan, Bahabad and Abarkouh after identifying the qualified families and evaluating their capacities.

Taghizadeh went on to say that during 8 months of activities of this headquarters, some 638 oral workshops have been formed and jobs were created for 987 people in the small and home-based jobs.

He added that for creation of this number of jobs some 360b rials of loans were earmarked and so far the bank has paid over 265b rials to the qualified applicants and it means some 560m rials have been paid for the launch of each home workshop.



Iran, Turkmenistan To Set Up Joint Trade Center

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Turkmenistan will set up a major trade center that can facilitate ties between businesses in the two countries amid efforts to deepen economic relations between the two neighbors.

The establishment of the Tehran-Ashgabat Trade Center was discussed on Tuesday during a meeting between Iranian trade minister Reza Fatemi Amin and deputy head of the Cabinet of Ministers of Turkmenistan Batir Atdayev.

Atdayev and a senior economic delegation from Turkmenistan arrived in Tehran earlier in the day while accompanying President Serdar Berdimuhamedov for a two-day official visit to Iran.

Fatemi Amin said setting up a joint trade center is in line with efforts by Iran and Turkmenistan to reach a preferential trade agreement (PTA) under which the two countries can significantly increase the volume and value of their bilateral trade.

The Iranian minister said Iran and Turkmenistan will discuss the list of goods that could enjoy lower tariffs under a PTA between the two countries within the upcoming months.

Iran has expanded its economic and energy ties with Turkmenistan since a new administration came to office in Tehran in August last year.

The two countries have revived arrangements for swap of natural gas from Turkmenistan through Iran. Turkmenistan has also allowed increased transit of cargo between Iran and Central Asian countries through its territory.

Iran's transportation minister Rostam Qassemi said on Tuesday that Iran and Turkmenistan plan to increase the volume of cargo transited through their territories.

Qassemi said during a meeting with Turkmenistan's top transportation official Mammethan Chakhyev that transit of cargo between the two countries had increased by nearly 50% over the calendar year to late March.

Reports in the Iranian media said labor ministers of Iran and Turkmenistan had also signed a memorandum of understanding earlier in the day to increase cooperation between the two countries.

Belarus Welcomes Iran's Proposals for Expansion of Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Deputy Minister of Industry of the Republic of Belarus Dmitry Kharitonchik has emphasized that Minsk is ready to implement all three suggestions proposed by Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Alireza Peymanpak to develop mutual trade ties.

TPO reported on Wednesday that a meeting for coordination of the 15th joint Iran-Belarus economic commission was held virtually with the participation of Peymanpak, Kharitonchik, as well as Iran's ambassador to Minsk Saeed Yari, and Ambassador of Belarus to Tehran Dmitry Koltsov.

The envoys of both countries in the meeting reached an agreement to hold the 15th joint economic commission in Minsk in this summer.

At the beginning of the session, the head of the TPO underlined the need for programming for the implementation of the agreements of the joint commission, saying that the text of the agreements has been confirmed by the Iranian side, so Tehran hopes that the ministers of both countries will sign the agreements in the near future to finalize the accords.

According to the deputy minister of industry of Iran, the current 40 million dollars trade between the two countries is minor, so the figure is expected to reach an acceptable digit in the future.

Peymanpak further proposed that a trade delegation from Iran visit Belarus alongside the works are being done in the trade commission in order to pave the way for tradesmen of both nations to become familiar with the capacities of each other and take part in face-to-face sessions to reach better agreements.



He also suggested that a delegation of representatives from important and advanced industries from Iran visit Belarus to create a link between Iranian and Belarussian major industries.

In his last suggestion, the Iranian official pointed to mutual cooperation to create a north-south corridor with the aim of providing Belarus with the opportunity to export its products through Iran to the littoral states of the Persian Gulf, India, and eastern Africa.

For his part, Kharitonchik welcomed all three proposals, saying that Iran has good experiences in trade, which can help develop bilateral relations.

Belarus is prepared to pave the ground for Iranian businesses and representatives of industries to hold meetings with their Belarussian counterparts, he said, adding that Minsk can host Iranian delegations in joint commission as well as trade and industrial committees.

The Belarussian ambassador in Tehran referred to good relations between Belarus and the TPO, adding that Minsk welcomes all proposals and the Belarussian side will pave the way for discussing the suggestions in the upcoming joint commission meeting.

The Iranian ambassador to Minsk, for his turn, emphasized the need for preparing infrastructure for the expansion of trade between the two countries, noting that easing issuance of visas for tradesmen and truck drivers can help realize all goals proposed by the joint commission.

In a March meeting in Minsk, the Iranian ambassador to Belarus and Chairman of the House of Representatives of the National Assembly of the Republic of Belarus Vladimir Andreichenko called for strengthening of bilateral ties between the two nations.

Energy Ministry Obligated to Boost Electricity Export

TEHRAN (IP) - With the consent of the MPs, the Ministry of Energy was obliged to issue a license to export surplus electricity generated by the private sector.

The open session of the parliament, chaired by Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf, began today, Wednesday, at the parliament with the presence of the MPs.

According to the parliamentary correspondent of Iran Press, the MPs in an open session today, Wednesday agreed with the principle of Article 19 of the plan to develop and eliminate the obstacles in the country's electricity industry.

According to this article, the Ministry of Energy is obliged to issue a license to export electricity generated to the private sector, especially electricity generated from renewable sources, after ensuring the supply of domestic electricity according to the annual announcement plan, provided that it does not

contradict government export policies.

Also, according to the note of this article, the fuel required for the production of electricity for thermal power plants subject to this article is calculated at the export rate and its transfer cost for export (excluding electricity generated from renewable sources) is determined according to the tariff announced by specialized holding companies.

MPs also agreed to refer Article 20 of the plan to develop and remove obstacles in the country's electricity industry to the Energy Commission for further consideration.

The MPs in the process of reviewing the report of the Energy Commission on the development plan and remove obstacles in the country's electricity industry agreed to refer Article 20 to the Energy Commission for further review.

Burkina Mourns 79 Dead In Jihadist Massacre

OUAGADOUGOU (Dispatches) - Burkina Faso began three days of mourning after 79 people died in one of the bloodiest massacres in a nearly seven-year-old insurgency by armed Islamists.

The government issued a new toll from the weekend attack at the village of Seytenga in northern Burkina, revising it sharply upwards from the earlier figure of at least 50 dead.

The head of the country's ruling junta, Lieutenant-Colonel Paul-Henri Sandaogo, decreed three days of mourning, which took effect at midnight on Monday.

In a statement, the government said 29 more bodies had been found, bringing the provisional death toll to 79.



Protests by Indian Muslims Continue

KOLKATA (Dispatches) - Thousands of Muslims marched in the eastern Indian city of Kolkata in a second week of protests, while six prominent former judges said a state government had acted illegally by demolishing the house of a Muslim activist.

Muslims have taken to the streets across India to protest against anti-Islamic comments made by two members of Prime Minister Narendra Modi's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP).

Clashes have broken out between Muslims and Hindus and between protesters and police in several areas, with at least 400 people arrested.



Ukraine Forces Struggle to Evacuate Civilians From Sievierodonetsk



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said its forces were still trying to evacuate civilians from embattled Sievierodonetsk after Russia destroyed the last bridge to the devastated eastern city.

The Ukrainian defenders were holding out against the Russians in a battle which has seen ground change hands several times over the past few weeks.

"Russian troops are trying to storm the city, but the military is holding firm, Sievierodonetsk's Ukrainian mayor Oleksandr Stryuk said.

He described the situation as "very difficult".

Although the last bridge over the Siverskyi Donets river had been felled, evacuations were still being carried out "every minute when there is a lull and there is a possibility of transportation," Stryuk said. "Every possible chance is taken."

Ukraine says more than 500 civilians are trapped inside Azot, a chemical factory where its forces have resisted weeks of Russian bombardment and assaults that have reduced much of the city to ruins.

Regional governor Serhiy Gaidai said: "The shelling is so powerful that people can no longer stand in the shelters, their psychological state is on the edge. The last few days, the residents are finally ready to go."

Russia said it would give the Ukrainian fighters holed up in the chemical plant a chance to surrender on Wednesday morning. Fighters should "stop their senseless resistance and lay down their arms" from 8 a.m. Moscow time, Interfax news agency quoted Mikhail Mizintsev, head of Russia's National Defence Management Centre, as saying.

Civilians would be let out through a "humanitarian corridor", he said.

Both sides claim to have inflicted huge casualties in the fighting over the city, Russia's main target in its battle for the east of the country after it failed to capture the capital Kyiv in March, in the early weeks of its invasion of Ukraine.

Ukraine still holds Lysychansk, Sievierodonetsk's twin city on higher ground on the western bank of the river.

But with all the bridges now cut, its forces acknowledge a threat that they could be encircled in Sievierodonetsk.

Damien Megrou, spokesperson for a unit of foreign volunteers helping to defend Sievierodonetsk, said there was a risk of leaving "a large pocket of Ukrainian defenders cut off from the rest of the Ukrainian troops" - as in Mariupol, the Black Sea port that surrendered last month after months of Russian siege.

The battle for Sievierodonetsk - a city of barely more than 100,000 people before the war - is now the biggest fight in Ukraine as the conflict has shifted into a war of attrition.

Kyiv has said it is losing 100-200 soldiers killed each day, with hundreds more wounded.

Russia gives no regular figures of its own losses but Western countries say they have been massive, as Moscow has committed the bulk of its firepower to delivering one of President Vladimir Putin's stated objectives: forcing Kyiv to cede the full territory of two eastern provinces.

Momentum in Sievierodonetsk has shifted several times over the past few weeks - with Russia concentrating its overwhelming artillery firepower on urban districts to obliterate resistance, then sending in ground troops vulnerable to counter-attacks.

Bigger battles could lie ahead for the wider Ukrainian-held pocket of the Donbas region, nearly all on the opposite bank of the river which Russian forces have found difficult to cross. Ukraine says Russia is massing to assault Sloviansk from the north and along a front near Bakhmut to the south.

In Washington, a senior U.S. defence official said Putin likely wanted to capture much if not all of Ukraine but has had to narrow his tactical objectives in the war.

Countries Blame China at UN Over Xinjiang "Abuses"

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Dozens of countries voiced concern today at alleged abuses in China's Xinjiang region, and demanded that the UN rights chief publish a long-delayed report on the rights situation there.

"We continue to be gravely concerned about the human rights situation in Xinjiang Uyghur Autonomous Region," The Netherlands ambassador to the UN in Geneva Paul Bekkers told the UN Human Rights Council.

Delivering a joint statement on behalf of 47 countries, he pointed to a number of "credible reports" - vehemently denied by Beijing - indicating that more than one million Uyghurs and other Muslim minorities have been arbitrarily detained in the region.

"There are reports of ongoing widespread surveillance, discrimination against Uyghurs and other persons belonging to minorities," he said. There were also reports of "severe restrictions on Uyghur culture and the exercise of human rights and fundamental freedoms", he added.

The joint statement also voiced concern about "reports of torture and other cruel, inhuman or degrading treatment or punishment, forced sterilisation, sexual and gender-based violence, forced labour, and forced separation of children from their parents by authorities".

The countries, he said, "repeat our call on China to urgently address these concerns," and to "end the arbitrary detention of Muslim Uyghurs and persons belonging to other minorities".

They also called on Beijing to provide UN investigators and experts "meaningful and unfettered access" to independently observe the situation on the ground.

UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Michelle Bachelet was granted access to visit last month - marking the first visit by a UN rights chief to China in 17 years.

But she faced harsh criticism for not speaking up more forcefully against China's alleged abuses prior to and during the trip, which is believed to have been heavily controlled by Chinese authorities.



WFP Suspends Part of Its Food Aid in South Sudan

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The United Nations' World Food Programme (WFP) has suspended part of its food aid in South Sudan due to a funding shortage - heightening the risk of starvation for 1.7 million people.

The move to suspend aid will affect almost a third of the 6.2 million people in South Sudan the WFP had planned to assist this year. It comes as global food prices soar amid the Russia-Ukraine war, leaving humanitarian agencies working in Africa to work with funding shortfalls. Climate change is also exacerbating the situation, with South Sudan facing severe flooding, localised drought as well as man-made conflict that has left more than 60 percent of the population grappling with severe hunger.

"South Sudan is facing its hungriest year since independence," the WFP's acting country director in South Sudan, Adeyinka Badejo-Sanogo, told reporters in Geneva on Tuesday. "We are already in a crisis, but we are trying to avert the situation from becoming more explosive."

Badejo-Sanogo, who was speaking from Juba, South Sudan's capital, said the WFP urgently needs \$426m to cover needs for the next six months and dial back what she described as an "explosive situation". The WFP said it had exhausted all options before suspending food assistance, including halving rations in 2021. It said that following the food aid suspension, it is now hoping to reach 4.5 million South Sudanese in need, including 87,000 people already experiencing famine-like conditions.

The Norwegian Refugee Council listed the situation in the country as one of the world's 10 most neglected displacement crises, highlighting the discrepancies in fund-raising for African countries, compared with that for Ukrainian refugees.

It highlighted that it took just one day this March for a humanitarian appeal for Ukraine to be almost fully funded.

"The war in Ukraine has demonstrated the immense gap between what is possible when the international community rallies behind a crisis, and the daily reality for millions of people suffering in silence within these crises on the African continent that the world has chosen to ignore," the aid group's chief Jan Egeland said.

Rwanda Ready to Welcome Thousands in UK Migrant Deal

KIGALI (Dispatches) - The Rwandan government today doubled down on its defense of a controversial deal to take in asylum seekers being expelled from Britain, saying it was ready to welcome thousands of migrants.

Government spokeswoman Yolande Makolo described the agreement, which has been opposed by the UN and rights groups, as an "innovative program".

"People may have their opinions about this program depending on where they come from, or because of how this is portrayed in the media, but for us it is about being part of a solution to a broken global asylum system.

"We are doing this for the right reasons," Makolo told a press conference in Kigali. "We don't think it is immoral to offer a home to people."

A plane carrying a first batch of asylum seekers being deported from Britain to Rwanda was due to leave tonight despite court challenges to the UK's policy.

Makolo said she did not have an exact number of migrants expected to arrive in the country.

"But we are happy to host thousands of them over the lifespan of this programme. Our president (Paul Kagame) has in the past pledged to host over 30,000, so we have the capacity to do this."

"We do not consider living in Rwanda a punishment," she added. "We will do our best to make sure that the migrants are taken care of and that they are able to build a life here."

The British government has remained unbowed by the criticism, insisting the policy is needed to stop a flood of all-too-often deadly migrant crossings over the Channel from France.

More than 10,000 migrants have made the journey so far this year, a huge increase on previous years.

Rwanda, with a population of about 13 million, is already host to more than 130,000 refugees from multiple countries, Makolo said.

The first planned deportation of the migrants to Rwanda comes just before the East African country, which has often been under fire for rights abuses, is due to host Commonwealth leaders at a summit in the capital next week.



Macron Urges Solid Parliament Majority Amid Troubled Times

PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron appealed to voters Tuesday to give him a "solid majority" in Sunday's parliamentary polls, warning against adding "French disorder to global disorder."

Speaking as he departed from Paris to visit French troops dispatched to Romania in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine, Macron said "the months ahead will be difficult" but called for people to back him in the name of "the higher national interest" and "common sense."

Macron's visit this week to Romania and neighboring Moldova has come under fire at home, landing ahead of the second round of crucial parliamentary elections in which his centrist majority is at risk.

"Emmanuel Macron has planned a trip abroad for three days... after anaesthetising the campaign by refusing any debate, he saw the second round as a done deal," Jean-Luc Melenchon, leader of the left-wing NUPES alliance, told Le Parisien daily.

The incumbent had already been charged by opponents with sitting out April's presidential vote, bringing home a solid but unspectacular win against far-right chief Marine Le Pen.

Appearing to bet on a similar strategy in this month's parliamentary poll, his Ensemble (Together) alliance suffered in Sunday's first round while NUPES and the far right made gains.

Projections suggest voters could hand Ensemble 255-295 seats in the second round -- uncomfortably low compared with the threshold for an absolute majority of 289.

Macron's Elysee Palace office said that in Romania the president would send "a clear message of our commitment to our NATO allies and European partners" following Russia's invasion of neighbouring Ukraine -- highlighted by France's 500-strong deployment in the country.

There have even been press reports, unconfirmed so far, that Macron could make his first visit to the Ukrainian capital Kyiv since the assault began in February, alongside German Chancellor Olaf Scholz and Italian Prime Minister Mario Draghi.

But "people (in France) are really worried about petrol, purchasing power, not about him going to visit French soldiers abroad," one anonymous parliamentary candidate for Ensemble complained to Le Parisien.

Darrous Apt (\$2500)
300sq.m, 3bdrs
S/p, Sauna
J, balcony
marble fl
fireplace
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Elahieh Villa (\$4000)
1400sq.m
5bdrs, S/p
S, Jacuzzi
L.balcony
yard, pkg
Fully Furn

Parsian

Farmanieh (\$2200) 3bdrs
Zaferanieh (\$2800) 4bdrs
Kamranieh (\$1800) 2bdrs
All with S/p, S, J, F.F

Velenjak bldg (\$10000)
5storey, total 20bdrs
S/pool, S, J, pkg lots
storages, & brand new

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Norway Firms See Growth Slowing in Next Six Months

OSLO (Dispatches) - Norwegian companies expect economic growth to slow in the coming six months, a central bank survey showed on Tuesday, driven by high inflation, capacity constraints and expected higher interest rates dampening demand.

"Constraints have become increasingly widespread across all sectors in the course of spring, except retail trade where somewhat more enterprises now have spare capacity," Norges Bank said in a statement.

The quarterly survey provides key input to monetary policy. The central bank has said it would most likely raise interest rates on June 23, with a string of more hikes to come.



South Korea Strike Disrupts Shipments of Key Cleaning Agent for Chipmaking

SEOUL (Dispatches) - A nationwide strike by truck drivers in South Korea has disrupted shipments to China of a key cleaning agent used by makers of semiconductor chips, the Korean International Trade Association (KITA) said on Tuesday.

It was the first sign the eight-day-old strike was affecting chip production's global supply chain. It has already cost South Korea's industry more than \$1.2 billion in lost output and unfilled deliveries, according to the industry ministry.

KITA said a Korean company that produces isopropyl alcohol (IPA), a chemical used in the cleaning of chip wafers, faced difficulties in shipping to a Chinese company that in turn supplies wafers to chipmakers. It did not name either company.

About 90 tons of the material, or a week's worth of shipments, have been delayed, the trade body said in a statement.

It corrected an earlier statement that had wrongly said production was disrupted, and added that the Chinese firm did not supply wafers to Samsung Electronics Co Ltd's chip production operations in China.

A major South Korean petrochemical company was also facing problems sending out IPA shipments from its plant in the port city of Yeosu, according to a person familiar with the matter who asked not to be named.

Only an "essential amount" is being let through, they said, declining to identify the company because of the sensitivity of the matter.

The truckers' union, which is protesting against soaring fuel prices and demanding guarantees of minimum pay, vowed to continue the strike after four rounds of talks with the government failed to find a resolution.

Transport Minister Won Hee-ryong ruled out accepting any demand that sought to use the national economy as a hostage.

"The government will continue to listen to reasonable arguments but strictly respond to illegal actions in accordance with laws and principle," Won said, according to a ministry statement.

Analysts expect the strike's impact on domestic chipmakers to be limited, saying that both Samsung and the world's second largest memory chip maker, SK Hynix, usually keep enough material on hand for three months or more.

"Both drastically increased inventory since Japan's export curbs on chip material in 2019 highlighted the issue," Ahn Ki-hyun, senior executive director of the Korea Semiconductor Industry Association, said.

Small business owners voiced concern about the havoc a lengthy strike could have on the recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, as the truckers launched their action less than two months after social distancing norms were lifted.

"Small business owners are waiting helplessly," a dozen lobby groups representing such businesses said in a joint statement, adding that shipments of liquor, food, farm and fisheries products had been blocked.

An official from HiteJinro Co Ltd, the biggest brewer of soju, the South Korean liquor, said its shipments were cut by about 40% by the strike.

China to Miss Boom in Asia Buyout Deals

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Buyout funds are set to extend a record spending spree in Asia to the rest of the year but they will be mostly seeking deals outside China, where concerns about the economy are likely to outweigh any easing of a regulatory crackdown, dealmakers said.

Private equity mergers and acquisitions (M&A) activity in Asia, not including Japan, posted a record start to the year with \$167.4 billion spent since January 1 in markets such as Australia, according to data from Dealogic.

Buyouts in China, Asia's biggest market for deals, however, slowed sharply in 2022, as the two-month Shanghai lockdown and other coronavirus-related restrictions in many parts of the country hurt the economy and brought potential transactions to a grinding halt.

Acquisitions backed by financial sponsors of Chinese assets totaled just \$1.5 billion this year, less than a tenth of the value in the same period last year, Dealogic data showed.

A sluggish deals market in China could impact private equity funds' investment returns and prompt them to double down on M&A elsewhere, dealmakers said. Funds in the region are already sitting on a record \$642 billion worth of unspent cash, or 'dry powder', according to data provider Preqin.

"Significant macroeconomic, geopolitical and pandemic-related headwinds still remain as far as China is concerned, which may continue to dampen sentiment for pursuing China investments at least in the immediate future," said Steven Tran, a partner at law firm Mayer Brown.

The record buyout deal value, however, suggested that some APAC-focused funds may be reallocating more of their dry powder away from China and redirecting their investment activities to other parts of the region, he said.

Despite signs that Chinese regulators could be easing curbs imposed on business sectors including technology, dealmakers don't expect to see any immediate investment surge in the country.

China's central leadership has given Ant Group a tentative green light to revive its IPO, Reuters reported last week.

"I don't think they (policy changes) will result in a major rebound of private equity investment, as most investments previously were speculative rather than value investments," said Richard Ji, chief investment officer of All-Stars Investment.



OPEC Sees Global Oil Demand Growth Slowing in 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - World oil demand growth will slow in 2023, OPEC delegates and industry sources said, as surging crude and fuel prices help drive up inflation and act as a drag on the global economy.

Fuel use has rebounded from the 2020 pandemic-induced slump and is set to exceed 2019 levels this year even as prices hit record highs. But high prices have eaten into growth projections for 2022 and fed into expectations for slower growth in 2023.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries is expected to publish its first forecast for 2023 demand in July. Its forecast, along with that of the Paris-based International Energy Agency, will be watched closely for pointers on how OPEC supply policy might develop.

An OPEC delegate and another source familiar with OPEC thinking said they expected world demand growth of 2 million barrels per day (bpd) or less in 2023, a rise of just 2%, compared with growth of 3.36 million bpd expected in 2022.

"Even if it is only 1 million bpd, that is still growth and not a peak," the delegate said of the outlook for next year.

OPEC is expected to publish its first demand forecast for 2023 in its monthly report on July 12, an OPEC source said.

The IEA, which advises Western governments on energy policy, will give its first 2023 demand forecast in a monthly report on Wednesday, an IEA spokesperson said.

OPEC is watching for signs that high fuel prices will lead to oil demand destruction.

Two more OPEC delegates said demand destruction is likely to take a toll on oil use in coming months, although one of them said there was little sign of it yet in the United States, citing recent gasoline demand data.

A senior industry source at a trading firm, not affiliated to the IEA or OPEC, also said he expected lower demand growth in 2023, saying his initial estimates pointed to demand growing by 2 million bpd or less, down from 2.6 million bpd growth in 2022.

"Crude at US\$120 a barrel is causing demand destruction," he said. "It is already happening." Oil demand forecasters often have to make sizeable revisions given changes in the economic outlook and geopolitical uncertainties, which this year included Russia's invasion of Ukraine and recent Chinese coronavirus lockdowns.

OPEC originally forecast demand growth in 2022 of 3.28 million bpd, in its first forecast published in July 2021, later raising it up to more than 4 million bpd before cutting it to 3.36 million bpd.

Turkey Signals Wage Hike to Help Workers



ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish government signaled it could boost wages as of July, in an effort to safeguard households from soaring inflation.

Fueled by soaring food and energy prices, Turkey's annual inflation rate rose at a lower-than-expected pace last month but still jumped to a 24-year high of 73.5%.

However, Turkey's public finances are strong compared to emerging market peers, leaving it room for potential stimulus.

"Turkey is in a position to implement an arrangement that will satisfy all employees in July," Labor and Social Security Minister Vedat Bilgin told an event in the capital Ankara.

"It is our duty to protect employees against inflation. We will not allow employees to be crushed by inflation. We have a July period ahead of us," he added.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan on Monday first signaled the government could announce a relief as of next month.

"We increased the minimum wage by close to 200% over the past 20 years. We will provide relief to all sections of our nation in July," Erdoğan said.

He said Turkey would be relieved of the burden caused by inflation and will leave behind its problems from February-March next year.

The government is reportedly considering pushing a supplementary budget through Parliament before a recess next month in order to cover possible summer payments and the rising costs of a lira decline and inflation.

Work on the extra budget is being conducted, but no final decision has been made on whether it will be needed, two sources told Reuters last week.

The budget burden has grown due to rising energy costs, public sector wage and pension hikes, the lira drop and the related rising cost of the deposit protection scheme (KKM) launched late in 2021 to boost lira deposits by protecting them against depreciation.

Asian Companies' Profits Drop for First Time in Seven Quarters

LONDON (Dispatches) - Earnings by Asian companies in March declined for the first time in seven quarters, dented by slowing demand due to lockdowns in China and diminishing margins as input costs rise.

According to a Reuters analysis of Asia's top 1,500 large- and mid-cap companies by market-capitalization and those that are covered by at least three analysts, cumulative profits of these firms declined 3.2% in the March quarter year-on-year.

The data also showed their average net margins stood at 5.86%, the lowest in seven quarters.

"Higher commodity prices are impacting profit margins, as companies struggle to pass on higher input costs to their consumers," said Herald van der Linde, head of equity strategy, Asia Pacific, at HSBC.

The decline in earnings came as investors ditched regional equities on concerns that firms may not be able to cope with rising interest rates and soaring inflation levels.

China's business activity and consumption slowed in the first quarter due to a resurgence of COVID-19 cases, which also affected regional companies exporting to the Asian country.

The data showed Malaysian and South Korean companies, which derive a major portion of their revenue from China, witnessed a drop of 18.3% and 18.9% in their first-quarter earnings, respectively.

Toyota Motor reported a 33% drop in the March-quarter operating profit, and warned that unprecedented hikes in raw material costs could slice a fifth of its full-year profit amid the supply-chain stress that has roiled the automobile industry.

Lenovo, the world's largest PC maker reported its slowest quarterly revenue growth in seven quarters as demand for its personal computers waned after two years of pandemic-driven demand.

UK Unemployment Edges Higher as Inflation Slams Wages

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's unemployment rate has risen slightly, while soaring inflation is causing the value of wages to fall at the fastest pace in more than a decade, official data showed.

Unemployment rose to 3.8 per cent in the three months to the end of April, but remained close to a 50-year low as Britain sees record-high vacancies.

That compared with an unemployment rate of 3.7 per cent in the first quarter of the year, the Office for National Statistics said in a statement.

ONS Head of Economic Statistics, Sam Beckett, meanwhile noted that "pay in real terms is falling at its fastest rate in over a decade", with UK inflation at a 40-year high.

The jobs data follows official figures Monday showing British economic output declined for a second month in a row in April, weighed down by runaway consumer prices.

"It is possible that this is the very first sign that the weakening in economic activity since the start of the year is filtering through into a less tight labour market," Paul Dales, chief UK economist at Capital Economics, said Tuesday.

However, "that won't be anywhere near enough to prevent the Bank (of England) from raising interest rates on Thursday", he added.

The BoE is expected to raise its main interest rate for a fifth time in a row to cool the pace of price rises.

UK annual inflation rate has soared to nine per cent, causing a cost-of-living crisis for millions of Britons.

"With inflation hurtling towards double digit territory, many workers are increasingly finding that their wages are not stretching wide enough to meet the bumper cost of seemingly everything from food to petrol," said Myron Jobson, senior personal finance analyst at Interactive Investor.

The Bank of England is widely expected to raise its key interest rate this week by a quarter-point to 1.25 per cent, while some are forecasting a half-point jump.

In the United States, Friday's forecast-beating inflation print has triggered expectations that the Federal Reserve will ramp up the pace of its interest rate increases, heightening fears of a recession.

Iranian Actor Wins Best Asian Actor Award of Septimius

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian actor Hamid Farokhnejad received the Best Asian Actor award at the Septimius Awards in Amsterdam.

The Awards presented its prizes to the best of the four continents of the United States, Europe, Africa, and Asia. Iranian actor Hamid Farokhnejad won the Best Actor

Award at the Asian Section for his role in 'Major' directed by Ehsan Abdipour.

Septimius Film Festival, formerly known as Amsterdam New Horizons Film Festival, is an international award ceremony showcasing Feature Films, Documentaries, Short films, Animations, Television Series, and Screenplays.



Germany's Refinery Dilemma Tests Russian Oil Ban Resolve

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany is struggling to find a way to wrest control of a Russian-owned refinery that supplies most of Berlin's fuel, four people close to the matter said, fearing retaliation by Moscow if the site is nationalized and as Western firms hesitate to step in.

The PCK refinery in Schwedt, majority-owned by Russian oil giant Rosneft, is testing Germany's resolve to eliminate imports of oil from Russia by the end of the year under fresh European sanctions to punish Moscow for its invasion of Ukraine.

The landlocked refinery is the source of 90% of Berlin's fuel and has received all its crude from Russia via the Druzhba pipeline since the plant was built in the 1960s.

One solution considered by Germany has been to temporarily hand control of the refinery's day-to-day operations to British oil major Shell, which owns a 37.5% stake in Schwedt, according to government and company sources.

Shell, which saw Germany block the sale of its stake in Schwedt to Rosneft last year, is willing to step in as an interim operator, two of the people said, including a company source. But it is neither interested in taking over a larger stake nor being a permanent operator, they said.

Officials have also sounded out the idea of handing operations to Polish refinery PKN Orlen which could play a key role in efforts to reroute the refinery's crude supplies away from Russia.

PKN Orlen and Shell declined to comment. Rosneft, PCK and the Polish government did not immediately reply to requests for comment.

A spokesperson for Germany's Economy Ministry, which is in charge of energy, said: "We are working flat out to find a solution. We know the problem and are working on it."

Poland insists that Rosneft must be ousted from Schwedt, Germany's fourth-largest refinery, before a potential deal including state-controlled PKN, the people said.

Rosneft, meantime, has so far refused to engage with Germany to discuss a sale of its 54.17% stake in Schwedt or any other solutions that could resolve the situation, the people said.

Italy's Eni holds the remaining 8.33% and last month confirmed it was in the process of selling it.

"It's not trivial to solve this," German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said on Monday with regard to Schwedt, adding a working group had been set up to discuss its prospects.

Berlin has the option of taking control of Schwedt from Rosneft or even expropriating the firm, which it can do through energy security legislation recently updated to facilitate nationalization.

Expropriation could spark retaliatory steps by Moscow, and the biggest fear in Germany would be that Russia cuts natural gas supplies, the people said. Europe has yet to draw up plans for how to cut dependency on Russian gas.

Any alternative crude supply would be costly, putting further pressure on German consumers as Europe's biggest economy struggles with recessionary risks.

The EU plans to impose an embargo on 90% of Russian crude oil imports by the year end. The plan excludes landlocked Hungary, Slovakia and the Czech Republic whose refineries get all their feedstock through the Druzhba pipeline from Russia.

Germany and Poland are gradually increasing crude supplies to Schwedt and the neighboring TotalEnergies-owned Leuna refinery via other, smaller



pipelines from the Baltic ports of Rostock and Gdansk.

Poland has offered to allocate spare capacity at its oil terminal in Gdansk and could ship sea-borne crude oil via its pipelines from the port to the two German refineries, on the condition Rosneft is removed as an owner of Schwedt.

The Gdansk terminal has room to receive as much as 36 million tons per year, leaving 9 million tons on top of the needs of Polish refiners that could be used for Germany.

Potential cooperation would include coordination of supplies and the types of crude in the pipeline system that feeds Poland's top refinery in Plock before turning west towards Germany, so that the product yields and refining margins can be maximized.

While the alternative pipeline supplies, from Norway, the Middle East, the United States and West Africa, are expected to rise in the coming months, they cannot meet the two refineries' full capacity of a combined 24 million tons of oil per year.

To plug the gap, one measure of last resort that is being considered includes the potential hiring of dozens of tanker trucks to deliver the crude oil from the two ports, two industry sources said.

For now, Schwedt and Leuna are enjoying unprecedented profit margins.

The Russian Urals crude delivered via the Druzhba pipeline is priced according to a formula calculating the grade's average monthly price. Based on a Reuters calculation, that priced the oil at around \$35 a barrel below the Brent benchmark.

While most other European refineries that are no longer buying Russian crude have seen record profits from converting crude oil into gasoline, diesel and jet fuel, the two German refineries' margins were given a further huge boost by the cheaper crude.

The margin for Leuna and Schwedt is estimated to be at around \$50 to \$70 a barrel, according to several industry sources and analysts.

That translates into a daily profit of between \$12 million to \$16.8 million per day for each refinery, roughly \$8.5 million per day more than a similar sized northwest European refinery which does not process Russian oil.

World in Race for...

FROM PAGE 1

"We emphasize that nuclear war cannot be won and must never be waged," the U.S. said in a joint statement at the beginning of January.

But SIPRI noted that all five countries had since further expanded or modernized their arsenals. Russia had even openly threatened the possible use of nuclear weapons in the course of its war of aggression in Ukraine.

"Although there were some significant gains in both nuclear arms control and nuclear disarmament in the past year, the risk of nuclear weapons being used seems higher now than at any time since the height of the Cold War," said SIPRI Director Dan Smith.

Also the remaining other nuclear weapon states - India, Israel, North Korea and Pakistan - have all recently developed or deployed new weapon systems or at least announced this, the think-tank said. Israel has never publicly acknowledged having such weapons.

It added that China is in the middle of a "substantial expansion" of its nuclear weapon arsenal, which includes the construction of more than 300 new missile silos. Britain announced last year that it will increase the upper limit for its total stockpile of warheads.

"All of the nuclear-armed states are increasing or upgrading their arsenals and most are sharpening nuclear rhetoric and the role nuclear weapons play in their military strategies," said Wilfred Wan, the director of SIPRI's Weapons of Mass Destruction Program. "This is a very worrying trend."

The new SIPRI data refer to January 2022, the month before Russia invaded Ukraine. It is still a little too early to draw conclusions about how Russia's war will ultimately affect the nuclear situation in the world, SIPRI's Kristensen said.

The ongoing conflict between India and Pakistan, growing hostilities on the China-India border and North Korea's ongoing nuclear efforts also play a role. All these things add up, so it is fair to say that the world is in a very precarious state at the moment, Kristensen said.

The report reveals this fact that the big powers say something and act differently and they just want other countries to stay away from being a nuclear country but they boost their own nuclear military power in silence.

This happens while the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) simply puts its pressure on independent countries like the Islamic Republic of Iran for its peaceful nuclear programs while it remains silent about such a stockpile.

New analyses and reports all bespeak of this fact that most of the countries in the world are moving to boost their nuclear programs or even nuclear powers because they have realized that being a nuclear power to some extent will make them apparently safe against possible foreign aggression.

The United Nations mostly expresses its concerns about Iran's peaceful nuclear program but it remains passive and silent when big countries continue their race for boosting their nuclear weapon stockpile and this passive approach makes this global body a toothless tool for stopping big powers from increasing their nuclear warheads and race for increasing their stockpiles.

Belarus...

FROM PAGE 1

The Belarusian State Technological University will showcase new types of mineral fertilizers, technologies for processing agricultural waste to obtain construction and composite materials, technologies for processing plant raw materials and medicinal herbs to produce biologically active additives, new methods of flax quality analysis and flax products.

The Belarusian products on display will also include disinfectants for agricultural premises, biopreparations for plants, veterinary preparations for agricultural and domestic animals, food packaging film production technologies, and functional food additives.

Right Time to...

FROM PAGE 1

of Teheran-ro in Gangnam -- a modern center for Koreans -- is a significant achievement, and steps like this shall be renewed and expanded to other regions."

Choi stated that numerous raw materials and resources from Iran and the Middle East could be utilized for the development of Korean industries.

"I think Iran needs Korea's economic investment, and Korea needs a supply of Iranian oil, natural gas and access to the commodity market," Choi said.

India's May Palm Oil Imports Drop 10% as Indonesia Curbs Exports

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India's palm oil imports in May fell 10 per cent from a month ago as top producer Indonesia curbed exports of the edible oil, a trade body said.

The south Asian country is the world's biggest importer of vegetable oils and lower purchases could weigh on Malaysian palm oil futures FCPOc3.

India imported 514,022 tons of palm oil in May, down from 572,508 tons in April, according to the Solvent Extractors' Association (SEA) of India.

Indonesia, the world's biggest producer and exporter of palm oil, on April 28 halted exports of the product to control soaring prices at home. Jakarta allowed exports to resume from May 23, but put in place policies to safeguard domestic supplies.

Indian refiners in May sourced more palm oil from Malaysia, Thailand and Papua New Guinea, but still the overall imports were down, the SEA said.

"In June palm oil imports could rise above 600,000 tons as Indonesia has started giving export permits," a Mumbai-based dealer with a global trading firm said.

Indonesia's export allocation for palm oil products has been raised to 2.25 million tons, a senior trade ministry official said on Monday, from around 1 million.

India's soy oil imports in May jumped 37 per cent from a month ago to 373,043 tons, while sunflower oil imports more than doubled to 118,482 tons, the trade body said.

India buys soy oil mainly from Argentina and Brazil and sunflower oil from Ukraine and Russia.

The country's soy oil imports could rise sharply in the coming months as New Delhi has allowed duty free imports of 2 million tons of the commodity, traders said.—

Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

This is Berdimuhamedov's first visit to Iran as Turkmenistan's president. He traveled to Tehran in January as the special envoy of Turkmenistan's former president, Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov, and held talks with Raisi.

Speaking at the Wednesday meeting, President Raisi expressed Iran's strong will to sign strategic, long-term deals with Turkmenistan, saying there is great potential for Tehran-Ashgabat cooperation which should be tapped into.

He said his Turkmen counterpart's visit to Iran can be a turning point in bilateral relations.

"My visit to Ashgabat a few months ago managed to activate cooperation between the two countries. Steps were taken in the fields of gas swap, transportation, and cooperation between the two countries," the president added.

The expansion of bilateral cooperation will definitely lead to better regional and international developments, he said. "The relationship between Iran and Turkmenistan is not just a neighborly relationship, but a relationship of brotherhood, civilization, and culture. In other words, it is a relationship of kinship, and this deep relationship between the two countries can provide the basis for greater cooperation between the two countries," he noted.

Raisi said he thinks the two countries should deepen and upgrade their cooperation in fields related to economy, trade, water, electricity, and gas. He thanked former Turkmen president Gurbanguly Berdimuhamedov for taking good steps in deepening the bilateral relations, expressing hope that his successor would also take effective steps to that end.

The Iranian president also said foreign presence in West Asia will not bring security and stability to the region. According to Raisi, Tehran and Ashgabat share similar views on the situation in their mutual neighbor Afghanistan.

"We believe that in Afghanistan, there should be an inclusive government representing all political parties and ethnic groups," he said.

"Regional issues must be resolved by regional officials, and any presence of foreigners may cause problems," Raisi said. "We believe that the presence of foreigners in the region will hinder security and create problems."

The Turkmen president, for his part, urged close cooperation with Tehran on issues such as the Caspian Sea legal regime. He also called for enhancing relations with Iran in international bodies.

IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

In yet another blow to the bleak prospects of reviving the JCPOA, the US, France, Britain, and Germany spearheaded a resolution at the IAEA's Board of Governors on Wednesday, which accused Iran of not cooperating with the UN nuclear watchdog.

Iran has denounced the resolution and blamed the US and its three European allies for the crisis created over its nuclear program, which was under an unprecedented level of inspections before Washington withdrew from the JCPOA.

The resolution was passed only few days after the IAEA's chief Rafael Grossi traveled to Israel and met the regime's hawkish Prime Minister Naftali Bennett.

Israel had previously warned that Grossi's visit to Israel ahead of the meeting of the Board of Governors Eslami vehemently rejected the "political" allegations leveled over the past 30 years that Iran is seeking atomic

bombs, saying such accusations have been orchestrated by Israel to impede Iran's nuclear progress.

Iran has always had full cooperation with the IAEA and allowed it to visit the country's nuclear sites, the AEOI chief emphasized. He reiterated that Iran provided the IAEA with clarifications regarding its nuclear activities as part of trust-building measures and as a sign of goodwill.

It is a completely false claim by Western and Zionist media outlets that Iran's peaceful nuclear program pursues military objectives and seeks to build nuclear bombs, he said. In Iran's defense doctrine and national security doctrine, weapons of mass destruction have no place, Eslami added.

He said Iran cooperates with the IAEA within the framework of the Safeguards Agreements and the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). There is no undeclared and hidden activity or undeclared sites in Iran, the nuclear chief added.

Kompany Appointed As Burnley Boss

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former Manchester City captain Vincent Kompany has been appointed as the new manager of Burnley, the Championship club announced on Tuesday.

The Belgian, 36, who left his job as Anderlecht head coach last month, said he was "excited by the challenge ahead".

"Burnley Football Club is a truly historic English side and it is an honour to be appointed first-team manager," said Kompany, who takes over from caretaker Mike Jackson.

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Man Utd to Play Rayo Vallecano

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United manager Erik Ten Hag's first game at home will be a pre-season friendly against LaLiga side Rayo Vallecano at the end of July, the Premier League club announced.

The match at Old Trafford on July 31 will conclude United's preparations for the new league season, which starts on Aug. 6.

Ten Hag's side are due to visit Thailand and Australia as part of their pre-season tour before playing Atletico Madrid in Oslo and then Rayo, who finished 12th in LaLiga last term.

Warriors Take 3-2 Lead Over Celtics

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - The Golden State Warriors are one win away from their fourth NBA title in eight years after the 104-94 victory over the Boston Celtics gave them a 3-2 lead in the championship series.

Andrew Wiggins scored 26 points and grabbed 13 rebounds as the Warriors survived a third quarter push from the Celtics to emerge with the win, with the best-of-seven series heading back to Boston for Game Six on Thursday.

Wiggins and Klay Thompson did most of the damage for the home team, combining for 47 points, while Boston committed 18 turnovers and missed 10 free throws at the Chase Center.

Poor shooting saw the Celtics trail by 12 at the half but they opened the third quarter on a 10-0 run, taking their first lead of the night at 58-55 via Al Horford's three-pointer.

The momentum then swung back to the Warriors via Jordan Poole's bank shot from near half-court at the third quarter buzzer, and they put the game out of reach with an emphatic Wiggins dunk late in the fourth.

Wiggins, the first overall pick in the 2014 draft who has only flourished since joining Golden State in 2020, also played outstanding defense on Boston's Jayson Tatum, who finished with 27 points.

"Throughout the playoffs he's rebounded well," Warriors head coach Steve Kerr said of Wiggins. "I think it's just a sense of what's needed. He's got veteran guys who are helping him to understand what we need from him, and he's just using his athleticism in a lot of different ways."

Stephen Curry had put the Warriors on his back with a 43-point performance in Game Four but struggled from distance on Monday, going 0-9 from three-point range and scoring just 16 points.

But his dazzling drives and playmaking ability was still on display as he finished with eight assists while putting pressure on the defense.

"I think Steph was probably due for a game like this," Kerr said.



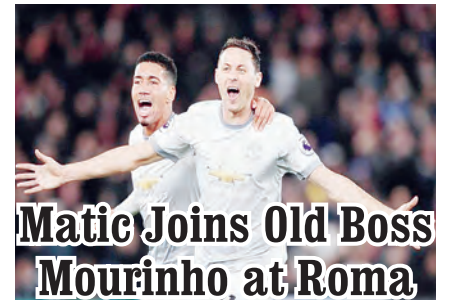
"He's been shooting the ball so well that, at some point, he was going to have a tough night. But we've got a lot of talent and a lot of depth that can make up for that, and the guys did a good job of that tonight."

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Matic Joins Old Boss Mourinho at Roma

ROME (Dispatches) - Nemanja Matic was reunited with his old boss Jose Mourinho at Roma after the Serie A club announced the Serbian's arrival as a free agent.

In a statement, Roma said that former Serbia midfielder Matic has signed a one-year deal with an option for a second season, with Italian media reporting that he will earn 3.5 million euros the coming campaign.

"I am pleased and honoured to be joining this club and I cannot wait to start the new season with my teammates," Matic said.

"Roma is a big club, with amazing fans and a coach, Jose Mourinho, who is well known to everyone — making the decision to come here very straightforward."

"I hope that by working together we are able to achieve some great things."

The 33-year-old was released by Manchester United after five seasons at the Premier League giants in which he failed to win a single trophy.

Barcelona to Sport UNHCR Logo in Place of UNICEF

MADRID (Dispatches) - Barcelona have signed a partnership deal with UNHCR, the United Nations Refugee Agency, whose logo will feature on the Spanish team's latest shirt in support of refugee children, the La Liga club said.

It will be displayed on the men's and women's first team shirts from the 2022-23 season and will serve as a message of solidarity with more than 100 million people who have been forced to flee their homes, Barca added.

Barcelona had previously partnered UNICEF in support of the world's children in 2006, with their logo present on the first team shirt for the past 15 years. The UNHCR logo will now replace the UNICEF logo.

Serena Set for a Comeback at Wimbledon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Serena Williams is set to make her comeback at Wimbledon a year after her last match in any competition, writing on Instagram on Tuesday: "See you there."

The 23-time Grand Slam singles champion, who suffered an injury during her first-round match at the All England Club 12 months ago, posted an image of her white trainers on grass along with the caption: "SW and SW19. It's a date. 2022, see you there."

The 40-year-old also tagged Eastbourne in her post, indicating she could potentially play in next week's grasscourt tournament on England's south coast.

It is unclear whether Williams, now ranked a lowly 1,208th in the world, is intending to play singles or doubles at Wimbledon.

The American could have entered using a protected ranking reserved for players who have been sidelined through a long-term injury but did not do so and will therefore need a wild card.

The initial batch of wild cards for singles and doubles at the tournament, which starts on June 27, will be announced.

Mayweather to Face MMA Fighter in Japan



The date, venue and rules of his fight against 29-year-old featherweight Asakura will be announced later this month.

It will be the 45-year-old Mayweather's fourth exhibition and his second in Japan, after

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Newly enshrined Hall of Fame boxer Floyd Mayweather will fight Japanese mixed martial arts star Mikuru Asakura in a September exhibition in Japan, organizers said.

The former welterweight world champion, who was inducted into the International Boxing Hall of Fame on Sunday after retiring with an unbeaten 50-0 record, beat "Dangerous" Don Moore in an exhibition in Abu Dhabi last month.

beating kickboxer Tenshin Nasukawa by TKO in just two minutes in December 2018, in a bout that was widely ridiculed.

Mayweather called himself the "pioneer of exhibitions" and promised to "put on a show" for fans when he returns in September.

"We're going to treat him nice, we're going to let him go three rounds, we're going to let him try to land his shot," Mayweather said of his opponent.

"I may not let him land one punch, it's all up to me, it's all on what I want to do," the American added, describing himself as "the puppet-master".

Mayweather said his "legacy is already set in stone" after entering the Hall of Fame. He retired from professional boxing in 2017 after beating UFC star Conor McGregor.

"It's great to go into the Hall of Fame and the great thing about it is I did everything on my terms," he said. "You look at so many champions and they can barely walk, they can barely talk. That's not cool. The name of the game is to hit and not get hit." Asakura said he intends to "use this opportunity to raise my name and my value internationally".

Tunisia Beat Japan to Win Kirin Cup

OSAKA (Dispatches) - Tunisia stepped up their World Cup preparations with a 3-0 win over Japan in Osaka to finish first in the four-team Kirin Cup tournament.

Mohamed Ali Ben Romdhane scored a penalty 10 minutes into the second half before Ferjani Sassi and Ali Maaloul scored to round off an impressive victory for the North Africans.

Tunisia have been drawn with France, Denmark and Australia in World Cup Group D and they can reflect on a productive trip to Japan this month after also beating Chile 2-0 in last Friday's semi-final.

Tunisia and Japan, who are also bound for Qatar, both struggled to create clear-cut chances in a tight first half.

Japan forward Takumi Minamino could only manage a fresh-air shot when the ball dropped invitingly to him in the box midway through the first half.

Daichi Kamada was guilty of an even worse miss when he slid in at the back post 10 minutes later with the goal at his mercy.

Minamino put the ball into the net at the end of the first half, only for the linesman to flag him for offside.

Tunisia made Japan pay 10 minutes after the restart when Anis Ben Slimane released Taha Yassine Khenissi into the box and Maya Yoshida took him down with a poorly timed challenge.

Romdhane stepped up and smashed the penalty past goalkeeper Daniel Schmidt.

Japan then handed Tunisia a second when a defensive mix-up between Yoshida and Ko Itakura let Youssef Msakni steal into the box, and Sassi was in position to finish off his pass.

Maaloul put the icing on the cake for Tunisia when he made it three after a break on the counter in injury time.

In the day's earlier game between beaten semi-finalists, Ghana beat Chile 3-1 on penalties after a 0-0 draw.



Marcelo Wants to Keep Playing After Leaving Real Madrid

MADRID (Dispatches) - Marcelo said an emotional goodbye to Real Madrid as the most decorated player in the club's history but insisted he has no plans to retire.

The 34-year-old has spent 15 years at the Santiago Bernabeu and will be a free agent when his contract expires at the end of the month.

Marcelo won 25 trophies at Real Madrid, including five Champions League, six La Liga and two Copa del Rey titles.

Among those attending a farewell ceremony in Valdebebas were Marcelo's teammates, Real Madrid president Florentino Perez, as well as Carlo Ancelotti and Raul, who is currently in charge of the club's B team.

"When I signed for Madrid, in my head I thought I could reach the top, and here I am the player with the most titles in its history," said Marcelo who broke down in tears.

"It's not goodbye, I don't feel like I'm leaving Madrid. If you don't give me a ticket, there will be trouble," he joked.

Marcelo said he would have no problem playing against Real Madrid in the future, keeping open the possibility he will join another team in Europe.

"I haven't thought about retiring, I think I can still play," he said. "I don't think playing against Madrid will be a problem, I couldn't have done any more. I'm very professional."

Marcelo collected his fifth Champions League title last month as Real Madrid defeated Liverpool in Paris to win a 14th European Cup.

But he did not play in the final, with Ancelotti favouring Ferland Mendy at left-back for Madrid's biggest games last season. Marcelo made only five starts in La Liga.

"This season I've hardly played but I have felt useful even without playing. I felt a responsibility," Marcelo said. "Sometimes I would be furious with Ancelotti and then the next day we were sharing kisses and hugs."

