

Iran Said a Cooperation Document In IT Field Has Been Signed Between Iran and Russia, Which Paves the Path for Active Presence Of Mighty Iranian Science-Based Companies to Have an Active Presence in the Russian Markets

IRAN NEWS

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a Phone Call to His Iraqi Counterpart Fuad Hussein On Thursday Condemned Deadly Terrorist Attack on Zakho and Reiterated Tehran's Support for Security and Stability in Iraq

2

DOMESTIC

Iran Warns to Retaliate Against Killers of Border Guards



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Ruble Can Reduce Dollar Use In Country



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

Draghi Resigns, Plunging Italy Into Political Turmoil



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Williams and Djokovic Included In U.S. Open Entry List



> SEE PAGE 8

Iran Economic Growth Rate at 4.4%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Central Bank of Iran (CBI) figures show Iran's economy grew by 4.4% in the year to late March despite continued pressure on the country's oil revenues because of American sanctions.

CBI figures published on Thursday showed that the Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) without considering the share of oil exports had expanded by 3.9% over the Persian calendar year 1400.

Total GDP calculated on prices reported in 2016, when one US dollar was equal to around 38,000 Iranian rials, reached over 65,263 trillion rials.

That comes as the current price of US dollar is around 320,000 rials. The CBI said economic growth rate in the quarter to late March was at 6.3%, up from 5% reported in the previous quarter.

The figures are consistent with the data published in June by the Statistical Center of Iran which put the country's economic growth rate for the year to late March at around 4.3%. The SCI had estimated that economy without oil had expanded by 3.5% over the same period.

See Page 7

Tehran, Moscow to Use Cryptocurrencies in Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) says the center for promoting trade with Russia has been activated in Iran and stressed that the license for setting up the Iran Trade Center in Russia has been issued that it will work as Iran's trade embassy in Russia.

During a training workshop for trade with Russia which was held by the TPO for Iranian businessmen, the head of TPO Mr. Alireza Payman-Pak pointed to the statistics regarding Iran's trade with Russia and said that European countries account for \$80b of Russia's total annual imports that has been affected by the sanctions after the Ukraine war.

He went on to say that it shows Russia is a big market that Iranian traders can make most of this market but unfortunately so far Iran has accounted for \$58m out of the total \$232b of Russia's imports.

He then pointed to several meetings between the economic delegations of Iran and Russia and said that the TPO has put on the agenda some factors for promoting trade with Russia, adding that broadening the market is the most important factor and it means both sides should set some mechanisms that they can help Iranian and Russian traders to have proper connection and interaction.

Payman-Pak said that the main issue is that main opportunities and properties of Russian market should be identified and at the same time major distributors of the Russian market should get acquainted with Iranian traders because in the past years, Iranian goods in Russia have been distributed by the third party countries.

He reiterated that Russia's market is totally different from Iran's traditional markets like Iraq and entering this market without enough studies will be repulsive and make Iranian traders disappoint.

Payman-Pak reiterated Iran has sent several trade delegations to different republics of Russia and it has not been limited to Moscow and so far the two countries have exchanged 24 trade delegations, and urged bodies like Iran Chamber of Commerce and Iran Chamber of Cooperatives to help to organize traders of the private sector.

He then said the second factor is the presence in the exhibitions in Russia, adding that Russia will host an exhibition on Iran's capabilities in September and some specialized exhibitions like on auto parts are being planned. He then pointed to using platforms as the third important factor for boosting trade with Russia, adding that if Iran wants to broaden an Iranian platform in Russia it needs considerable investment.

Payman-Pak continued to say that the center for promoting trade with Russia has been activated and the license for the launch of the Iran Trade Center in Russia has been issued and Iran Chamber of Cooperatives is in charge of it, noting the center will help traders to ease their trades and it will act actually as Iran's trade embassy in Russia.

He then pointed to some good actions taken by both countries in the field of logistics and banking and stated that Iran and Russia have reached some good agreements on using cryptocurrencies in their trade to circumvent the sanctions.

Payman-Pak went on to say that currently 700 items of goods are covered under preferential trade which has been extended for one more year and there is possibility that tariffs of some 80% of goods exchanged between the two countries are zeroed under the free trade.

Iranian Envoy Slams UNSC Approach to Syria

NEW YORK (IP) - Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations has criticized the UN Security Council for repeating baseless accusations against Syria regarding chemical weapons.

Speaking during the meeting of the Security Council on Syria, Deputy Permanent Representative of Iran to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi said that considering the cooperation of the Syrian government in implementing its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention (CWC), it is expected that the Security Council will not allocate its meetings to repeating positions and baseless claims against the Syrian government because this does not help the effectiveness of the Security Council.

In the UNSC meeting, the Iranian representative reiterated Tehran's demand for the complete, practical, non-political, and non-discriminatory implementation of the Convention as well as maintaining the authority of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and said that politicizing the implementation of the Convention and exploiting the OPCW in line with political motives, will endanger the validity of the Convention and the OPCW organization.

See Page 7

Iran Not to Sit Idly by Over Nouri's Life Sentence

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian rights official has warned that the Islamic Republic will not remain idle in response to Swedish court's ruling of life imprisonment for Iranian citizen Hamid Nouri, calling on Stockholm to "rectify its behavior."

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, made the comment in a post on his Twitter page on Thursday after Tehran recalled its ambassador to protest the sentencing of Nouri to life in prison on baseless accusations brought by some members of the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO), an anti-Iran terrorist group.

"Iran will not sit idly by and has several options on the table to respond to a) Sweden's totally unlawful sentencing of Hamid Nouri to life imprisonment, and b) its' brash support for notorious terrorist groups," Gharibabadi wrote.

Iran will NOT sit idly by and has several options on the table to respond to a) Sweden's totally unlawful sentencing of Hamid Nouri to life imprisonment, and b) its' brash support for notorious terrorist groups. The clock is ticking for Sweden to rectify its behavior!

"The clock is ticking for Sweden to rectify its behavior," added the tweet.

See Page 7

Iran Eyes \$5.7m bpd of Oil Output by 2029

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran plans to attract around \$160 billion worth of domestic and foreign investment to its petroleum sector until 2029 to significantly increase its production of oil and gas, according to a new report.

The Thursday report by the official IRNA news agency said that the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has outlined a seven-year investment plan under which Iran's production of crude oil will reach 5.7 million barrels per day by 2029.

Iran's current oil output capacity is just over 3.8 million bpd although actual production has dropped to nearly 2.6 million bpd mainly because of American sanctions that hamper direct exports of Iranian crude.

It added that Iran also seeks to meet a natural gas production target of 1.5 billion cubic meters (bcm) per day by 2029, up from a current output of just over 1 bcm per day.

The IRNA analysis said a current administrative government in Tehran, which may remain in office until 2029 under a second four-year term, has already secured nearly \$50 billion worth of investment for development projects in the Iranian petroleum sector.

See Page 7

Belgian Parliament Ratifies Prisoner Exchange Treaty With Iran

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The Belgian parliament has ratified a treaty with Iran allowing prisoner exchanges between the two sides, potentially opening the way for the release of an Iranian diplomat illegally jailed in the European country on false allegations despite his diplomatic immunity.

Following two days of debate, out of the 131 lawmakers present, 79 voted in favor and 41 against the treaty and 11 abstained from the vote held late on Wednesday.

According to the treaty, Iranians convicted in Belgium would be allowed to serve their sentences at home and vice versa.

The first reading of the treaty was approved by the parliament's foreign affairs committee on July 6, which led to a heated debate among the MPs.

The treaty will now potentially clear the way for the release of Assadollah Assadi, the Iranian diplomat sentenced by a Belgian court to 20 years in prison after accusing him of plotting an alleged attack against the Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO) anti-Iran terrorist group.

See Page 7

Iran Calls for Removal of Unilateral Sanctions Imposed Against Syria

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Iranian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the UN Majid Takht Ravanchi while paying heed to the territorial integrity, independence and political sovereignty of Syria called for removal of unilateral sanctions imposed against Syria.

"Iran's position vis-a-vis Syria's humanitarian issue is completely clear. The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported the efforts by the United Nations and the international community in helping Syria," Takht Ravanchi said on Thursday addressing a meeting of the UN General Assembly on "Strengthening of the United Nations system - Item 124 Debate pursuant to resolution 76/262".

The following is the full text of Takht Ravanchi's speech at the UN General Assembly:

My delegation aligns itself with the statement delivered by the representative of Venezuela on behalf of the Group of Friends in Defense of the United Nations Charter. I would like to make the following in our own national capacity.

In accordance with the principles of independence, humanity, neutrality, and impartiality, Iran has always supported the United Nations and the international community in their efforts to assist Syria.

We have frequently stated that the provision of humanitarian aid to Syria is critical and that political circumstances must not be allowed to prevent aid from reaching people in need. This must be done in a manner that fully respects Syria's political sovereignty, independence, unity, and territorial integrity and in compliance with the purposes and principles of the United Nations Charter.

In line with our consistent position, we have reiterated that the cross-border aid delivery mechanism should be considered as an exceptional and temporary measure imposed by specific circumstances and that humanitarian aid to those in need must be delivered in cooperation and full coordination with the Syrian government and from within the Syrian territory. This will help to prevent the divergence of aid to unintended persons

See Page 7

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Iran Warns to Retaliate Against Killers of Border Guards

TEHRAN (IFP) - The Deputy Commander of the Iranian Police's Border Guard says Iran will give a crushing response to the killers of two border guards who died in a clash with terrorists on the country's western border.

In an interview with Tasnim News Agency on the sidelines of the funeral ceremony held for the border guards in the city of Baneh on Thursday, Brigadier General Jalal Setareh expressed his condolences to the families of the victims and their comrades.

He said, "Our response to these evildoers will be regretful and crushing, and we will avenge the blood of our martyrs."

Armed Forces High Level of Deterrence Dissuades Enemies From Any Act of Aggression

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri says the Islamic Republic's troops have aimed to conquer a peak of deterrence, which will dissuade enemies from even think of attacking the country.

Addressing a gathering of the Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) Ground Force commanders in the northeastern holy city of Mashhad on Thursday, Baqeri pointed to the downfall of the unipolar hegemony in the world, the decline of US power, failure of Washington's scenarios in the West Asia region despite spending billions of dollars, the revival of China as a great power and Russia's taking more active role, and said all the developments attest to the fact that the world is entering a new phase identified as transition period.

He elaborated on the geopolitical features of the transition period, and noted that Iran, thanks to the unique leadership of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, cognizance of the nation and preparedness of Armed Forces, has attained many achievements despite wars, instabilities, insecurities and conflicts of recent years.

"With Iran turning threats into opportunities, the so-called pillars of the enemy's maximum pressure have collapsed one after another, and the role of Armed Forces, among other factors, was very important and decisive in this regard," the high-ranking Iranian military official stated.

A review of the events over the past three years shows that accomplishments like the downing of the enemy's strategic drone, successful missions of Iranian Armed



Forces in land and sea operations across the region, victorious campaign against Daesh Takfiri terrorists, establishment of lasting security in the country and along its borders, and promotion of Iran's power in missile, drone, naval and ground sectors have all played an effective role in failure of the enemy, the top general added.

He went on to say that the Ground Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran play a fundamental role in establishment of sustainable deterrence, promotion of durable security in the country and along border areas, support for the resistance front, and frustration of the enemy's strategies.

Separately, IRGC spokesman Brigadier General Ramezan Sharif on Thursday warned the Israeli regime against committing an act of folly against Iran.

"Zionists are trying hard to threaten the Islamic Republic of Iran. We warn the usurping Israeli regime that it will permanently lose the 27,000 square kilometers of territories that it has occupied if it makes such a mistake. There's no doubt about this threat," he said at a ceremony in the northwestern city of Qazvin.

Sharif also dismissed Israel's threats of military option against Iran, stating that the former Ba'athist regime of Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein, which enjoyed full support of the United States and the Soviet Union, miserably failed in the 1980-1988 war on Iran.

Iran Decisive Action Forced West to Retreat

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top nuclear official says the country's countermeasures following a bid to pressure Tehran into submission to Western demands have been totally effective, forcing the Europeans and the US to change their language.

Last month, Iran announced it had begun injecting uranium gas into advanced centrifuges and disconnected some of the UN nuclear agency's cameras monitoring its sites outside the Safeguards Agreement.

Iran's announcement came after the IAEA Board of Governors adopted a resolution proposed by the US and the three European parties to the 2015 Iran deal – Britain, France, and Germany – which accused Iran of not cooperating with the UN nuclear agency. The trigger for the resolution was an IAEA report after its Director General Rafael Grossi visited Israel and met the regime's authorities.

Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) Mohammad Eslami said that his organization chose its steps "very intelligently and precisely" which proved "completely effective".

"The language used by the Western countries vis-à-vis Iran has changed, and we have the upper hand so to speak," he said. "The result is basically the balance that the country has achieved and now they [the West] simply cannot match Iran's strength in various fields."

"The Western parties thought that they could bring Iran to

its knees with maximum pressure, and to achieve this goal, they had a spectrum of accusations and objections with the aim of preventing progress," Eslami said. "Now their goals as regards Iran's nuclear issue have been defeated."

Iran's disconnecting of the nuclear cameras, the official said, totally changed the discourse and all the fuss against the Islamic Republic, "since the JCPOA cameras which they thought would be available forever as a tool are out of their reach".

Eslami said the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) is basically an understanding to resolve ambiguities about the activities of the nuclear industry, but the Westerners which have not fulfilled their obligations under the agreement, are now rather threatening Iran.

Tehran, he said, needs to move forward with authority and strength no matter what and achieve its goals with detailed planning. "It should be noted that the capacity of our organization in creating and using new technologies is very high," Eslami said, adding the more powerfully Iran acts, the faster the obstacles will be removed.

"The current achievements have empowered the Islamic Republic of Iran and provided a platform to show that Iran is not afraid of America.

"The clear message is that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not seek permission from anyone to advance its goals and does not need anyone, but it needs to double its efforts in order to increase its share in this field."

Argentina Envoy Summoned

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry has summoned Argentina's acting charge d'affaires to express "strong protest" over the exit restrictions on five Iranian crew members of a Venezuelan cargo plane grounded by Buenos Aires.

The Argentinean diplomat was summoned to the Foreign Ministry.

Argentinean officials seized the passports of the Iranian nationals last month after the plane was prevented from landing in neighboring Uruguay and was returned to Argentina. Back then, an Argentinean judge ordered the crew's documents to be held after Security Minister Anibal Fernandez said information had been received from "foreign organizations" that some among the crew might be linked to companies with ties to Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC).

Fernandez, however, did not disclose which organizations he had received the information from.

Meeting with the Argentinean diplomat, Iran's Foreign Ministry officials called the allegations leveled against the Iranians "unfounded," and protested the lengthy nature of the Argentinean judge's investigation into the case.

"The situation concerning the Venezuelan plane and its Iranian crew is within the framework of the international law and aviation conventions, [and are therefore] completely legal," the Argentinean official was told.

The Foreign Ministry, meanwhile, expressed "grave concern" on the part of the Iranian government and the crewmembers' families over the continued confiscation of the Iranians' travel documents, calling their mistreatment "a manifestation of violation of human rights."

Resistance Axis States Must Join Forces to Expel U.S. From Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian official says countries of the resistance front should continue strong cooperation to bring about the expulsion of American forces from Syria and the whole region, emphasizing that the Islamic Republic will never back down on its stance in this regard.

Ali Akbar Velayati, a senior advisor to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei on international affairs, made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Syrian Foreign Minister Faisal al-Mekdad in Tehran on Thursday.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported and will continue to support the resistance front," Velayati said, describing Syria as one of the most important members of the axis.

He added that Iran also supports Syria's stance on opposition to some compromise agreements in the region and anti-Palestinian plans, referring to some regional countries' move to normalize ties with the Israeli regime. The Israeli regime and its puppets are too weak to be able to undermine the powerful resistance front, the senior Iranian official said.

Back in 2020, the United Arab Emirates and Bahrain signed

United States-brokered agreements with Israel to normalize their ties with the regime. Some other regional states, namely Sudan and Morocco, followed suit soon afterward.

Spearheaded by the UAE, the move has sparked widespread condemnations from the Palestinians as well as nations and human rights advocates across the globe, especially within the Muslim world.

Other regional countries have also been fraternizing with Israel, including Saudi Arabia, which received a visit by the regime's former prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu in November 2020.

Velayati reiterated the Islamic Republic's determination to continue support for Syria.

The Syrian foreign minister, for his part, said Tehran and Damascus are resolved to resist against the forces who have illegally occupied Syria's territory for years.

Mekdad added that the positions of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei have always played a leading role in settling regional issues.

U.S. Must Stop Excessive Demands in JCPOA Talks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Thursday underlined the need for the U.S. side to stop excessive demands in the course of talks over reviving a 2015 Iran nuclear deal – known as JCPOA – and lifting unilateral sanctions on Tehran.

Speaking at a phone conversation with his Qatari counterpart Sheikh Mohammed bin Abdulrahman Al-Thani, Amirabdollahian noted that a realistic approach is required for finding a solution to the differences and reaching a deal.

During the phone conversation, Amirabdollahian and the Qatari foreign minister whose country hosted a recent round of talks between Iran and the world powers discussed the latest developments of the JCPOA talks.

The Qatari side hailed Iran's rational stance in dealing with the case.

Fugitive Bank Melli Governor Not Repatriated to Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's Nour News media outlet, which is affiliated with the country's Supreme National Security Council, has rejected claims that fugitive former Bank Melli Governor Mahmoud Khavari has been arrested.

Khavari is wanted in the Islamic Republic on corruption charges.

Nour News said the way the fake news is making the rounds fosters the notion that this "fugitive corrupt person" has started the media game to deflect attention from himself.

Reports have been swirling around for the past few days that say Khavari has gone missing.

The reports also say Khavari has been abducted and returned to Iran.

This is while his family has not commented on the matter. Khavari fled to Canada over a decade ago after embezzling three thousand billions of tomans in public funds, that were equal to 3 billion dollars then.

The fugitive Bank Melli governor has been sentenced to 20 years in jail in absentia for disrupting the Iranian economy and 10 years more for receiving bribes.

Iran says the Canadian government has declined to pave the way for his extradition to Iran through Interpol.

Bright Future Ahead for Iran-Russia-China Alliance

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ambassador to Moscow says the Iran-China-Russia alliance is the major coalition of the future world.

"The future of such an alliance is very bright," said Kazem Jalali.

He then elaborated on the importance of this trilateral alliance for the region and the international system.

"Russia is our northern neighbor and a powerful country which is very vast and enjoys high potential and capabilities; moreover, there is Iran which is a powerful country both at the regional and international levels," he added.

The top diplomat said this is a coalition which major powers, especially the US, will certainly envy.

"Over the past 43 years, we have fought for our independence and stood up to hegemonic powers as well as the global unipolar system, and Iran paid heavy prices in those areas, but managed to secure a stable place on the world stage," said the ambassador.

He said Iran-Russia relations are going through their golden age, and added special attention should be paid to mutual economic cooperation.

Fighting Terrorism Must Not Harm Syria Territorial Integrity



TEHRAN (MNA) – Respecting the territorial integrity of Syria has been Tehran's policy in recent years, Iran's First Vice President said, stressing that fight against terrorism should not harm the territorial integrity of Syria.

Mohammad Mokhber made the comments in a meeting with the visiting Syria's foreign minister Faisal Mekdad in Tehran on Thursday morning.

Enhancing the level of economic cooperation and commercial relations between Tehran and Damascus is one of the serious strategies of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Mokhber also noted in this meeting.

Emphasizing the need to remove the obstacles in the path of Iranian and Syrian private sectors and economic activists, he called for taking the necessary measure for the expansion of economic relations between the two countries.

Although Iran and Syria enjoy cordial relations and appropriate political relations, the economic relations between Tehran and Damascus have not improved in proportion to the political relations, he also added.

Tehran is determined to expand its relations and relations with Damascus in all dimensions, he said, adding, "If the necessary measures are provided by Damascus, we will witness a serious development in the development of mutual relations."

Faisal Mekdad, for his part, hailed the Islamic Republic of Iran for supporting Syria in all dimensions of the fight against terrorism.

If it were not for the support of Iran, the situation of the region and Syria would be completely different today, Mekdad said.

"We will never forget Iran's assistance and we will try to solve the challenges and obstacles on the way to the development of Tehran-Damascus relations," he added.

Referring to the conspiracies of the United States in imposing economic sanctions against the people of Iran and Syria, he added, "A country that commits such cruel and unilateral actions against nations is a war crime and against humanity."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:36
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:26
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:06

37. By men whom neither traffic nor merchandise can divert from the Remembrance of Allah, nor from regular Prayer, nor from the practice of regular Charity: Their (only) fear is for the Day when hearts and eyes will be transformed (in a world wholly new).-

38. That Allah may reward them according to the best of their deeds, and add even more for them out of His Grace: for Allah doth provide for those whom He will, without measure.

Surah 24. Light (37 - 38)

Ruble Can Reduce Dollar Use in Country

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Secretary General of Iranian Exchange Association believes the ruble-rial exchanges are in their early stages and it is obvious that like any other work in its early stages it is not welcomed by the people and shift in public demands from dollar to ruble needs time but with the rise in ruble services in the country it will be attractive for the people and passengers, adding that he predicts as a user that the demands for ruble will gradually increase in the country.

Speaking to ILNA and touching upon the launch of the new integrated forex market on ruble/rial currency pair and probable rise in demands for ruble, Kamran Soltanizadeh said that ruble is a currency which is common in the CIS and Caspian Sea countries which include 12 states where trade exchanges are done through this currency.

He added that due to the export volume and financial exchanges of Iran with these countries, ruble is considered an important forex for Iran, adding that due to the sanctions on banking system, ruble banknote can reduce market use of dollar because economic activists and passengers can use this forex in the CIS countries where they can use ruble.

Soltanizadeh added that ruble in forex shops in countries like the UAE and East Asia due to their trade with Russia and Russian passengers are used, noting that if we can promote ruble in Iran as a forex which is traded in the integrated forex markets and forex shops, then many passengers who do not have dollars to spend will turn to rubles but it first needs ruble to be priced fairly and properly and customer benefit of its exchange and purchase because supply and demand is always controlled through pricing.

He expressed hope that by proper pricing and rating ruble this forex would be included in the forex market of the people. He stated that since there are many Iranian



students in the CIS states and Russia, they can be the major applicants for ruble in the country provided that sales of forex to students is eased.

On the rise in demands for ruble in Iran's forex market, Soltanizadeh said that since three or four years ago forex shops by taking wrong decisions had put aside some other currencies and they just served the public with trading some certain foreign currencies but the forex shops have now this chance to return for exchange of other currencies but it takes time.

He said that trade of Iran and Russia in rial and ruble is in its early stage and any work in its early stage does not move ahead fast and definitely shift in the public demands from dollar to ruble will take time but it will definitely will increase gradually and it will be attractive for the public and passengers. He expressed hope this shift will continue for other currencies and the country would not remain reliant on one or two foreign currencies.

On the probable rise in the price and rate of ruble due to the rise in demands, he said that currently some trades are done in ruble but in this new process, unofficial ruble trade becomes official and in any market that demand exceeds supply, the price will rise.

Iranian Brothers Shine At Global Music Awards

IRAN NEWS ART DESK

TEHRAN – Iranian brothers Ali and Mohammad Saeidi won bronze medals at the Global Music Awards for their song "Youth".

According to the reports, the traditional Iranian song duo of Ali and Mohammad Saeidi was given a bronze medal for their single "Youth" composed by Hamid Lali. Santur player Amir-Hossein Moallem also contributed to the piece.

Ali and Mohammad Saeidi both were born on October 30, 1981 in Isfahan and they are both students of maestros Mohammad Ali Kianinejad and Mohammad Taghi Saeidi and Fazlollah Shahzamani and they are twins singers in Iran.

These brothers have recently cooperated with maestro Ali Rahbari in the project named "Persian Nightingales" which had been ordered by Naxos International Company.

Global Music Awards has three special honors, each awarded annually to a musician for a group of musicians. Our goal is to say thank you to very special musicians who make the world a better place through their music.

Global Music Awards opens doors. Our goal is to be your partner in your journey to the top. If you win our honors, our credibility may make it easier for you to lock-in bookings, be discovered by A&R executives and be signed by labels.

Established in 2011, by Thomas Eugene Baker, Ph.D., the Global Music Awards is a well-known international music competition which celebrates independent musicians. Global Music Awards is widely recognized by industry insiders as giving legitimacy to highly talented artists. 'Global Music Awards is recognized as music's golden seal of approval.'

Each year, Global Music Awards receives hundreds of entries from around the world. If you receive Global Music Award honors you will know that you music stands-out internationally, across cultures.



Iran, Turkey To Boost Scientific Cooperation



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran and Turkey stressed boosting scientific cooperation between the two countries.

During a meeting held between the Iranian deputy minister of science in international affairs Vahid Haddadi-Asl and the President of the Scientific and Technological Research Council of Turkey (Tubitak), the two sides stressed boosting scientific cooperation between the two countries.

Referring to the long history of relations between Iran and Turkey, Haddadi-Asl stated, "We are ready to strengthen the scientific, research and technological cooperation between the two countries, and in this regard, while continuing the past trends, we emphasize defining new paths."

"Currently, 47 joint research projects between Iran and Turkey are underway, and we are ready to add 30 more research projects to the existing projects within a year," he added.

Haddadi-Asl also suggested that in addition to academic centers, independent research institutes in Iran can also cooperate with Turkish research institutes, and the issue of water can be one of the fields of this cooperation.

The President of Tubitak Hasan Mandal, for his part, called for including the field of industry in cooperation with the Iranian side.

He cited that Tubitak has independent research institutions that can cooperate with Iran in the field of biotechnology and various industries.

Referring to the cooperation of Iranian and Turkish knowledge-based firms, Mandal stated that the cooperation between science and technology parks and knowledge-based companies of the two countries can be developed by establishing an office of technology transfer between Tubitak and the Ministry of Science, Research and Technology of Iran.

Kyrgyzstan Eases Visa Process for Iranian Nationals

KHORASAN (IP) - The ambassador of Kyrgyzstan in Iran said that the conditions for issuing Kyrgyz visas for Iranians have become more accessible than before, and there are no more problems with visas from our country. Even the possibility of issuing visas at the airport has been provided.

In a meeting with Iranian authorities, economic organizations, and private sector operators in Khorasan Province on Wednesday, Kyrgyz envoy to Tehran, Turdakun Sydykov, said that cooperation between production sections of the two countries would expand bilateral ties and increase the volume of commodity exchange.

Sydykov noted that Soon, two commodities fairs would be held in Bishkek and Osh, where the presence of Iranian companies will help to introduce the capabilities of Iran's production and export sector, as well as the development of relations and exchanges of goods between the two countries.

For his part, the Chairman of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Gholam Hossein Shafei, said Iran and Kyrgyzstan had had long-term relationships, adding that Iran was the first to recognize Kyrgyzstan's independence.

He added that expansion of bilateral ties depends on removing investment obstacles and increasing commodity and service exchanges between the two countries.

Shafei said that regarding its economic rules, Kyrgyzstan is one of the advanced Central Asian countries and has been improving in investment and economic arenas.

He concluded that Iran had improved its capabilities in mining, food industry, transportation, irrigation projects and chemical fertilizers and could have constructive cooperation with Kyrgyzstan in these areas.

East Asia-Iran Trade Exchanges Can Surge to \$100b

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's trade exchanges with neighboring states and East Asian countries enjoy the capacity to increase to 100 billion dollars, an Iranian legislator said.

Mohsen Zanganeh, a lawmaker and member of the Parliament's Planning and Budget Committee, told IRNA on Wednesday that the recent visits by various heads of states to Tehran indicate the economic and political diplomacy of the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

Since the beginning of the Raisi administration, there have been several meetings between Iranian authorities and high-ranking officials of different countries around the world, which is a sign that the administration is heading towards expansion of ties with neighboring, Southeast Asian and Latin American nations that is a turning point in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Zanganeh mentioned.

The lawmaker also urged various ministries of the administration such as the Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade, Ministry of Agriculture Jihad, Ministry of Petroleum and Ministry of Cultural Heritage, Tourism and Handicrafts to pave the ground for enhancing necessary infrastructure for utilization of capacities for cooperating with neighboring, regional, Asian and Latin American states.

On the impact of holding meetings among Iranian and other heads of states, the member of parliament argued that the talks can provide Iran with the opportunity to nullify illegal sanctions imposed by the United States.

The Islamic Republic is mostly exporting its commodities to neighboring states or China and Russia, while European countries have only 4 to 5 percent share in Iran's foreign trade exchanges; thus, focusing on regional and Eastern countries concerning trade development can pave the way for doubling the amount of export to these states, he noted.

Iran has succeeded in reaching important progress in interaction with East Asian countries particularly China, which is also one of the biggest world powers, he said, adding that Iran has also enhanced its relationship with Russia; so, such an approach can provide Iran with the opportunity to boost its exports to these countries.

He went on to say that along with enjoying the capacity of international entities such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the administration of President Raisi can focus on the economic and trade cooperation with neighboring and East Asian states in a bid to expand its annual trade exchanges worth 53 billion dollars to reach 100 billion dollars per annum.

Minister Proposes to Set Up Iran-Turkey Joint Free Zone

TEHRAN (MNA) – In the meeting of Turkish-Iranian High-Level Cooperation Council in Tehran, the Iranian economy minister proposed establishment of a joint free zones between the two countries.

In the Turkish-Iranian High-Level Cooperation Council in Tehran on Tuesday, which was held with the participation of the presidents of the two countries, Seyyed Ehsan Khandouzi, Iran's Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF) proposed the establishment of a joint free zone between Iran and Turkey which was highly welcomed by the Turkish industry minister.

Given the signing a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), it was decided that Joint Investment Committee between Iran and Turkey will accelerate their cooperation in this field.

PGSR Honor of Establishment



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Representative of Velayat-e Faqih to Hormozgan Province Hojjatolislam Ebadizadeh believes Persian Gulf Star Refinery is honor and pride of the Islamic Republic of Iran establishment and growth of this group will please everybody especially the Supreme Leader and expressed hope that the brilliant achievements of this group will continue by the assistance of Almighty God.

In meeting with the CEO of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company Mr. Alireza Jafarpour, Hojjatolislam Ebadizadeh said that Supreme Leader has special attention on this refinery as he has said this refinery has foiled the plot of enemies regarding imposing gasoline sanctions.

He went on to say that every industry as well as its impact on environmental pollution has direct impact on livelihood of the people in the region and everybody expects industries beside their achievements for the country to resolve some part of employment in their provinces.

He added that there are skillful forces in the province that their employment should be prioritized for the industries in the province.

Ebadizadeh also hailed Persian Gulf Star Oil Company for its support for resolving problems of Jame Mosque of Bandar Abbas, adding that he will continue his support for advancing construction of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company hospital in the province.

Then the CEO of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company Jafarpour, for his part, pointed to the role of Persian Gulf Star Refinery in production of gasoline in the country and said that with implementation of the project for enhancing the capacity, he expects the production capacity of the refinery would reach 540,000 barrels per day and this refinery will enter among the world 10 biggest refineries.

He added that the refinery is planning production in four working shifts and to this end it will absorb skilful native forces through holding specialized exams.

Jafarpour noted that the company will continue the construction and completion of Persian Gulf Star Oil Hospital and the company is trying hard to improve the scientific level of the youths in the province through holding special educational courses.

He reiterated that the company pays its taxes in the provinces and all of the company's accounts are Hormozgan Province and taxes are paid in this province.

Biden Tests Positive for Covid

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Joe Biden, the oldest person ever to serve as U.S. president, has tested positive for Covid-19, is experiencing mild symptoms and will continue working but in isolation, the White House said today.

Biden, 79, has begun taking a course of the antiviral treatment Paxlovid, according to his press secretary, Karine Jean-Pierre.

"He is fully vaccinated and twice boosted and experiencing very mild symptoms," she said in a statement.



Kremlin Says Putin Is Fine

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Kremlin said today that Russian President Vladimir Putin was in good health, dismissing what it called false reports he was unwell.

"Everything is fine with his health," Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov said in reply to a question at his daily briefing.

"You know that Ukrainian information specialists, and American and British ones, have been throwing out various fakes about the state of the president's health in recent months - these are nothing but fakes," he added.



Draghi Resigns, Plunging Italy Into Political Turmoil



ROME (Dispatches) - Italian President Sergio Mattarella dissolved parliament on Thursday, clearing the way for an early election after Prime Minister Mario Draghi quit following the collapse of his national unity government.

Mattarella said the election must be held within 70 days, leaving the government to fix the precise date which is likely to be in late September.

"The period we are going through does not allow for any pause in the (government) action which is needed to counter the economic and social crisis, and rising inflation," the president said in a short address from his Quirinale Palace in Rome.

Draghi, an unelected former central banker who has led a broad coalition for almost 18 months, resigned earlier on Thursday and has been asked to stay on in a caretaker capacity.

A bloc of conservative parties, led by the far-right Brothers of Italy, looks likely to win a clear majority at the next election, a study of opinion polls showed this week.

Draghi's coalition crumbled on Wednesday when three of his main partners snubbed a confidence vote he had called to try to end divisions and renew their fractious alliance.

He had tried to reassert his authority as parties began to pull in different directions before the planned end of the legislature in the first half of next year.

The political crisis has up-ended months of stability in Italy, during which Draghi had helped shape Europe's tough response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine and had boosted the country's standing in financial markets.

Draghi, credited with helping save the eurozone as head of the European Central Bank, presided over a remarkable period of unity as Italy's premier before falling foul of its notoriously unstable political system.

The star economist was never directly elected but won the backing of almost all political parties when he took office in February 2021 and raised Italy's profile on the international stage as a respected leader in the European Union and G7.

He was tasked with battling the coronavirus pandemic and the aftermath of a recession in Europe's third-largest economy just as Italy was awarded a vast part of an unprecedented EU recovery package worth billions of euros to boost growth.

Rejecting Italy's long-standing ties with Moscow, he strongly opposed Russia's invasion of Ukraine and played a key role within the EU in backing Kyiv's bid for membership in the bloc.

Enjoying soaring personal popularity and the trust of Brussels and the financial markets, Draghi was seen as the best choice to revive a stagnant economy, plagued by structural inefficiencies and a punishing bureaucracy, by ushering in structural reforms long delayed by infighting and inertia.

But with elections scheduled for next year, the parties in his coalition grew increasingly restive and Draghi's stern warnings to stop political games went unheeded.

Three parties in his coalition on Wednesday refused to participate in a confidence vote, pulling the plug on the government.

Iraq Declares Day of Mourning for Victims of Shelling Blamed on Turkey

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraqi Prime Minister Mustafa al-Kadhemi declared a day of national mourning Thursday after nine civilians were killed in a strike on a Kurdish hill village he blamed on neighboring Turkey. Ankara has denied responsibility for the attack.

The coffins of the nine dead, draped in Iraqi national flags and festooned with flowers, were put on board a flight to Baghdad from Kurdish regional capital Erbil by an honour guard led by top officials.

Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein and Kurdish regional president Nechirvan Barzani led the pallbearers carrying the smallest of the coffins, a child's, onto the military plane, according to reporters.

In Baghdad, the bodies were to be handed over to their families for burial.

The deaths in a village pleasure garden prompted several dozen angry demonstrators to protest outside the Turkish visa office in Baghdad early Thursday, despite a heavy police presence. Loudspeakers blared out patriotic songs as protesters chanted slogans demanding the expulsion of the Turkish ambassador, an AFP journalist reported.

"We want to burn down the embassy. The ambassador must be expelled," said demonstrator Ali Yassin, 53.

"Our government is doing nothing."

In an unusually strong rebuke, Iraqi Prime Minister Kadhemi has warned Turkey that Baghdad reserves the "right to retaliate," calling the artillery fire a "flagrant violation" of sovereignty - a line echoed by Iraq's Kurdish administration.

Iraq said it was recalling its charge d'affaires from Ankara and summoning Turkey's ambassador, and demanded an official apology from Turkey along with "the withdrawal of its armed forces from all Iraqi territory".

Turkey has however rejected the claim that it was responsible for the deadly strike in northern Iraq.

Turkey regularly carries out air strikes in northern Iraq and has sent commandos to support its offensives as part of a long-running campaign in Iraq and Syria against militants of the Kurdish PKK and the Syrian Kurdish YPG militia. Ankara regards both as terrorist groups.

In an interview with Turkish state broadcaster TRT Haber on Thursday, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said the military had informed him that it was not responsible for the attack.



New Sri Lanka President Sworn In

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka's six-time Prime Minister Ranil Wickremesinghe was sworn in as president of the crisis-hit South Asian nation, as officials said he was looking to form a unity government to manage the turmoil.

The 73-year-old veteran politician, who was overwhelmingly elected as head of state in a parliamentary vote Wednesday, took his oath of office before Chief Justice Jayantha Jayasuriya, his office said.

Live coverage of the swearing-in at the tightly-guarded parliament complex was cut off just as Wickremesinghe and his wife Maithree walked into the building after reviewing a military parade.

"An investigation was launched to figure out why the broadcast was interrupted," a top defence official told AFP.

Sri Lanka's police chief and top military brass stood behind the new president as the oath was administered.

Official sources said he was expected to shortly form a cabinet not exceeding 30 ministers to steer the country out of its worst economic crisis since gaining independence from Britain.

A foreign exchange crisis triggered by the coronavirus pandemic and exacerbated by mismanagement has left Sri Lanka suffering lengthy power blackouts and the country's 22 million people enduring shortages of fuel, food and medicines for months.

Public anger over the hardships boiled over when tens of thousands of protesters stormed the home of then-president Gotabaya Rajapaksa, forcing him to step down and clearing the way for Wickremesinghe's election.

Wickremesinghe is widely expected to invite his schoolmate and former public administration minister Dinesh Gunawardena to be the prime minister in the unity government.

But political sources said at least two other candidates were also in the running.

Race to Become UK PM Down to Final Two

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former finance minister Rishi Sunak and foreign secretary Liz Truss will battle it out to become Britain's next prime minister after they won the final lawmaker vote, setting up the last stage of the contest to replace Boris Johnson.

Sunak has led in all rounds of the voting among Conservative lawmakers, but it is Truss who seems to have gained the advantage so far among the 200,000 members of the governing party who will ultimately choose the winner.

The final stretch of a weeks-long contest will pit Sunak, a former Goldman Sachs banker who has raised the tax burden towards the highest level since the 1950s, against Truss, a convert to Brexit who has pledged to cut taxes and regulation.

Whoever triumphs when the result is announced on Sept. 5 will inherit some of the most difficult conditions in Britain in decades. Inflation is on course to hit 11% annually, growth is stalling, industrial action is on the rise and the pound is near historic lows against the dollar.

Britain under Johnson, and aided by Truss, also took a hard line against Brussels in its post-Brexit negotiations around Northern Ireland, drawing legal action from the European Union and threatening future trade ties.

Eleven candidates originally put their names forward, but in a fifth and final ballot of Conservative lawmakers on Wednesday, the junior trade minister Penny Mordaunt was eliminated. Sunak won 137 votes, versus Truss's 113 and Mordaunt's 105.

Polls show Truss would beat Sunak in the party members' contest, opening up the chance that Conservatives elect a leader who was not the most popular choice for lawmakers.

Truss thanked some lawmakers outside parliament shortly after the votes were announced. "I am in it, to win it," she said to reporters. In a statement, she added: "As prime minister I would hit the ground running from day one, unite the party and govern in line with Conservative values."

Sunak said on Twitter: "Grateful that my colleagues have put their trust in me today. I will work night and day to deliver our message around the country."

Mordaunt, who was just eight votes behind Truss, called on the party to unite after an often ugly leadership contest.

"Politics isn't easy. It can be a divisive and difficult place," she said in a statement. "We must all now work together to unify our party and focus on the job that needs to be done."

The two finalists will now start weeks of hustings up and down the country before the party's membership.



Tribal Woman Wins Indian Presidential Election



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - A woman from India's tribal minority, Droupadi Murmu, was elected as the country's president Thursday with the backing of the ruling party, making her the first person from the marginalized community to occupy the top post.

Murmu, who is from the Santhal tribe, secured the largely ceremonial position with the support of more than half the electorate of MPs and state legislators, partial results released by the election commission showed.

Murmu, 64, was nominated by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's ruling Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) for the post.

Modi tweeted to congratulate Murmu, saying her "exemplary success motivates each and every Indian".

"She has emerged as a ray of hope for our citizens, especially the poor, marginalised and the downtrodden."

Her closest rival, the opposition-backed Yashwant Sinha - an ex-member of the BJP and former finance and external affairs minister, also tweeted his congratulations.

"India hopes that as the 15th President of the Republic she functions as the custodian of the Constitution without fear or favor," Sinha wrote.

Murmu will be the country's second woman president after Pratibha Patil, who held the position for five years from 2007, and succeeds Ram Nath Kovind, the second president from the Dalit community, the bottom of the Hindu caste system.

Born in Mayurbhanj district in the eastern state of Odisha, the president-elect began her career as a schoolteacher before joining politics.

She has held ministerial positions in the state government, and been governor of the neighbouring state of Jharkhand.

"As a tribal woman from remote Mayurbhanj district, I had not thought about becoming the candidate for the top post," she told reporters soon after her nomination this month.

Murmu's win was considered a certainty because of the strength of the ruling BJP and its allies in the parliament and state assemblies.

But the post is largely ceremonial and her election is not expected to make significant practical difference to the tribal community, which has long been relegated to the margins of society. "We've been on the road fighting for tribal rights since the 90s," activist Dayamani Barla told AFP.

Farnborough Slow Roasts Jet Deals In Scorching Heat



FARNBOROUGH (Dispatches) - Boeing unveiled orders for dozens of 737 MAX jets as Britain's Farnborough Airshow, back after a four-year pandemic-induced hiatus, braved the hottest day on UK record.

While the second day of one of the industry's biggest events saw a relatively modest flow of orders, the minds of most aviation bosses were focused on fixing broken supply chains - and ducking from one air-conditioned chalet to another.

Stabilizing fractured supply chains rather than adding to bulging order books is the main focus of this year's event, though Boeing is keen to shore up its 737 MAX program with deals following a safety crisis and regulatory issues.

Miami-based airline investor 777 Partners ordered 30 MAX in a deal that could rise to 66 planes if options are exercised.

That comes after a deal for 100 MAX 10 airliners from Delta Air Lines on Monday - a boost for a model whose future has been clouded by an elusive year-end deadline for certification in time to avoid costly rule changes.

"I think you can check the reboot box and now we're just into the normal Boeing versus Airbus continuing to compete hard for each customer," Boeing Commercial Airplanes CEO Stan Deal told reporters.

Lesser ACG ordered 12 737 MAX while Delta Air Lines placed an order for 12 A220 jets from Airbus. Regional planemakers Embraer and ATR also announced deals.

Still, the volumes seen so far pale in comparison with former events. Cancelled in 2020 due to COVID-19, the biennial event saw headline deals worth more than \$190 billion when last held in 2018.

"Despite record heat, no record-breaking orders," Jefferies analysts said in a note.

Boeing sold five 787-9 Dreamliners to AerCap (AER.N), taking the leasing giant's fleet of 787s owned or on order to 125.

Airbus confirmed an order for 56 narrowbody jets from easyJet on Wednesday.

Contesting with Paris' Le Bourget as the world's biggest airshow, usually crammed with dealmakers in golf buggies, Farnborough stood relatively quiet as executives mingled inside temporary chalets.

The show itself brought reminders of a problem-strewn recovery from COVID-19 with train disruptions and London airports facing ongoing delays, a day after the runway at Luton Airport, used chiefly for tourism, melted on Monday and added to delays.

The conditions underscored the challenges of meeting net zero emission targets after British Prime Minister Boris Johnson opened the event on Monday calling for renewed efforts to tackle a "carbon tea cosy" stifling the planet.

"There are things that are outside our control," easyJet CEO Johan Lundgren told reporters on Tuesday.

"We can't help it if runways are closed down because they're melting. We have help if air traffic control puts restrictions into the flow system," he said. "But the things that actually are within our control, that's been stabilized."

Farnborough marks the aviation's biggest meeting since the outbreak of COVID-19 pummeled air travel and fractured supply chains, with parts makers struggling to get back up to speed.

"We have an industry grappling with a downturn and (then) a bounce-back at a challenging time for the economy," the head of conglomerate General Electric, Larry Culp, said on Monday.

Rival engine maker Pratt & Whitney pledged to get engine deliveries to Airbus for its A320 series back on track by early 2023.

Human Food Waste Threat To Polar Bears



PARIS (Dispatches) - The invasion of a remote Russian village by dozens of ravenous polar bears three years ago captured headlines around the world, with images of groups of animals gorging on rubbish in an open garbage dump.

Scientists and conservationists warned Wednesday that it was just one of a growing number of incidents showing the threat food waste poses to the at-risk animals.

Polar bears are acutely threatened by climate change, with the Arctic region warming about three times faster than the global average, meaning there is less sea ice that the animals rely on to hunt for food.

"We've been seeing this slow and steady increase in negative human polar bear interactions, fuelled largely by loss of sea ice pushing more bears onshore for longer periods and in more places," said Geoff York, Senior Director of Conservation at Polar Bears International.

In the new analysis, researchers looked at how discarded food, particularly in garbage dumps, is drawing polar bears towards human communities and into danger.

"We know from the brown and black bear world in Europe and North America that dumps are a huge problem for bears. Human food is a huge problem for bears," said York, who co-authored the report in the conservation journal Oryx.

"It's likely to get worse if it's not addressed."

The report draws together a number of case studies in recent years and calls for greater awareness of the risks and better waste management in Arctic communities.

These include isolated incidents where one or two bears approached villages or encampments -- sometimes being shot after attacking local people -- and much larger congregations.

In Kaktovik, Alaska, the protected beach dumping site for the remnants of bowhead whales, which the Inupiat community has traditionally hunted, attracts as many as 90 polar bears from up to 160 kilometres (a hundred miles) each autumn.

The authors said the dramatic scenes in the Russian village of Belushya Guba in 2019, where more than 50 bears were drawn to an open dump on a bad ice year, were an extreme example of what can happen when sites are left unsecured.

Polar bears have evolved to eat a high fat diet, so that the weight they put on in the spring when they hunt ice seal pups will last them much of the rest of the year.

But with ice melting earlier in this crucial period, York said bears are now sometimes returning to shore without having put on enough weight and even those that do return well fed are staying on land for longer.

In this case an accessible rubbish dump can present a "bonanza of calories", he said, although dramatically less nourishing than their normal diet.

"What they don't know is they're also ingesting plastics, they're ingesting toxic materials that are also in the landfill," said York. He added that there was also a disease risk from garbage like cat food as well as proximity to humans and other animals at the dumps.

York said communities in the Arctic region were faced with steep costs for dealing with household waste, because the frozen and rocky ground offers limited options for landfill.

Dumping or low temperature burning are often used, but he said high temperature burning could be a better, if imperfect, approach.

Meanwhile some communities have formed patrols to chase bears from landfill sites before they get a taste for human food.



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South Africa Inflation Strikes 13-Year High on Eve of Rates Call

JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - South African inflation surged to a 13-year high in June, data showed on Wednesday, moving further away from the central bank's target the day before an interest rate announcement.

Headline consumer inflation quickened more than forecast to 7.4% year on year in June, versus analysts' predictions for 7.2% and a reading of 6.5% in May.

June headline inflation was the highest since May 2009, during the global financial crisis.

Statistics South Africa figures showed fuel and food prices, which have soared globally due to the war in Ukraine, continue to be the major drivers of price pressures.

Fuel prices were up 45.3% in June, the largest annual increase for fuel since the agency's consumer price index series began in 2009.



EU Tells Members to Cut Gas Usage Amid New Putin Warning

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union told member states to cut gas usage by 15% until March as an emergency step after President Vladimir Putin warned that Russian supplies sent via the biggest pipeline to Europe could be reduced further and might even stop.

Deliveries via Nord Stream 1 pipeline, which accounts for more than a third of Russian gas exports to the EU, are due to resume on Thursday after a 10-day halt for annual maintenance.

But supplies via that route had been reduced even before the maintenance outage in dispute over sanctioned parts, and may now be cut further, while flows via other routes, such as Ukraine, have also fallen since Russia invaded its neighbor in February.

The disruptions have hampered Europe's efforts to refill gas storage before winter, raising the risk of rationing and another hit to fragile economic growth if Moscow further restricts flows in retaliation for Western sanctions over the war in Ukraine.

The European Commission proposed a voluntary target for all EU states to cut gas use by 15% from August to March, compared with their average consumption in the same period in 2016-2021.

"Russia is blackmailing us. Russia is using energy as a weapon. And therefore, in any event, whether it's a partial, major cut-off of Russian gas or a total cut-off of Russian gas, Europe needs to be ready," EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said.

The Commission proposal would enable Brussels to make the target mandatory in a supply emergency, if the EU declared a substantial risk of severe gas shortages.

The move, which needs the backing of EU states, will be discussed on Friday so ministers can approve it on July 26.

"We believe that a full disruption is likely," one EU official said. "If we wait, it will be more expensive and it will mean us dancing to Russia's tune."

EU states are trying to ensure storage facilities are 80% full by Nov. 1, from about 65% now.

European politicians say Russia is using technical issues as a pretext to cut deliveries. The Kremlin says Russia is a reliable energy supplier and blames sanctions for reduced flows.

Two Russian sources familiar with export plans said flows via Nord Stream 1 were expected to restart on Thursday but below capacity of 160 million cubic metres (mcm) per day.

Kremlin-controlled Gazprom cut gas exports via the route to 40% capacity in June, blaming delays on the return of a turbine that Siemens Energy was servicing in Canada. That turbine, which was caught up in sanctions, was reported this week to be on its way back, although Gazprom said on Wednesday it had not received documentation to reinstall it and said the turbine's return and maintenance of other equipment was needed to keep the pipeline running safely.

Putin said there might be a further reduction in supplies or even a complete halt to flows via the pipeline that runs under the Baltic Sea to Germany, which relies heavily on Russian fuel.

He said equipment was being returned from Canada but said the quality of the returned gear and other parameters meant the pipeline might still lead to a complete shut down in the future.

UK Inflation Roars to New 40-Year High of 9.4% in June

LONDON (Dispatches) - Surging petrol and food prices last month pushed British inflation to its highest rate in 40 years, according to official figures that bolstered the chances of a rare half percentage-point Bank of England (BoE) interest rate hike next month.

The Office for National Statistics (ONS) said annual consumer price inflation rose in June to 9.4%, the highest since February 1982, up from May's 9.1%.

The latest increase means Britain had the highest rate of inflation seen in any Group of Seven (G-7) advanced economy since 1985, although many smaller European Union countries are currently seeing even faster growth in prices.

Wednesday's data bolstered bets that the BoE will opt for a 50-basis point rate hike next month, which would be the biggest since 1995. The European Central Bank (ECB) is considering such a move this week, sources told Reuters on Tuesday.

BoE Governor Andrew Bailey on Tuesday said that scale of increase in borrowing costs - unseen in Britain in a quarter of a century - was on the table but not "locked in."

The BoE has raised borrowing costs five times since December as it tries to stop the surge in inflation from becoming embedded in Britain's economy, and it is expected to increase them again on Aug. 4.

The ONS pointed to a 42% year-over-year rise in petrol prices and an almost 10% increase in food prices as the primary drivers of inflation last month.

The Resolution Foundation think-tank said inflation for this group had already passed into double digits.



The cost-of-living crunch has triggered a wave of industrial actions by trade unions and has been hotly debated among the remaining candidates in the race to replace Boris Johnson as prime minister.

"Soaring inflation means that momentum for a half-point interest rate rise in August is growing," Suren Thiru, economics director of accountancy trade body ICAEW, said.

"However, tightening monetary policy too aggressively increases the risk of recession and will do little to address the global factors driving this inflationary surge."

Investors now see an almost 100% chance of the BoE raising the Bank Rate to 1.75% from 1.25% next month. It said in June that it was ready to act "forcefully" if needed.

Ukraine Seeks Debt Payment Freeze as War Ravages Economy

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine will ask international bondholders to agree to a 2-year delay on its debt payments so it can focus its dwindling financial resources on repelling Russia, a government resolution published on Wednesday showed.

Facing an estimated 35-45% crash in GDP this year following Moscow's invasion in February, lawmakers have instructed the country's finance ministry to negotiate the deferral on its roughly \$20 billion of debt by August 15.

The delay, which many creditors say is likely to be accepted and was quickly backed by major western powers, would come just in time to put off around \$1.2 billion of debt payments due at the start of September.

The government's resolution posted on its website said, "all interest payment dates for the bonds" would be deferred under the plan.

In a bid to avoid what would be classed as a hard default, Kyiv plans to offer lenders, which include governments and many of the world's largest investment funds, additional interest payments once the freeze ends.

Ukraine has estimated a fiscal shortfall of \$5 billion - or 2.5% of pre-war GDP - a month, which economists calculate pushes its fiscal deficit to 25% of GDP, compared with just 3.5% before the conflict.

On top of that researchers from the Kyiv School of Economics estimate that it will already take over \$100 billion to rebuild Ukraine's bombed infrastructure, while the head of the EU's powerful financing arm, the European Investment Bank, has warned it could run into trillions.

"We, as official bilateral creditors of Ukraine, intend to provide a coordinated suspension of debt service," a group of governments including the United States, Canada, France, Germany, Japan and Britain said shortly after Ukraine made its proposal.

"We also strongly encourage all other official bilateral creditors to swiftly reach agreement" the group added.

Wednesday's move had marked something of a U-turn from Kyiv, which had repeatedly said in recent months that it planned to keep up debt payments despite the war.

Speculation that a debt freeze request could be imminent however was fanned last week after the country's state-run energy firm Naftogaz also requested one.

"A proper restructuring still needs to happen, said Viktor Szabo, a portfolio manager at abrdn which holds Ukraine's government bonds. "But it cannot be done before the situation normalizes on the ground, i.e. a sustained cease-fire at least."

Importers Paid \$32b in U.S. Tariffs on China Tech Imports



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Importers of technology products from China paid over \$32 billion worth of tariffs imposed by President Donald Trump between mid-2018 to the end of 2021, a new trade group report showed on Tuesday as the Biden administration continues to deliberate over whether to remove some duties.

The Consumer Technology Association said in the report that the tech industry has reduced its dependence on China in the wake of the tariffs, but this has been offset by increased imports from Vietnam, Taiwan, South Korea, Malaysia and other countries.

Roughly half of the \$32 billion in tariffs were paid on Chinese-produced computers and electronic products, CTA said. Total "Section 301" tariffs paid on Chinese goods through July 13 totaled \$145.43 billion, according to Customs and Border Protection data.

The report comes as the Biden administration is trying to determine whether to remove some of the tariffs as a way to provide American consumers relief from high inflation, which remained low during the first two years that the tariffs were imposed.

Ed Brzytwa, CTA's vice president of international trade, said in a statement that the tariffs were hurting U.S. businesses, not solving China trade challenges.

"With rising prices across all sectors of our economy, removing tariffs would mitigate rampant and harmful inflation and lower costs for Americans," he said.

CTA's review of import trends since the tariffs were first imposed in phases in mid-2018 show that imports of Chinese tech goods hit by Section 301 tariffs fell by 39% over the next three and a half years, while those not affected grew by 35%.

China's share of U.S. imports of tech products hit by the tariffs roughly halved to 17% in 2021 from 32% in 2017, CTA said. About half of the \$32 billion in tariffs were for computers and electronics products.

The group said there was no such shift tech products unaffected by tariffs, with China accounting for 84% of U.S. imports in these categories in both 2017 and 2021.

Russia Is China's Top Oil Supplier for 2nd Month

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Russia held its spot as China's top oil supplier for a second month in June as Chinese buyers cashed in on lower-priced supplies, slashing more costly shipments from Saudi Arabia, data showed.

Imports of Russian oil, including supplies pumped via the East Siberia Pacific Ocean pipeline and seaborne shipments from Russia's European and Far Eastern ports, totaled 7.29 million tons, up nearly 10% from a year ago, according to data from the Chinese General Administration of Customs.

Still, Russian supplies in June, equivalent to about 1.77 million barrels per day (bpd), were below May's record of close to 2 million bpd, a level analysts had expected to be maintained.

China imported 5.06 million tons from Saudi Arabia, or 1.23 million bpd, down from 1.84 million bpd in May and 30% below the level in June last year.

Year-to-date imports from Russia totaled 41.3 million tons (1.67 million bpd), up 4% on the year but still trailing behind Saudi Arabia, which supplied 43.3 million tons (1.75 million bpd), a volume 1% below year-ago level.

China's total crude oil imports sank in June to near a four-year low as rigid lockdowns to contain the spread of coronavirus reduced fuel demand. The rise in imports from Russia also displaced supplies from Angola and Brazil.

The Customs data showed China imported 260,000 tons of Iranian crude oil last month, its fourth shipment of Iran oil since last December, confirming an earlier Reuters report.

Despite U.S. sanctions on Iran, China has kept taking Iranian oil, usually passed off as supplies from other countries. These supplies, roughly 7% of China's total crude oil imports, are facing competition from the growing Russian flows.

India Central Bank Prepared to Spend \$100b More Defending Rupee

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's central bank is prepared to sell a sixth of its foreign exchange reserves to defend the rupee against a rapid depreciation after it plumed record lows in recent weeks, a senior source aware of the central bank's thinking told Reuters.

The rupee has lost over 7% of its value in 2022 and weakened past the psychological level of 80 per U.S. dollar on Tuesday, but the source said the fall would have been far bigger if the Reserve Bank of India (RBI) had not stepped in to stem the decline.

The RBI's currency reserves have fallen by more than \$60 billion from its peak of \$642.450 billion in early September, in part due to valuation changes, but largely on the back of dollar selling intervention.

Despite the drawdown, the RBI's reserves of \$580 billion remain the fifth largest in the world, giving the central bank confidence in its ability to prevent any sharp, jerky depreciation of the currency.

"They have shown that they will use reserves at will to prevent volatility in the rupee. They have the wherewithal and have demonstrated the willingness to use it," the source said.

"The RBI can afford to spend even \$100 billion more if required to defend the rupee," the source added. The source said the RBI, as per its stated stance, does not try to protect the rupee or hold it at a certain level but will act to avoid any runaway depreciation in the currency.

The RBI did not immediately respond to a query seeking comment.

The rupee's fall is in line with what is happening globally - a broad and persistent U.S. dollar rally driven by the Federal Reserve's aggressive monetary tightening and the resultant scramble by investors to dump riskier assets in favor of dollars.

India's trade and current account deficits too are looking set to widen further as the Russia-Ukraine conflict has led to a spike in commodity prices, in particular oil that forms a large chunk of India's import bill.

"No doubt a lot of the rupee decline is related to the U.S. dollar strength and higher oil prices, but the RBI has also been behind the curve despite inflation staying above the midpoint target for nearly three years now and growth momentum still strong," said Charu Chanana, a markets strategist at Saxo Capital Markets.

"India's macro fundamentals remain strong and that means this trend could reverse as the dollar peaks."

Foreign investors have sold nearly \$30 billion worth of shares so far in 2022 while the monthly trade deficit has averaged \$25 billion since January, suggesting a \$100 billion intervention kitty to directly offset the dollar demand would barely last four months.

Iran Volleyball Moves Up to 8th in World

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's national volleyball team has ranked eighth in the world, according to the latest rankings of The International Volleyball Federation (FIVB).

According to the latest ranking of the FIVB, the national Iranian volleyball team stood eighth with 278 points. Poland with 391 points and Brazil with 360 points have the first and second places.

France with 360, Russia with 352, and Italy with 350 points stood in the third to fifth in the world, according to the latest rankings of FIVB. Also, Argentina with 280 points and Japan with 273 points stood in the seventh and ninth places.



Oil Price Windfall Tests Persian Gulf's Fiscal Discipline

DUBAI (Reuters) - A petrodollar windfall is helping some Persian Gulf Arab states pay down debt and providing cash for others to diversify their oil-reliant economies, but it is also testing commitments to fiscal discipline as governments try to shield citizens from inflation.

Persian Gulf oil producers have promised more prudence this time as crude prices have spiked higher, seeking to learn the lessons of previous periods of plenty that rapidly turned into eras of belt tightening and deep deficits.

The six Persian Gulf Arab states - Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Bahrain and Oman - are on track for budget surpluses, some for the first time in a decade, with the help of buoyant oil prices and years of fiscal reforms.

Now, say analysts, they must hold this conservative line.

"The temptation to revert to pro-cyclical spending is real, especially as government contracting continues to drive economic activity in the largest economies, like Saudi," said Karen Young, senior fellow at Middle East Institute in Washington.

Some signs are encouraging. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait and Bahrain have cut spending in their current budgets, although the UAE, Qatar and Oman are spending more. Most budgets were drawn up before Russia invaded Ukraine, which helped send oil surging from below \$80 a barrel at the end of 2021 to above \$100 now.

Rocketing crude prices and other inflationary pressures have prompted central banks around the world to jack up interest rates, notably the U.S. Federal Reserve. With most Gulf Arab state currencies pegged to the dollar - except for Kuwait's, which is linked to a currency basket - they have largely followed suit.

But inflation at home, even if not as high as elsewhere, has encouraged some, such as Saudi Arabia and the UAE, to boost state spending on social welfare to help citizens.

"The expectation is that inflation is not going to go out of control, but the pressures are there," said Ravi Bhatia, director and lead analyst at S&P Global Ratings. "I don't think it's going to be a game changer on the fiscal front."

Annual inflation in the UAE, the only Persian Gulf state with no cap on vehicle fuel prices, rose to 3.3% in the first quarter, its highest since August 2018. Petrol prices have jumped by 60% since February.

Seeking to offset such price pressures on citizens, Kuwait, which faced a liquidity crunch in 2020, has approved a one-time grant for pensioners totalling almost 600 million dinars (\$1.95 billion). Oman has cut electricity tariffs for households.

But Persian Gulf states are increasingly aware that the world's long-term shift away from fossil fuels puts a limit on this oil bounty, adding impetus for them to spend more of their cash windfall on diversifying oil and gas-reliant economies.

Saudi Arabia, the UAE and Oman, for example, have all outlined plans to develop production of 'green' hydrogen, made by splitting water using renewable energy.

Persian Gulf sovereign wealth funds are also playing a part in broadening the role of private enterprise in economies that have long depended on state spending as the main driver.

Scott Livermore, chief economist at Oxford Economics, said spending on diversification from oil would remain high, but he added: "The area where ambitions may be scaled back is diversification of fiscal revenues and trimming back public sector employment."

Saudi Arabia, the world's top oil exporter which posted a \$15.3 billion first quarter budget surplus, has said it was "decoupling" state spending from oil price fluctuations.

That promise will be tested as soon as September with the 2023 pre-budget statement. The kingdom planned a 955 billion riyal (\$254 billion) budget this year, down from 990 billion riyals last year.

Some of the expected surplus, the kingdom's first in nine years, is expected to go to the Public Investment Fund (PIF), the sovereign fund that has said it plans to



invest 1 trillion riyals domestically by 2025.

"We will see more spending on large domestic development projects, especially those under PIF's purview, and I would expect more demands for transparency in those project budgets," Young said.

The UAE said in June it aimed to increase its spending by 1.23 billion dirhams (\$335 million) in 2022, or about 2% more than originally forecast for the year.

Oman has loosened its purse strings further, hiking state budget spending by 12% to 12.1 billion riyals (\$31.4 billion) in 2022 compared to 2021, and raised its budget for development projects by 22% to 1.1 billion riyals.

For Oman and Bahrain, both far less well-endowed with fossil fuels than their neighbors and the only "junk"-rated Gulf Arab states, the petrodollar boon may alleviate some debt pressure.

Monica Malik, chief economist at Abu Dhabi Commercial Bank, said this would help them out in the short term but added: "Their funding requirements will remain high for repayment of debt. Thus will remain an issue in the coming years."

Oman bought back more than \$700 million of its bonds in June, a move ratings agency S&P said "supports improving metrics". Meanwhile, the IMF said Bahrain's level of debt to gross domestic product fell to 129% in 2021 from 130% in 2020 and was expected to hit 116% in 2022.

S&P revised its outlook for Kuwait, which has not tapped the international debt markets for years, to stable from negative on a favorable oil price and production outlook, and it forecast a cumulative budget surplus of 18% of GDP over 2022-2023.

Unlike its Persian Gulf neighbors, gas is the main economic driver for Qatar, where its plans to expand liquefied natural gas (LNG) production may now help Europe as it tries to wean itself of Russian piped gas.

Kuwait, Qatar, Oman and Saudi Arabia have the largest energy sectors compared to GDP, in that order, and may see the largest fiscal deterioration if a global economic downturn weakens the world's demand for fuel.

But even if the world's economy proves more resilient, the global drive to shift away from fossil fuels remains a longer term concern. "The biggest risk is a persistent oil demand destruction," said Moody's analyst Alexander Perjessy.

Czechs Want F-35 Fighter Jets, CV-90 Fighting Vehicles



PRAGUE (Dispatches) - The Czech government agreed on Wednesday to open talks with the United States on supplies of the F-35 Lightning II fighter jets made by Lockheed Martin Corp to replace leased Gripen fighters from Sweden's Saab AB, Prime Minister Petr Fiala said.

The NATO member country will also lead talks to buy fighting vehicles from a Swedish subsidiary of BAE Systems after cancelling a tender for the supplies.

"This is another step to modernize the army and meet our alliance commitments," Fiala told a news conference shown live on television.

"These are important decisions at a time when the security of Europe and the Czech Republic faces new challenges caused by Russia's aggression in Ukraine."

Defense Minister Jana Cernochova said the country wanted 24 F-35s, and talks should be concluded by October next year.

The country now has 14 Swedish-made Gripen jets under a leasing agreement until 2027. Lockheed Martin said in June it could deliver the first F-35 fighter jets to Czech neighbor Germany in 2026, and expected more orders for the aircraft in Europe including possibly Greece and the Czech Republic.

The U.S. Department of Defense agreed with Lockheed Martin to build about 375 F-35 fighter jets over three years, the two parties said on Monday.

The Czech government also cancelled a long-dragging \$2.6 billion tender for around 210 tracked fighting vehicles which included BAE Systems, General Dynamics and Rheinmetall.

It will instead talk to the Swedish government on deliveries of the CV-90, Cernochova said, referring to armored vehicles made by a Swedish subsidiary of BAE Systems.

UN Records Hundreds of Killings and Rights Violations by Taliban

KABUL (AFP) - The Taliban have carried out hundreds of human rights violations in Afghanistan since seizing power last year, the United Nations said Wednesday, including extra judicial killings and torture.

"There's no denying that the findings of our report are extremely serious," Markus Potzel, acting head of the United Nations mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA), told a news conference in Kabul.

The Taliban have routinely denied accusation of rights abuses since overthrowing the previous Western-backed government, but a UNAMA report released Wednesday listed multiple accounts.

It documented 160 allegations of extra judicial killings, 56 incidents of torture and ill treatment and more than 170 arbitrary arrests and detentions against former government officials and national security force members since August. The most common methods of torture included kicking, punching and slapping, beatings with cables and pipes and use of electric shock devices.

It documented more than 200 instances of cruel, inhuman or degrading punishments -- including beating shopkeepers for not attending mosque -- and more than 100 cases of excessive use of force.

Since the end of the war, security has vastly improved across the country with a huge drop in civilian casualties. However, the Taliban -- notorious for their brutal reign of terror between 1996 and 2001 -- have sharply restricted the freedoms of Afghans, particularly women and girls.

Iran Calls for...

FROM PAGE 1

During the discussions of the issue in the Security Council, my delegation was actively engaged with Penholders of the resolution, the Syrian delegation, and Council members in order to bring this process to a successful conclusion.

We welcome the adoption of Resolution 2642 (2022) and consider it a crucial step toward addressing Syria's urgent needs. In this regard, we would like to highlight the following points;

1- While the resolution extends the cross-border mechanism for a period of six months, it also sets out explicit demands for early recovery projects and increased transparency in relief efforts. The resolution underlines the critical need to increase cross-line delivery throughout Syria. In this context, we call on all parties to carefully adhere to the basic principles governing humanitarian assistance, as well as to ensure neutrality and transparency.

2- We demand the lifting of unilateral sanctions against Syria, which impede the implementation of the Resolution. In this context, the implementation of early recovery projects such as electricity, which are critical to restoring access to basic services, must not be affected by unilateral sanctions. These illegal measures also stymie Syria's reconstruction efforts and

humanitarian relief delivery in a variety of ways, even delaying the return of refugees and displaced persons. In this connection, we call for the removal of sanctions in the context of the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic.

3- Resolution 2642 requests the Secretary-General to provide a special report on the humanitarian needs in Syria. The report should include overall trends related to unhindered and safe United Nations cross-line operations which should reach all parts of Syria, early recovery projects, and detailed information on the humanitarian assistance delivered through United Nations humanitarian cross-border operations, including their transparency, the distribution mechanism, the number of beneficiaries, operating partners, locations of aid deliveries at district-level and the volume and nature of items delivered;

4- And finally, the resolution encourages the convening of a Security Council Informal Interactive Dialogue in order to regularly review and follow up on the implementation of this resolution, including progress in early-recovery projects. We believe that through this mechanism, the Council will be able to monitor progress in the effective and balanced implementation of the resolution.

Iran Economic...

FROM PAGE 1

That comes as the SCI had used 2011, when one US dollar was around 12,500 rials, as the baseline year for GDP growth calculations, saying that Iran's GDP had increased to 7,569 trillion rials over the past calendar year.

The growth figures come despite the fact that Iran has been subject to a series of unprecedented sanctions by the United States since 2018.

Government figures and reports by international institutions show that it took almost two years for Iran to recover from the economic impacts of US sanctions on its oil exports as the country began to report positive economic growth rates in the second half of 2020.

Iran's exports of crude oil have rebounded from historic lows reported in 2019 with figures suggesting that crude sales to China and other countries have exceeded 1 million barrels per day on average since October last year.

Iranian Envoy...

FROM PAGE 1

She said that some member states have politicized the Syrian chemical weapons case and prevented the OPCW organization from confirming Syria's abidance by its obligations.

Ershadi also emphasized that Iran supports the OPCW and Syria's willingness to hold high-level talks and hopes this initiative will yield positive results.

The Iranian diplomat further welcomed Syria's presentation of the 14th monthly report to the OPCW on July 17, 2022, regarding the activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons and their production facilities in that country.

Iran Not to Sit Idly...

FROM PAGE 1

In a related development on Thursday, Gharibabadi censured the contradictory and double standards of certain European countries with regard to Nouri's illegal trial and ruling in Sweden.

"You cannot arrest and prosecute innocent Iranian citizens, be a safe haven for terrorist groups, seize Iran's money and make its transfer subject to the emancipation of criminals and convicts in Iran, and accuse Iran of hostage-taking!," Iran's Fars news agency quoted Gharibabadi as saying.

"Iran would not sit on its hands over Sweden's illegal action in the trial of Hamid Nouri and the issuing of life sentence for him as well as the country's clear support for terrorist groups," he added, noting "Iran has various options at its disposal."

The official wondered as to how Sweden could claim to be acting within the framework of bilateral relations and mutual respect, while it has turned into a base for hosting, supporting and leading various terrorist and separatist groups against Iran.

"Some European countries have also become a safe haven for fugitive criminals who have absconded with the property of the people and the government, and keep refusing to return them to Iran," Gharibabadi noted.

The Iranian official said it remains to be seen whether such European countries are ready to publish the real number of Iranians imprisoned in their respective countries and those of their citizens detained in Iran so that it can be clarified who the real hostage taker is.

Iran Eyes...

FROM PAGE 1

It said the commitments include a memorandum of understanding reached earlier this week between the NIOC and Russia's state petroleum company Gazprom for up to \$40 billion worth of investment in oil and gas projects.

Others include contracts signed in early July with a consortium of Iranian banks and energy companies to carry out development projects in oilfields shared with Iraq in southwestern Iran. The report also said that the NIOC had signed a \$500-million contract in March with a foreign company, whose name it said would remain confidential because of US sanctions, to develop the oil layer of the South Pars gas field in the Persian Gulf.

Belgian Parliament...

FROM PAGE 1

In June 2018, Belgian authorities said that the country's police had intercepted a car carrying homemade explosives and a detonation device, claiming that Assadi had handed the materials to two people in Belgium earlier.

Assadi, himself, was apprehended in Germany the next day and told he could not apply his diplomatic immunity.

Iran has repeatedly slammed the illegal arrest of Assadi and his dire detention condition, urging his immediate release. Citing Belgian media, Nour News, which is affiliated with Iran's Supreme National Security Council, highlighted speculation that the treaty, which has been much criticized by the US, could pave the way for the repatriation of two Belgian nationals serving jail terms in Iran.

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Stenson Stripped of Ryder Cup Captaincy

LONDON (AFP) - Henrik Stenson was stripped of the captaincy of the European Ryder Cup team with immediate effect "in light of decisions made by Henrik in relation to his personal circumstances".
The 46-year-old Swede is understood to be on the verge of signing up for the Saudi-funded breakaway LIV Golf series and, after discussions with Ryder Cup Europe officials, the decision was made to effectively sack him as captain.

Lee Targets Evian Repeat With Pressure off

EVIAN (Dispatches) - Minjee Lee begins the defence of her Evian Championship title as the sport's in-form player.
The Australian returns to France as this season's US Women's Open champion and having soared to number two in the world rankings behind Ko Jin-young of South Korea.
"There was a lot of pressure waiting for the first major after seven years on Tour," admitted the 26-year-old, who came from seven shots back in the final round to beat Lee Jeongeun in a play-off at the Evian last year.

Williams and Djokovic Included In U.S. Open Entry List

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Serena Williams was included on the entry list for the U.S. Open along with fellow former champion Novak Djokovic, who will not be able to compete due to his refusal to be vaccinated against COVID-19.

Williams, who returned to competition last month after a year-long absence, was added to the entry list for the Aug. 29-Sept. 11 Grand Slam in New York having been named in the draw for tune-up events in Toronto and Cincinnati.

The 23-times Grand Slam champion fell in the first round at Wimbledon and last appeared in the U.S. Open in 2020 when the six-time winner reached the semi-finals.

Eligible players are automatically entered into the main draw but that does little to help Djokovic, who retained his Wimbledon crown last month and is one back of Rafa Nadal's record of 22 Grand Slam titles.

Djokovic will not be able to participate in the year's final Grand Slam due to current rules under which travelers seeking to enter the United States have to be fully vaccinated and provide proof before boarding flights.

"The U.S. Open does not have a vaccination mandate in place for players, but it will respect the U.S. government's position regarding travel into the country for unvaccinated non-U.S. citizens," the United States Tennis Association (USTA) said in a news release.

Almost 12,000 people have signed an online petition calling for the USTA to work with the country's government to allow Djokovic to compete in the U.S. Open despite his refusal to take the COVID-19 vaccine.

Carlsen Will Not Defend World Title Next Year

LONDON (Dispatches) - Magnus Carlsen will not defend his world championship in 2023 against Russia's Ian Nepomniachtchi as he is not motivated to play another match, the Norwegian five-time champion said in a podcast.

If Carlsen does not defend his title, Nepomniachtchi is likely to face the runner up in the recent Candidates tournament, China's Ding Liren.

"I feel I don't have a lot to gain, I don't particularly like (the championship matches), and although I'm sure a match would be interesting for historical reasons and all of that, I don't have any inclination to play and I will simply not play the match," he said on the podcast for his sponsor Unibet.

Fury Would Come out of Retirement to Face Joshua

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - WBC heavyweight champion Tyson Fury said he would return to the ring to fight Anthony Joshua in their native England provided the bout was free to watch and attend.

Fury (32-0-1) in June said he was "over" boxing but has since changed his tune, saying he would sign the contract immediately to take on Joshua (26-2) provided his terms were met.

"The fight has got to be for free," Fury said in an Instagram post.

"Free to air on television and all tickets go for free. No money is to be made off of this British, historic fight if it happens," he said.

"There's the terms, I'm in the driving seat, take it or effing leave it." The Gypsy King knocked out fellow Briton Dillian Whyte in April to retain his title before telling fans he would be sticking to his promise to his wife to retire. In June he said he would fight again for £500 million.

Fury and Joshua appeared to be on a collision course last year until an arbitrator ruled Fury had to fight Deontay Wilder for a third time.

Joshua lost his WBA, WBO, IBF and IBO belts when he fell to Ukraine's Oleksandr Usyk in London in September, and the pair are set to meet for a rematch in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia on Aug. 20.



Meanwhile the Shanghai Masters and three other men's tournaments in China will not be held this year due to COVID-19 restrictions in the country, the ATP Tour said.

China hosted the Winter Olympics under strict health protocols in February but almost every other international sporting event in the country this year has been cancelled or postponed.

ATP Chairman Andrea Gaudenzi told Reuters last month that the prospects of the 2022 China swing were bleak.

"This marks the third year of cancellation for the ATP's China swing, typically hosted in September and October and last staged in 2019, prior to the pandemic," the men's governing body said in a statement.

As of July 20, mainland China had confirmed 228,180 cases of COVID-19 with symptoms since the pandemic first struck in December 2019.

Although the number is small by global standards, authorities in China are sticking to a stringent zero-COVID policy, while other countries have relaxed their rules and chosen to live with the virus.

The French Open and Wimbledon were recently held without any health restrictions and it was unlikely players would have agreed to go to China if there was any period of isolation involved.

The women's tour has no events scheduled in China for 2022 as the WTA works to find a resolution to the standoff with China over Peng Shuai.

Former doubles world number one Peng's wellbeing became a concern for the WTA after she posted a message on social media last November accusing China's former Vice-Premier Zhang Gaoli of sexual assault.

In addition to the Oct. 9-16 Shanghai Masters, China was scheduled to host the Chengdu Open and Zhuhai Championships, both starting on Sept. 26, and the China Open from Oct. 3-9 in Beijing.

To fill the hole in the calendar left by the cancellation of the China events, the men's body said it has granted single-year event licenses to six ATP 250 tournaments.

Harden To Stay With Sixers

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - NBA star James Harden has agreed to a two-year, \$68.6 million deal to remain with the Philadelphia 76ers, league sources told the Philadelphia Inquirer.

The newspaper was just one of the US media outlets reporting the deal, which comes less than a month after the 2018 NBA Most Valuable Player declined his US\$47.4 million player option for the coming season so the 76ers could bolster their roster.

Harden will reportedly make US\$33 million in the 2022-23 season in the deal that also includes a US\$35.6 million player option for 2023-24.

As Harden waited for his deal to emerge, the Sixers signed veteran forward P.J. Tucker and forward Daniel House.

Harden, a 10-time All-Star, landed at Philadelphia from Brooklyn at the trade deadline last season in a blockbuster deal that sent Ben Simmons to the Nets.

He averaged 21 points, 10.5 assists and 7.1 rebounds in 21 regular-season games with Philadelphia.

After the 76ers fell to the Miami Heat in the second round of the playoffs, Harden said he would do "whatever it takes to help this team continue to grow and put us up there with the best of them."



Roma Sign Former Juventus Forward Dybala

ROME (Dispatches) - Roma announced the signing of Paulo Dybala on a three-year contract after the Argentina forward's deal with Juventus expired.

"I arrive at a team that is growing, with a club that continues to lay an increasingly solid foundation for the future and a coach, Jose Mourinho, with whom it is a privilege to work," Dybala said in a statement.

The 28-year-old had been touted for a move to Serie A runners-up Inter Milan, which would have ensured Champions League football next season.

Roma finished sixth in Serie A last season. Sky reported that the contract was worth six million euros (\$6.08m) per season including bonuses.

Dybala spent a trophy-laden seven years in Turin, scoring 115 goals for Juve, but has been dogged by injuries over the last two seasons.

He joined Juve from Palermo in 2015, going on to win five Serie A titles and four Italian Cups.

He also played in the team which reached the 2017 Champions League final but lost to Real Madrid.

Lewandowski Hungry for Success At Barca Unveiling

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Robert Lewandowski was officially unveiled as a Barcelona player and insisted he still has the hunger to continue his incredible goalscoring exploits.

The Polish striker, signed from Bayern Munich for around 50 million euros, was formally introduced as a Barca player alongside club president Joan Laporta.

The unveiling came a day after the La Liga side started their four match tour of the United States with a 6-0 win over David Beckham's Inter Miami.

Lewandowski, 33, who left the German champions under a cloud after a dispute over a new contract as well as clashing with coach Julian Nagelsmann over tactical choices, cannot wait to get started.

Lewandowski joined Bayern in 2014, scoring 344 goals in 375 competitive matches and broke the Bundesliga's single-season scoring record.

But he could make his Barca debut in Las Vegas this weekend against arch-rivals Real Madrid and said: "We worked hard to get to this moment but we got there in the end."

"I am always hungry to succeed and have the winning mentality. This is a new challenge for me and I have already seen this is a squad with huge potential."

"There is a lot of quality and I want to do my best for the club. I am ready."

Lewandowski joins Barcelona in the midst of a financial crisis yet although the club have racked up debts of almost one billion euros, the striker becomes the club's fourth summer transfer after the signings of Ivory Coast midfielder Franck Kessie from AC Milan, Chelsea defender Andreas Christensen on a free transfer, and Brazil winger Raphinha.

"We are doing our best to restructure," said Laporta. "We did a lot of work to make this happen. "There is a big expectation for you (Lewandowski). You are a football star."



Messi Scores as PSG Labor Past Japan's Kawasaki

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi scored but Paris Saint-Germain were made to work hard for a 2-1 win over Kawasaki Frontale in the first match of their pre-season Japanese tour.

Star forwards Messi, Neymar and Kylian Mbappe all started in new PSG manager Christophe Galtier's first game in charge of his full squad in front of a crowd of 65,000 at Tokyo's National Stadium.

Messi opened the scoring with a 32nd-minute shot but a much-changed PSG line-up in the second half could manage only one more goal through substitute Arnaud Kalimuendo.

J-League champions Kawasaki pulled a goal back in the 84th minute when Kazuya Yamamura headed home unmarked to set up a nervy finish.

PSG will play two more J-League sides on their Japanese tour, taking on Urawa Reds in Saitama on Saturday and Gamba Osaka in Osaka the following Monday.

PSG had most of the early possession but the first real chance fell to Kawasaki.

A pass forward split the PSG defence and released striker Marcinho, only for the Brazilian to put the ball wide with the goal at his mercy.

Kawasaki goalkeeper Jung Song-ryong denied Mbappe a minute later after Messi had played him in on goal.

Kawasaki's Chanathip Songkrasin -- nicknamed the "Thai Messi" -- then cleared a shot from his Argentine namesake off the line to keep the game scoreless.

But Messi found a way through shortly after, guiding a shot into the corner from just inside the box. Neymar and Mbappe departed at half-time and Kawasaki forward Kei Chinen missed a glorious chance to equalize when he blazed over the bar in the 50th minute.

Messi bowed out soon after as Galtier, newly arrived from Nice, rung the changes.

