

A Spokesman of Iran's Foreign Ministry Described the Claims Leveled by Westerners About the Seizure of a Boat Smuggling Iranian Weapons Off the Coast of Oman as "False Accusations"

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Representative Is Going to Deliver a Speech on the First Day of The UN Commission on the Status of Women Meeting on Monday, Despite the Political Action of the West in Removing Iran's Membership in This Commission

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Officials Say Poisonings Part of Enemy's Hybrid War on Iran

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Pakistan Invited Iran to Discuss Additional 100MW Electricity Tariff

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan has reportedly invited Iranian Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian to discuss tariff of additional 100MW electricity, to be supplied to Gwadar, as Iran has sought revision in existing agreement for upward revision in tariff, well informed sources told Business Recorder.

Sharing the details, sources said, the matter of supply of 100MW additional electricity from Iran to Makran Division, Pakistan through 132 kV Polan-Gabd/Gwadar power transmission line is under discussion.

The project was suspended due to difficulties for quite some time and the two sides achieved success in June 2022 by agreeing to and signing amendments in the existing agreements to operationalise the first phase of project by construction of 29km transmission line till Jiwani which will help overcome electricity shortages in the area.

The sources said the project is ready for inauguration as the transmission line has been constructed on Pakistan side and installation of necessary equipment by Iran side on the border has also been completed. The two sides are negotiating for finalizing tariffs for additional electricity to be supplied. **See Page 7**

Any Military Attack on Nuclear Facilities Is Illegal



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) Rafael Grossi says any military attack on nuclear facilities is outlawed, responding to US and Israeli threats to target those in Iran.

Grossi made the remarks in Tehran Saturday, in a joint news conference with head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran Mohammad Eslami who urged the IAEA to help build trust.

The Biden administration has drawn closer to Israel in recent weeks, conducting large-scale joint military exercises with the regime.

"There are two separate issues in this regard. First, attacks on nuclear power plants have unfortunately become common, and this is due to the war in Ukraine. Second, these attacks have been condemned during the Agency's public conferences. So I think that the attack on nuclear facilities is totally condemned and illegal," Grossi said.

He is visiting Tehran after Western reports claimed that IAEA inspectors had found 84% enriched uranium in Iran - an allegation Tehran has rejected.

Eslami told reporters that the Islamic Republic is enriching uranium up to 60% fissile purity.

Grossi said he had "constructive discussions" with Iranian officials that could pave the way for the revival of a landmark 2015 agreement to bring the US back to compliance and remove sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

"By having a constructive discussion, like we are having now, and having good agreements, like I am sure we are going to have, we are going to be paving the way for important agreements," he said.

Eslami called for the remaining signatories of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), namely France, Britain, Germany along with China and Russia, to fulfill their obligations.

"Three European and some other countries are just focusing on Iran's JCPOA obligations," he said. "They too have obligations that they need to adhere to."

Eslami said, "We came to an arrangement (with Grossi) to define our cooperation within the framework of the safeguards."

He called on the UN nuclear agency to avoid being swayed by those who aim to hinder cooperation between the two sides.

"We must be able to resolve issues in a trustful manner and prevent the entry and penetration of the elements and agents whose purpose is to disrupt a normal and professional relationship," he added.

Grossi claimed that his "agency has never been used as a political tool and will never be used", reflecting on observations that the IAEA's reports on Iran are often based on feedback provided by the US, Israel and others.

"We did not work under the instructions of any country and we have a Board of Governors that reviews our performance. We do not act on the words of others and it is necessary to talk and cooperate with each other."

Eslami called on the IAEA to prepare for a sort of interaction, by which the agency "can always maintain its duties toward Iran's nuclear program within the framework of the Safeguards Agreement".

He touched on Iran's scientific research and nuclear technology capabilities, saying the country is ready to share its achievements with other countries.

Grossi said talks were ongoing with Iran on two sets of important matters including the science sector, and there was "great expectation" about the process. **See Page 7**

3 DOMESTIC

Direct Iran-Venezuela Shipping Route Officially Established

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Old Fox and the Same Old Story

For centuries the British colonialists have tried to dominate Iran through their influence on the rulers in Iran and they have been behind any plots against Iran through the history and for this reason Iranians do not trust on the British, known as the Old Fox, and they use to blame the British over any plot in the country because they are well aware that the British are red handed and in recent riots and protests in the country once again London played its role but this time in different way.

Since the beginning of the Islamic Revolution, Iranians have thwarted any plot engineered by the British and many of their spies have been fallen in the trap of the Iranian intelligence services and for this reason the British have turned to the media challenge with Iran and spreading different baseless accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to paint a negative picture of the Islamic Revolution and create a rift among Iranians on what the official source of Iran announces.

We know some anti-revolutionary media outlets are placed in the UK and they are actually supported by the London government and even many anti-revolutionary persons are also living in the UK.

In recent months London tried to paint a negative and dreadful picture of the Islamic Revolution of Iran during the riots that were massively covered by the London-based anti-Islamic Revolution media and since their efforts were in vain and London failed to reap from what it had planted, it has returned to the same old story of spreading false accusations against Iran.

The British navy on Thursday claimed about the seizure of a boat smuggling Iranian weapons, including anti-tank missiles, off the coast of the Gulf of Oman in a joint operation with U.S. forces and this claim was strongly rejected by Tehran.

"The countries that have caused the death of [the Yemeni] people and the destruction of Yemen by sending billions of dollars worth of weapons to the [Saudi-led] war coalition cannot exonerate themselves by accusing others," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

He said the main warmongering countries and the biggest exporters of weapons and equipment to critical zones in the world are "making false claims and spreading fake news" to mislead the global public opinion. **See Page 7**

Belgian Court Upholds Prisoner Exchange Deal With Iran

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Belgium's Constitutional Court turns down a request for the annulment of a treaty with Iran, which authorizes the exchange of prisoners between the countries.

"The Court rejects the action for annulment," the tribunal said in a press release on Friday.

In line with the deal, Iranians convicted in Belgium would be allowed to serve their sentences at home and vice versa.

The treaty could lead to the release of Assadollah Assadi, an Iranian diplomat, who has been illegally imprisoned in the European country. In February 2021, a Belgian court sentenced Assadi to 20 years in prison after accusing him of plotting an alleged attack against the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO).

An anti-Iran terrorist cult, the MKO is responsible for killing around 12,000 Iranians through acts of terror since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution.

Following the sentencing, Iran's Foreign Ministry strongly condemned the jail term as completely unlawful, in violation of Assadi's diplomatic immunity, and a result of Belgium's falling under the influence of the MKO.

"Unfortunately, Belgium and some [other] European countries have taken such illegal and unjustifiable actions [against Assadi] under the influence of the atmosphere that has been created by the hostile MKO terrorist group on Europe's soil," the ministry said at the time.

Belgium's parliament ratified the treaty back last July.

CEO of Sugarcane and By-Products Development Co. in an Interview Explains

Innovations List of «Sugarcane Development»



Sugarcane is the heart of Khuzestan agriculture and this is not a slogan but the very truth. Of the total of over 14 million tons of agricultural and horticultural products of the province, which has made this province one of the top agricultural producers in the country, more than 8 million tons of it is sugarcane. So with this volume of production, sugarcane should be considered as the heart of Khuzestan agriculture.

Innovations List of «Sugarcane Development»

Concurrently, sugarcane industry is the gateway to mechanization in agriculture, and sugarcane agro-industries have special technical knowledge due to the presence of expert and experienced forces at different levels in cultivation and industry, and they use new methods in these fields. Almost 100% of the sugarcane harvest in the seven units of the company is mechanized, and the path for joining of Haft Tappeh to this modern farming method has been paved. Innovation and creativity serve the productivity and environmental goals of this industry, and the fruit of these innovations is the design and construction of dozens of devices as well as the implementation of new methods at the level of sugarcane fields, some of which are mentioned below. According to the CEO of Sugarcane and By-Products Development Company, the link between knowledge and agriculture is a strategy in the sugarcane industry which in addition to attaining food security, has a special role in increasing productivity, job creation and economic growth in the region. Abd Ali Naseri listed the «link between knowledge and agriculture» as a distinctive

feature of this company, which leads to sustainable production and materialization of food security of the country.

An agro-toxin-free product

He considered knowledge-based agriculture as environment-oriented and emphasized that special attention to the environment is an integral part of sugarcane farming activities, and this industry has been able to produce a product free of toxins based on «biological» control in sugarcane fields. He mentioned the movement of the sugarcane industry towards the use of new agricultural technologies, which has led to an increase in production, various non-sugarcane products, and design and manufacture of agricultural machineries and parts in the year of «knowledge-based production and job-creation».

Production of agricultural parts under sanctions

Naseri stated that the will and creativity of sugarcane specialists under the sanctions pressures has been able to put this industry on the path of prosperity, and the production of parts and agricultural machinery is a small part of the achievements of sugarcane specialists, which has helped the country cut its need to import these products. One of these achievements is the construction of a «sugarcane harvester» which has a special role in harvesting sugarcane fields and its monopoly was in the hands of foreign countries, but now with the ingenuity of domestic sugarcane specialists, it has been localized with the aim of overcoming the conditions of cruel sanctions and, according to Dr. Naseri, the spirit of self-confidence and it has strengthened the will among the youth and has given objectivity to the slogan «We can». 80% of the parts of this harvester are made domestically and the foreign model of this machine is sold in the world market for \$340,000, but with the efforts made, this machine was made in the Sugarcane and By-Products Development Company, with less than 10% compared to the world market.

Achievements due to the efforts of sugarcane specialists

The sugarcane harvester is not the only achievement of the sugarcane industry in the construction of agricultural machinery as the

company continues to stand on the heights of success by manufacturing agricultural machines and parts, the fruit of which is the realization of the country's food security. «Combined Farrowers», «Cultivator» to fight weeds in sugarcane fields is another part of the achievements that has been attained by the efforts of sugarcane experts. Naseri noted reaching of sugarcane to such a position is the outcome of continuous move of this industry in the field of science and called Sugarcane and By-Products Development Company as a university for promoting the knowledge of agriculture.

He mentioned the «Hydroflume»

irrigation method of sugarcane fields as the most modern irrigation method in the world and emphasized that the use of this method has increased water efficiency in the sugarcane industry. In addition to the hydroflume irrigation method, drip and rain irrigation systems are also being implemented in this industry in the form of the pilot to be used on a large scale after passing the initial tests.

Efforts to increase the green harvesting level of sugarcane to 40%

Regarding the green harvest of sugarcane, Naseri said: "Increasing the green harvest in sugarcane fields is one of the goals of the Sugarcane and By-Products Development Co. in Khuzestan Province, and we will try to achieve this in the best possible way." He added: «Despite the old machineries and sanctions, we are trying to increase the green harvest to 40% by modernizing the equipment and machineries and increase the level of green sugarcane harvest in Khuzestan.» Naseri stated: "If the sugarcane are short, they can be easily harvested green, but if the reeds are too tall and lodging, it is not possible to harvest them green and they must be burned." Referring to the delivery of guidelines on burnt sugarcane harvesting with minimal negative effects on the environment to the subsidiary companies, he added: the subsidiaries of the company have been instructed to try direct burnt harvesting with the least negative impacts on the environment and stressed: "With renovating equipment and machineries we are trying to advance the burnt sugarcane harvesting to the green sugarcane harvesting."

Iranian Cheetah Cubs to Be Born in May, 2023

SHAHRUD (IRNA) - Managing Director of Semnan Environment Preservation Organization said that the only female cheetah of Turan National Park of Shahroud named Iran will give birth to her cubs in May, 2023.

On the sidelines of guiding a number of media reporter in Turan National Park, Bahram Ali Zaheri told IRNA reporter that cheetah Iran's successful mating with male cheetah Firouz was registered on January 25th." Pointing out that the panthers' pregnancy takes between 90 to 95 days, Zaheri said, "After that the natural conditions for baby cubs' birth will be completed in May when they will be born."

Cheetahs are the fastest animals on earth and are known by the pattern of their spots and lines on their faces and their skins.

Officials Say Poisonings Part of Enemy's Hybrid War on Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi and foreign minister say the mysterious poisoning of schoolgirls in several cities is in line with a hybrid war being waged on the country by the enemies.

The incident started in late November in the holy city of Qom where about 50 female students fell ill and had to be transported to hospital. Similar poisonings have since happened in several other schools in Qom, Tehran, and Kermanshah in the west and Ardabil in the northwest. Scores of schoolgirls have been affected in each incident, and some have had to be hospitalized.

President Raisi said the enemy, as part of a psychological war, is "seeking to create stress and anxiety among students and parents so that chaos is formed".

"One day, the enemies instigate street riots and another day they try to create problems in the field of education and schools because despite all the plots, people across the country came to the scene and defeated the enemy on February 11" where several million Iranians took to streets to mark the 44th anniversary of the Islamic Revolution, Raisi said.

The president said he had tasked his ministers of intelligence and interior to follow up the issue at the earliest and make their findings public.



Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian hit out at Western governments for "shedding crocodile tears" over the poisonings.

"The interventionist reaction of some Western authorities to the question of the suspected poisoning of dear Iranian female students is the continuation of the enemy's hybrid war," he wrote in a Twitter post.

"The relevant institutions of the country are following up seriously and meticulously examining its dimensions. The great nation of Iran knows crocodile tears very well!"

His remarks came after Germany said the circumstances surrounding the poisoning of schoolgirls in Iran should be fully investigated by authorities. "The reports of schoolgirls being poisoned in Iran are shocking," Foreign Minister Annalena Baerbock said on Twitter.

White House national security spokesperson John Kirby said the issue is "deeply concerning" and the world needs to know what is causing the ailments.

Iranian officials have already said foreign intelligence agencies, especially the CIA, orchestrated the violent riots which hit Iran for several weeks.

Iran Slams Germany's Hypocritical Stance on Poisoning of Schoolgirls

TEHRAN (IFP) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said that Germany's stance on the mysterious poisoning of schoolgirls in several cities across the country is "hypocritical and meddlesome."

In a tweet, Kanaani reacted to the German foreign minister's tweet that had alleged violation of girls' rights in Iran and called for addressing the issue.

"One of the bitter facts that still needs clarification is the chemical poisonings through German-made toxic gases during the Saddam-imposed war [on Iran] which still takes lives," he wrote, referring to the use of German-made chemical weapons against Iranian people during the eight-year war. "Your expression of concern on this case is hypocritical and meddlesome," the diplomat added.



Kanaani also stated that the Iranian government is very serious about "identifying and uprooting this ill will," adding that Tehran will not allow others to foment insecurity for Iranian girl students with "political motivations."

In an earlier statement on Friday, the spokesperson noted that the "hasty" and "bizarre" remarks of some foreign officials on the issue were a continuation of their "meddlesome political stances" about Iran in recent months.

Diplomat Slams UK Envoy's Remark On Poisoned Iranian Students

LONDON (IRNA) - After British ambassador's expressed sympathy with some Iranian victims of suspicious poisoned gas attacks, caretaker of Iran's Embassy in Britain blamed that country for hiding the number of killed British soldiers in Ukraine war.

Issuing a message in his Twitter account, Mehdi Hosseini wrote, "According to reports, a large number of British soldiers were dispatched to the warfronts of the Ukraine war, which started last year, and got killed there."

Referring to the statistics issued by the Russian and the British sources about the issue, he added, "Those statistics have still not been confirmed by concerned British officials though."

"I assume that the British people have the right to know about such statistics related to their killed compatriots in Ukraine," added the caretaker of the IRI Embassy.

The suspicious poisoning of Iranian girl students in high schools of different cities has led to interfering remarks of some western countries.

The British ambassador wrote in his Thursday tweet, "As a father, I sympathize with the entire Iranian fathers and mothers who are worried for their children at schools due to serial poisoning of the Iran girls' high schools, which seems to be endless."

Intelligence Ministry Announces Arrest of Afghan National for Spying

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's intelligence ministry has announced the arrest of an Afghan national in northern Mazandaran province on charges of spying and fraud.

In a statement, the ministry said the person, who has not been identified, was holding "fake" identity cards.

The foreign national was engaged in "illegal" works related to Afghan refugees living in Iran, the statement noted, adding that he has been residing in Mazandaran for the past 39 years.

The ministry further said the Afghan national collaborated with foreign "spying services", and faces "spying, fraud, and bribery" charges.

He had gained access to classified documents by bribing some employees in government organizations in Iran, according to the statement, and introduced himself as a representative of Afghan citizens in northern Iran and a representative of the United Nations.

The person was also involved in "transferring court cases" in a pickup truck under the garb of grocery activities, the ministry said, without providing details.

The arrest comes less than two months after Iranian security forces dismantled a Daesh-affiliated group that included Afghan and Tajik nationals who had plans to foment insecurity in Iran.

Iran's GTC Bought Russian Wheat in Tender

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian state agency the Government Trading Corporation (GTC) is believed to have purchased Russian-origin milling wheat in a tender which closed on Wednesday, European traders said on Thursday.

The volume involved was unclear but some traders said a large purchase of several hundred thousand tons was suspected.

A tender for a nominal 60,000 tons from the GTC had sought shipment in April and May.

"The market was surprised at the tender as there is talk about large numbers of ships still waiting to unload grain in Iran because of payment delays," one trader said.

Dozens of merchant ships with grains and sugar were stuck in December outside Iranian ports after weeks of delays as payment snags disrupted the flow of goods into the country, according to trade sources and shipping data.

Food is exempt from the West's sanctions on Iran over its nuclear programme, but the sanctions have affected the country's financial system, creating complex and erratic payment arrangements with international companies.

"Russian wheat is the cheapest in the international market currently," another trader said. "It is logical that Russia would supply. There is belief that the purchase this week was large but details are still lacking."

IME Posts 14% Rise In Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 3,535,773 tons of commodities with a total trading value of nearly \$960m, posting growths of 79.4% and 14.8% in volume and value of trades compared with the week before that.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,823,384 tons of commodities worth more than \$606m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,304,018 tons of cement, 1,045,000 tons of iron ore, 378,506 tons of steel, 165,000 tons of zinc, 86,500 tons of sponge iron, 9,650 tons of aluminum, 4,000 tons of copper, 1,500 tons of cast iron, 310 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 12 kg of gold bars.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 506,212 tons of commodities valued at more than \$333m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 172,778 tons of bitumen, 107,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 106,247 tons of polymeric products, 41,056 tons of lube cut, 42,880 tons of chemicals, 15,300 tons of sulfur, 4,161 tons of base oil, 2,570 tons of petroleum products, 530 tons of insulation and 140 tons of feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 206,177 tons of commodities on its side market.

Iran, Russia Ink MoU to Develop Cooperation in Tourism

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran Tourism Development Corporation and the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce signed a memorandum of cooperation to develop tourism between the two countries.

The cooperation and participation of the two sides in the development of tourism infrastructure for Iran's Tourism Development Corporation's investment in residential, recreational, services projects, etc. are among the main items of the MoU.

Holding seminars, webinars, summits, and joint exhibitions in tourism and employing professors for tourism education with the support of Iran Tourism Development Corporation and the Joint Chamber of Commerce of Iran and Russia, and introducing the potential of the country to Eurasia, are some of the other items of cooperation.

Iran, Oman Ink MOU on Oil, Gas, Petrochem, Petro-Refining Cooperation



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Oman signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) in Tehran on cooperation in the development of oil and gas fields, investment making in petrochemical and petro-refining sectors, and the export of oil products and petrochemicals, Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji announced.

Oji made the remarks addressing the press on the sidelines of his meeting with Omani Minister of Energy and Minerals Salim al-Aufi at the place of Oil Ministry.

"Signing this MOU between the national oil companies of the two countries today was in continuation of the previous negotiations between the two sides", the minister said.

Recalling that several stages of negotiations have been conducted with the Omani side over one and half past years, the official said: "Today, they signed a memorandum of cooperation in the continuation of the negotiations in the upstream and downstream sectors of the oil industry."

"With the finalization of the negotiations between the two countries, we will see an increase in the export of petrochemical products and oil products to this country, considering the existing capacity in the country", Owji noted and said that as the negotiations become more serious, more details of oil and gas cooperation with Oman will be informed.

In the 13th government, there is special attention to all-round development with the neighbors of the country, especially Oman, the minister underlined and added that in the new period, efforts are being made to increase these cooperations, especially in the field of oil and gas.

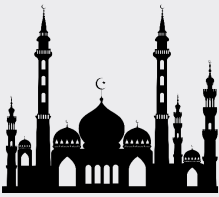
Owji had intensive meetings with the ministers of foreign affairs and energy of Oman during his trip to Muscat on May 20, 2022.

On that trip, the minister announced reaching an agreement with Oman on forming a technical committee for the development of Hengam oil field which the two countries share in the Persian Gulf.

"We agreed to form a joint technical committee to develop the next phases of Hengam oil field, which is the only joint field between the two countries, in the form of a joint working group and a joint team," Owji explained.

The Iranian oil minister stated that integrated development of the field, which is unprecedented in the region, unlike competitive exploitation, will save the joint field's reservoir from getting damaged, and the production from the reservoir will take place safely, ensuring that the two countries will benefit most from the field development.

The official noted that the two sides have also agreed on exports of technical and engineering services from Iran to Oman.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)

■ Evening (Maghreb)

■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

■ Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:15

18:20

05:04

06:27

57. O mankind! there hath come to you a direction from your Lord and a healing for the (diseases) in your hearts,- and for those who believe, a guidance and a Mercy.

58. Say: "In the bounty of Allah. And in His Mercy,- in that let them rejoice":

that is better than the (wealth) they hoard.

Surah 10. Jonah (57 - 58)

Direct Iran-Venezuela Shipping Route Officially Established

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's embassy in Caracas says a direct shipping route between the Islamic Republic and Venezuela has been established to enhance trade ties amid U.S. sanctions targeting both nations.

In a statement on Friday, the embassy said the route seeks to support traders in both countries.

Appreciating the efforts of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL), the mission said a cargo ship will leave Iran for Venezuela every three months.

The IRISL said last week that the third ship carrying Iranian goods will head to Venezuela in May.

Iran and Venezuela have improved relations in various fields in recent years.

Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro made an official visit to Iran in June 2022, inking a 20-year partnership agreement aimed at improving bilateral cooperation in various fields such as technology, agriculture, oil and gas, petrochemicals, tourism as well as culture.

On June 12, 2022, Iranian Ambassador to Venezuela Hojatollah Soltani described the direct shipping lane as a "lost chain" in ties between the two states. The diplomat said it could lead to a "major transformation" in bilateral relations.

He said the economies of Iran and Venezuela are complementary as Venezuela is in need of home appliances, petrochemical products, raw materials, medicine, and medical equipment, all of which are being produced in Iran, adding that Venezuela has a great capacity in agriculture.

The growing cooperation was also highlighted in the ninth meeting of the Iran-Venezuela Joint Economic Committee which was held in Tehran on November 15, 2022. Co-chaired by Venezuelan Transport Minister Ramon Blazquez and Iranian Defense Minister Mohammadreza Gharaei Ashtiani, the three-day event explored new avenues for mutual cooperation.

At the end of the meeting, the two sides inked a comprehensive cooperation document covering a variety of areas including industry, mining, energy, petrochemical, trade, agriculture, science, and technology.

Industrial Investment, the Priority In Over 260 Underprivileged Towns

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade and Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization of Iran (IDRO) says the organization in its regional balance project intends to direct new industrial investment towards over 260 towns where they have faced the lowest investment.

Speaking on a TV program, Mr. Ali Nabavi said that during the 13th government, one of the programs of the industry ministry is to balance investment and renovation hat IDRO has a great task regarding it. He added that many industrial investments have been done in the country in the past decades but they have not been balanced, for example, the country faces lack of balance in the production chain of a product like steel, and the volume of investment in rolling sector has been too much while the investment in the lower links like production of ingot and sheet has been insufficient.

Nabavi further said that one of the goals of the regional balance project is to correct the defects in the field of investments in the production chains. He added that in some regions, investment has been more than need as they have faced shortage of labor forces and at the same time in some areas, the investment has been very little in a way that it has led to the rise in unemployment.


He noted that migration because of lack of investment balance has created social and political problems, adding that they should invest in areas to prevent the wave of migration and to this end, the organization has raised some incentives for investment in the target towns.

He added that out of 465 towns of the country, 107 are in the zone number 1 and 156 in the zone number 2 of investments. It means industrial investment in those towns have been zero or very little.

He reiterated there will be no more incentives for investment in the zones 3 and 4 because those zones have almost been saturated of investment but those projects which are underway will be completed.

Nabavi then touched upon developing Phase 14 of South Pars by domestic experts and said that development of this phase has happened by a consortium comprised of 8 domestic companied led by the IDRO without involvement of any foreign company.

Baghdad Seeks To Buy More Gas From Iran



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iraq's Minister of Electricity, Ali Fadel, has stated that his country is currently in the process of finalizing a contract to purchase gas from Iran in the summer season.

In a recent interview with Iraqi News Agency, Fadel emphasized that Iraq needs 35,000 megawatts to ensure 24-hour electricity supply during the summer season. Currently, Iraq's electricity production is at 15,600 megawatts, and citizens have access to 18 hours of electricity per day.

Fadel also stated that the situation regarding electricity supply this coming summer will be different from previous years. The Iraqi Ministry of Electricity is ready to sign an agreement with Iran to purchase the required amount of gas for the summer season, which will add 7,000 megawatts of electricity to Iraq's supply.

However, the shortage of fuel is preventing an increase of 5,000 megawatts, although facilities are ready for the production of this amount of electricity.

The Minister also mentioned that Iraq's contracts with Siemens and General Electric will enter the implementation phase from March of this year. As a result, Siemens will produce 1,400 megawatts at the Beiji power plant and 600 megawatts at the Dhi Qar power plant in the first phase, while General Electric will also produce 3,000 megawatts of electricity.

Fadel added that the two companies are obligated to conduct the necessary studies to collect associated gas. With the contracts between Iraq and Siemens and General Electric entering the implementation phase, Iraq's electricity supply is set to receive a significant boost. In addition, the purchase of gas from Iran will further increase Iraq's electricity supply and help the country meet its energy needs during the summer season.

Iran to Add to Knowledge Enterprises

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A senior economic official says that the Iranian Foreign Ministry has adopted a special chapter for knowledge-based enterprises in the area of public diplomacy.

Mehdi Safari, the deputy foreign minister for economic diplomacy, made the remarks in his interview with IRNA.

During the interview, Safari referred to innovation houses as places for fostering export markets for the KBEs.

Iranian Foreign Ministry, with the help of the Vice-Presidency for Science, Technology and Knowledge-based Economy, makes efforts to establish and develop innovation houses in order to provide the ground for the domestic innovation products to have an active presence in the export markets, the official announced.

Further, Safari underlined the importance of getting much more familiarized with the international markets.

All economic Iranian envoys in foreign countries are tasked to cooperate with the knowledge-based companies and support them in the target countries, Safari noted.

He went on to say that the innovation houses in the target countries would act as centers for dispatching Iranian products to the neighboring states.

"Our endeavor is to cooperate with the knowledge-based enterprises and support them beyond the borders," the official stressed.

Elsewhere, he referred to the recently-held meeting with the participation of D-8 countries in Pardis Technology Park in northeast Tehran and said such meetings will help exchange of technology.

The Developing Eight D-8 members include Iran, Turkey, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Indonesia, Malaysia, Egypt, and Nigeria.

Reportedly, Iranian innovations houses as centers for development of exports of the KBEs products have already been launched in China, Syria, Russia, Turkey, and Kenya.

Exports From Mining Sector Surpassed \$11b

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran exported 34.791 million tons of minerals and mining products worth \$11.089 billion in the first 11 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-February 29, 2023), IRNA reported.

The exports of the mentioned products during the said 11 months registered a four percent rise in terms of weight and a decline of five percent in terms of value as compared to the figures for the same period last year.

Steel and steel products were the top exported commodities in this sector, followed by copper and its byproducts, aluminum and related items, as well as other downstream products.

The Islamic Republic also imported 4.051 million tons of minerals and mining products worth \$4.474 billion during the said 11 months.

The exports from mining sector were 35.5 million tons worth \$9.963 billion in the first 10 months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2021-January 20, 2023).

Having 81 different types of minerals, Iran is one of the top 10 mineral-rich countries across the globe. In this regard, the Iranian government has been seriously pursuing several programs for promoting the mining sector as a major contributor to the country's economic growth.

Iran's proven iron ore reserves are 2.7 billion tons, while the country's copper reserves are 2.6 billion tons. The country also has 11 million tons of zinc reserves.

The total proven reserves of Iran's mines are estimated at about 60 billion tons, which is expected to reach more than 100 billion tons with the implementation of the Industry, Mining, and Trade Ministry's exploration programs over 500,000 square kilometers of new mineral zones.

Despite the country's huge potential in this area, due to some issues like the lack of necessary machinery and equipment and the lack of access to financial resources and foreign investment because of the U.S. sanctions, the Iranian mining sector has been struggling to operate at its maximum capacity over the past few years.

Iran's Trade Center to Be Inaugurated in Afghanistan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The supervisor of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) for the Indian Subcontinent, Mohammad Sadegh Ghannadzadeh, announced the inauguration of the country's trade center in Afghanistan.

A 70-member Iranian trade delegation, composed of the public and private sectors, was scheduled to travel to Afghanistan's capital of Kabul on Saturday, March 4, for the inauguration of the country's trade center.

Afghanistan is one of Iran's strategic trade partners which have longstanding historical and cultural relations and also religious and social commonalities with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Ghannadzadeh said.

Iran's lack of an active trade center in Afghanistan has been one of the major problems in its interaction with the Republic of Afghanistan, especially after the recent developments in the neighboring country, he continued.

Today, more than 70 Iranian traders and economic activists will travel to Kabul within the framework of a trade delegation for the inauguration of a trade center, he said, adding that the trade center will be launched in an 11-story trade tower which has all necessary facilities for trade and economic activities.

Presently, 30 to 40 trade firms have carried out their registration operations for deploying in this center, he stated, noting that there are representatives in this center that can carry out marketing and research activities for the traders as well.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ghannadzadeh said that a working group has been set up for issuing licenses and evaluating trader centers on a monthly basis.

Broumand Selected CEO of Iran's House of Cinema

IRAN (IP) - The Board of Directors of Iran House of Cinema chose Marzieh Broumand, a distinguished filmmaker of Iranian cinema, as the CEO of the country House of Cinema.

Marzieh Sadat Boroumand Yazdi known as Marzieh Boroumand (born June 8, 1951, in Tehran) is a director and actress. She has a bachelor's degree in performing arts from the Faculty of Fine Arts, University of Tehran.

The text sent by the body states: " Broumand is one of the most important and

influential Iranian women with more than 40 years of experience in Iranian theater, television, and cinema."

The Board of Directors of the Iranian Cinema House, on behalf of Iranian cinematographers, expressed its satisfaction with the acceptance of this proposal by Mrs. Marzieh Broumand and hopes that the choice will provide an opportunity to improve the situation of the society of Iranian cinematographers.

Belarus Jails Nobel Winner Bialiatski for 10 Years

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Belarus handed a 10-year jail term to Nobel Prize winning activist Ales Bialiatski, drawing immediate condemnation internationally.

Bialiatski, who founded the authoritarian nation’s most prominent right group, has repeatedly run into trouble with security forces in Belarus, which is often described as “Europe’s last dictatorship”. He was in the dock with two allies after they were jailed in the aftermath of historic demonstrations against the disputed re-election of Belarus strongman President Alexander Lukashenko in 2020. The 60-year-old and his associates had been convicted of smuggling and financing “activities that grossly violate public order”, said the Viasna (Spring) rights group founded by Bialiatski.



Germany Asks Switzerland to Sell Mothballed Leopard 2 Tanks

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Germany has asked Switzerland to sell it some of its mothballed Leopard 2 tanks, the Swiss and German governments said, in a deal that could allow Western countries to increase military aid to Ukraine.

Germany wants Switzerland to sell some of the tanks back to arms maker Rheinmetall (RHMG.DE), which would allow the company to backfill gaps in the armaments of European Union and NATO members. Germany, Poland, Portugal, Finland and Sweden are among countries sending Leopard tanks to help Ukraine defend itself against Russian attack, creating gaps in their own arsenals.



Russia Says Bakhmut Practically Surrounded



CHASIV YAR (Dispatches) - Russian troops and mercenaries rained artillery on the last access routes to the besieged Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, bringing Moscow closer to its first major victory in half a year after the bloodiest fighting of the war.

The head of Russia’s Wagner private army said the city, which has been blasted to ruins, was now almost completely surrounded, with only one road still open for Ukraine’s troops.

Reuters observed intense Russian shelling of routes leading west out of Bakhmut, an apparent attempt to block Ukrainian forces’ access in and out of the city. A bridge in the adjacent town of Khromove was damaged by Russian tank shelling.

Ukrainian soldiers were working to repair damaged roads and more troops were heading towards the frontline in a sign that Ukraine was not yet ready to give up the city. To the west, Ukrainians were digging new trenches for defensive positions.

Victory in Bakhmut, with a pre-war population of about 70,000, would give Russia the first major prize of a costly winter offensive, after it called up hundreds of thousands of reservists last year. It says it would be a stepping stone to capturing the surrounding Donbas region, an important war aim.

Ukraine says the city has little intrinsic strategic value but that the huge losses there could determine the course of the war. It recaptured swathes of territory in the second half of 2022 but its forces have now been on the defensive for three months.

“Units of the private military company Wagner have practically surrounded Bakhmut,” Wagner boss Yevgeny Prigozhin said, appearing in combat uniform in a video that Reuters determined was filmed on a rooftop in a village 7 km (4.3 miles) north of the centre of Bakhmut.

“Only one route (out) is left,” he said. “The pincers are closing.”

He called on Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskii to order a retreat from Bakhmut to save his soldiers’ lives. The camera panned to show three captured Ukrainians - a grey-bearded older man and two boys - asking to be allowed to go home.

The commander of a Ukrainian drone unit active in Bakhmut, Robert Brovdi who goes by the name “Madyar”, said in a video posted on social media that his unit had been ordered by the military to withdraw immediately. He said he had been fighting there for 110 days.

Reuters was last able to reach the streets of Bakhmut on Monday, finding a few civilians and stray dogs wandering around while buildings were ablaze and the sound of explosions and gunfire was unceasing.

Both sides say they have inflicted devastating losses in Bakhmut. Kyiv has said its forces are still holding out there, while acknowledging that the situation has deteriorated this week.

Volodymyr Nazarenko, a deputy commander in the National Guard of Ukraine, told Ukrainian NV Radio the situation was “critical”, with fighting going on “round the clock”.

“They take no account of their losses in trying to take the city by assault. The task of our forces in Bakhmut is to inflict as many losses on the enemy as possible. Every metre of Ukrainian land costs hundreds of lives to the enemy,” he said.

“We need as much ammunition as possible. There are many more Russians here than we have ammunition to destroy them.”

Turkey’s Opposition Alliance Splits Over Election Candidate

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey’s right-wing IYI Party withdrew from the main opposition alliance, rejecting its proposal to make the biggest opposition party leader their election candidate and potentially weakening the challenge to President Tayyip Erdogan.

The public split, after months of simmering discord, came after Erdogan said this week the elections would be held on May 14, despite criticism of his government’s response to last month’s devastating earthquakes.

Speaking at party headquarters in Ankara, IYI Party leader Meral Aksener said the other five parties in the alliance had put forward Kemal Kilicdaroglu, leader of the Republican People’s Party (CHP), as their presidential candidate. She said her party, the second biggest in the alliance, would not “bow down” to pressure to accept him. Instead she proposed as candidates the Istanbul and Ankara mayors, both from the CHP, saying opinion polls showed they would win by a large margin against Erdogan.

“As of yesterday, the ‘Table of Six’ (opposition parties) has lost the ability to reflect the will of the people in its decisions,” she said, signaling her party’s exit from the alliance.

“It is no longer a platform through which potential candidates can be discussed but a table that works to rubber-stamp a single candidate,” she said.

Aksener said the nation was calling on the Istanbul Mayor Ekrem Imamoglu and Ankara Mayor Mansur Yavas to do “their duty” suggesting they step up as candidates. Speaking after Aksener’s announcement, Kilicdaroglu downplayed the disagreement over the presidential candidate.

“Don’t worry, all stones will fall into place,” he said, according to broadcaster Haberturk and other media. The “Table of Six” met on Thursday for more than five hours to agree a candidate and issued a statement, signed by all the leaders including Aksener, saying, “We have reached a common understanding concerning our joint presidential candidate.”

It had said the leaders would gather again on Monday to announce their final decision. But following that meeting, Aksener went to her party’s headquarters in Ankara and held a meeting with IYI leaders until around the early hours of the morning.

She made her announcement after a further meeting of party officials on Friday.



U.S., S.Korea to Hold Big Exercises

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United States and South Korea will conduct more than 10 days of large-scale military exercises in March, including amphibious landings, officials from the two countries said.

The “Freedom Shield” drills will be held from March 13 to March 23 to strengthen the allies’ combined defensive posture, the two militaries said in a statement released at a briefing in Seoul.

“Freedom Shield is designed to strengthen defence and response capabilities of the Alliance by focusing within the exercise scenario on things such as the changing security environment, DPRK aggression and lessons learned from recent wars and conflicts,” the allies said, referring to North Korea by the initials of its official name.

On Friday, the two militaries conducted a combined air drill with at least one American B-1B long-range bomber and South Korean F-15K and KF-16 fighter aircraft, South Korea’s ministry of defence said in a statement.

The aim was to practice coordination as well as demonstrate American “extended deterrence” against North Korean threats, the ministry said.

Such exercises have in the past drawn sharp reactions from North Korea, including missile tests and nuclear threats.

North Korea says such joint military exercises are proof that the United States and its allies are hostile and bent on regime change in the North.

When asked about the North’s reaction, Colonel Isaac Taylor, a spokesman for U.S. Forces Korea (USFK), said the drills were routine and purely defensive.

South Korean officials have noted North Korea is also conducting annual winter drills. Freedom Shield will feature field exercises on a scale not seen since about 2017, before former U.S. President Donald Trump scaled back public drills to facilitate diplomacy with North Korea.

Talks with North Korea later stalled and COVID-19 restrictions kept drills small in recent years.

Argentina to Renew Push for Sovereignty Over Falkland Islands

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina has called on the United Kingdom to launch new talks over the sovereignty of the Falkland Islands, a disputed archipelago in the South Atlantic.

The Argentinian foreign ministry announced the government’s plans to revisit its claim over the islands, known as the Islas Malvinas in Spanish.

Foreign minister Santiago Cafiero has “formulated a proposal to restart negotiations for sovereignty over the Falklands Question”, the ministry said in a statement following a meeting with UK officials.

The decision effectively ends the 2016 Foradori-Duncan pact, a non-binding statement to agree to disagree on the sovereignty of the islands, in favour of improving relations on trade and security.

Argentina’s announcement was met with strong criticism in the UK, which also claims authority over the Falkland Islands. The two sides had been engaged in talks in New Delhi, India, this week at the Group of 20 (G20) summit, which concluded on Thursday.

After meeting with Cafiero, UK foreign secretary James Cleverly took to Twitter to blast Argentina’s plan to revisit talks over the Falkland Islands.

“The Falkland Islands are British,” he wrote on Thursday. “Islanders have the right to decide their own future — they have chosen to remain a self-governing UK Overseas Territory.”

His views were echoed by David Rutley, the UK’s

minister for the Americas and the Caribbean, who called the announcement “a disappointing decision” after his recent visit to Buenos Aires.

“Argentina has chosen to step away from an agreement that has brought comfort to the families of those who died in the 1982 conflict,” he wrote on Twitter. “Argentina, the UK and the Falklands all benefited from this agreement.”

The Foradori-Duncan pact included an agreement to identify the remains of unknown Argentinian soldiers who died during the 1982 Falkland War.

That conflict saw long-simmering tensions between the UK and Argentina come to a head, as the South American country launched a military invasion to assert its control over the cluster of islands.

The UK sent its navy to respond. The conflict, which lasted 10 weeks, resulted in the deaths of 649 Argentinian military members, 255 British soldiers and three civilian women.

The archipelago, which sits about 600 kilometres (373 miles) off the coast of Argentina, is home to an estimated 3,200 people from 60 countries, according to its government. Currently, the UK identifies the islands as a self-governing overseas territory.

In 2013, a referendum was held on the island to gauge whether residents wished to retain their status as a British territory. An estimated 99.8 percent of participants voted yes.



Cambodia Opposition Leader Kem Sokha Sentenced to 27 Years

PHNOM PENH (Dispatches) - Cambodian opposition leader Kem Sokha has been sentenced to 27 years under house arrest after being found guilty of treason following a three-year trial in which a judge deemed that his election campaigning and civil society work were designed to encourage a “colour revolution”.

The judge at the Phnom Penh Municipal Court told the former president of the Cambodia National Rescue Party (CNRP) that he would be banned from politics and voting in elections indefinitely. Nor would he be allowed to meet anyone outside his family while under house arrest.

Kem Sokha was arrested in September 2017 without a warrant in a midnight raid on his home and taken to a provincial jail. Denied bail several times before eventually being released under house arrest, the prominent politician was charged with “conspiracy with a foreign power” under article 443 of Cambodia’s criminal code.

In his decision on Friday, presiding Judge Koy Sao said the court found Kem Sokha guilty of secretly colluding with foreigners to instigate a “colour revolution” in Cambodia under the pretext of campaigning for democratic elections.

The judge said that Kem Sokha was taking ideas from other countries and had used a non-governmental organisation he had founded – the highly-respected Cambodian Center for Human Rights – to further his plans.

“The accused activity is an illegal act that affected the peace, national security, stability and the happiness of the people,” the judge said.

Kem Sokha did not react as his sentence was announced, and he did not take questions from reporters after the verdict, instead he gave a slight smile and raised a fist as he was escorted out of the court’s side door by security guards.

Outside the courtroom, defence lawyer Ang Udom told reporters the verdict was unjust and the case was politicized.

“We all already knew that this is a political case and only the politicians can decide [it],” Ang Udom said, adding he and other lawyers would meet with Kem Sokha later to discuss an appeal.

Condemnation of the verdict was swift.

“The international community should not fall for such a charade. ASEAN and the global community at large should condemn in the strongest terms the travesty of justice inflicted on Kem Sokha, as well as on dozens of other opposition figures...”



Chips Industry Goes All-in on AI

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - It's been a wild few years for the microchip industry, recovering from a long-term supply squeeze only to be thrust into the center of a US-China battle to control supply lines of the valuable technology.

But an industry long associated with volatility is quietly getting excited that artificial intelligence (AI) could be the key to some longer-term stability.

US firm Nvidia dominates the market in specialised chips known as GPUs, which happen to be ideal for training AI programmes like the wildly popular chatbot ChatGPT.

"Technology trends are working in Nvidia's direction," the firm's vice president Ronnie Vasishtha told AFP this week at the Mobile World Congress (MWC) in Barcelona.

This has helped make Nvidia the biggest company in the sector -- and one of the biggest firms of any kind in the United States -- with a valuation of \$580 billion.

Traditional rivals like Intel and Qualcomm are now on maneuvers, desperate to make sure they do not miss out.

The tiny components, also known as semiconductors, are essential in everything from smartphones, PCs and electric cars to sophisticated weaponry, robotics and all other high-tech machinery.

AI already features heavily in all of these fields, and the advent of chatbots is only pushing it further into the public imagination.

Even in a sector where low-key engineers do the talking, the enthusiasm is palpable.

"The most exciting thing right now is AI," Cristiano Amon, boss of rival firm Qualcomm, told a Wall Street Journal event at the MWC.

He wants the world's phones to be toolled up with chips able to handle even the most tricky AI-related tasks, largely because Qualcomm leads the field in phone chips.

Vasishtha is equally enthused.

"Where and how does AI get used? It's probably going to be easier to answer where it is not getting used," he said.

Another chip firm, the British-based Arm, is even further back in the production chain than Nvidia -- it provides the designs used by chip suppliers.

The firm's Chris Bergey told AFP there was massive potential with AI.

The kind of chips Nvidia produces are great for training AI models in data centres, he said, but smartphones need chips that can act based on those models.

"It's a huge opportunity and it's ubiquitous," he said.

He compares the AI revolution to the onset of apps, which appeared about 15 years ago and rapidly changed the way we used technology.

"Definitely AI is something that has a lot of interesting applications and we're still scratching the surface of where we'll go."

Yet, with chips, nothing is straightforward.

The supply chain is fiendishly complex -- consulting firm Accenture reckons a chip crosses borders 70 times before it ends up in a phone, camera or car.

Countries like China and the United States would prefer to have greater control.

And there is an added problem: the factories that make most of the world's chips are in Taiwan, a self-ruled island that China claims.

This could bring China and the United States into direct conflict.



Scientists Discover Hidden Corridor in Great Pyramid of Giza

CAIRO (Dispatches) - A hidden corridor nine metres (30 feet) long has been discovered close to the main entrance of the 4,500-year-old Great Pyramid of Giza, and this could lead to further findings, Egyptian antiquities officials said.

The discovery within the pyramid, the last of the Seven Wonders of the Ancient World still standing, was made under the Scan Pyramids project that since 2015 has been using non-invasive technology including infrared thermography, 3D simulations and endoscopes to peer inside the structure.

The Great Pyramid was constructed as a monumental tomb around 2560 BC during the reign of the Pharaoh Khufu, or Cheops. Built to a height of 146 metres (479 feet), it was the tallest structure made by humans until the Eiffel Tower in Paris in 1889.

The unfinished corridor was likely created to redistribute the pyramid's weight around either the main entrance, almost seven metres away, or on another as yet undiscovered chamber or space, said Mostafa Waziri, head of Egypt's Supreme Council of Antiquities.

"We're going to continue our scanning so we will see what we can do ... to figure out what we can find out beneath it, or just by the end of this corridor," he told reporters after a press conference in front of the pyramid.

Five rooms atop the king's burial chamber in another part of the pyramid are also thought to have been built to redistribute the weight of the massive structure. It was possible the pharaoh had more than one burial chamber, Waziri added.

Scientists confirmed the presence of the corridor using radar and ultrasound, before retrieving images of it by feeding a 6mm-thick endoscope from Japan through a tiny joint in the pyramid's stones.

In 2017, Scan Pyramids researchers announced the discovery of a void at least 30 metres long inside the Great Pyramid, the first major inner structure found since the 19th century.



Toilet Paper Adding to Forever Chemicals in Wastewater

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Toilet paper is an unexpected source of potentially harmful "forever chemicals" in wastewater across the globe and could be leaching into soils via sewage, a new study said.

"Forever chemicals", or PFAS, are found in cosmetics, non-stick cookware and waterproof clothing. They have been linked to several types of cancers, cardiovascular disease, fertility problems and developmental disorders in children.

The synthetic chemicals are present in soil and waterways across the globe, and a new study yesterday found that toilet paper "should be considered as a potentially major source" of PFAS in wastewater treatment systems.

The researchers said reducing PFAS in wastewater is "critical", since the chemicals are potentially harmful. "Wastewater effluent and sludge are commonly reused for irrigation and/or land application; research has already shown that these two pathways pose a risk for human and environmental exposure to PFAS," said the study in the Environmental Science and Technology Letters journal.

Some manufacturers add PFAS when converting wood into pulp, traces of which may contaminate the final toilet paper product.

Recycled toilet paper may also be made with fibres that come from materials containing PFAS, said the study.



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Proton Records 52% Sales Growth in February

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Proton sold 14,033 units of vehicles in February 2023, comprising domestic and export, up 52 per cent compared with the same month last year. Sales volume was 20.1 per cent higher than January 2023 while for the first two months of the year, year-to-date (YTD) volume swelled by 88 per cent to 25,714 units, it said in a statement today. Proton deputy chief executive officer Roslan Abdullah said the car maker is hopeful of continuing its sales growth trajectory for the rest of the year. "Over the next few months, Proton will also be making several announcements to shape the company's direction for 2023 and beyond.



Turkey's Inflation Dips to a Year-Low of Nearly 55.2% in Feb.

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey's inflation eased slightly more than expected in February, official data revealed on Friday, following massive earthquakes that jolted its southeastern region just under a month ago.

Yet, prices continue to rise on a monthly basis, driven by higher prices of food and services.

The annual consumer price index (CPI) dropped to 55.18% in February, as per the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat), driven mainly by the so-called base effect, marking a fourth straight month of slowdown and the lowest level in a year.

The reading, compared to 57.7% in January and 64.3% in December, marks a notable regress from the peak of 85.5% – a 24-year high – registered last October.

Surveys expected the annual February reading to come in at around 55.5%.

Month-over-month, inflation rose by 3.15%, as per data, after a 6.65% surge in January, mainly due to higher food prices and price hikes in education and services.

Although it marked the second-highest February reading since 2000, it came in lower than market expectations for a 3.4% increase on a monthly basis.

The biggest monthly rise in prices was in the food and nonalcoholic drinks sector, which was up 7.36%, while prices of education and restaurant and hotel items climbed 5.69% and 4.07%, respectively.

"Overall, annual inflation maintained a downtrend in February as widely expected, and is likely to decline further until May mainly due to strong base effects, though currency stability will remain key for the outlook," the Dutch banking giant ING said in a blog.

The Turkish lira traded at 18.8920 after the data, unchanged from its close on Thursday. The currency has been mostly flat since the summer.

The government is preparing to ramp up spending to rebuild huge swathes of the southeast after the 7.7 and 7.6 magnitude earthquakes on Feb. 6 left more than 200,000 buildings either completely collapsed or damaged to the point where they require immediate demolition.

The disaster killed more than 45,000 people and left more than 2 million people homeless.

The spending for post-quake recovery could lift consumer spending and industrial production, two key indicators of economic growth, which could also increase inflationary pressures.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan pledged a swift campaign and has said the devastated regions would be rebuilt within a year. The state statistical institute said "field prices" could not be collected last month in the quake-hit provinces. Instead, they were compiled with "workplace barcode scanner data" and "price data compiled from the Internet via web scraping techniques."

The domestic producer price index was up 1.56% month-over-month in February for an annual rise of 76.61%, the data revealed.

It marked the lowest reading since November 2021, implying that there are still high, but improving, cost-push pressures in comparison to previous months, ING said.

Economists and government officials expect the earthquakes to cost more than \$50 billion (TL 945.14 billion) and shave one to two percentage points off the country's economic growth this year.

Ukraine Sees No Need to Curb 2023/24 Wheat Exports

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine doesn't plan to limit wheat exports for the upcoming 2023/24 July-June season, as the winter harvest looks to be larger than expected, albeit smaller than in peacetime, a top agriculture ministry official said.

Ukraine was the world's fifth-largest wheat exporter before the war with Russia, and its shipments were especially important to poor countries in Africa and the Middle East. Based on results collected by the Ministry of Agrarian Policy and Food as well as satellite images, farmers planted more wheat in southern areas than the ministry had forecast in autumn, first deputy farm minister Taras Vysotskiy told Reuters.

"The (supply) balance is positive and so far there are no reasons for it," he said of government-imposed limits to wheat exports that would preserve more wheat for domestic consumption.

Some Ukrainian agriculture groups have suggested that the government may introduce limits on wheat exports, fearing a shortage of milling wheat at home after a smaller, poor-quality harvest.

The ministry now estimates that farmers planted 4.1 million hectares of winter wheat nationally, up from its estimate in October of 3.7 to 3.8 million hectares, Vysotskiy said, adding that the ministry planned to formally release the new forecast on Monday.

The planted area is still sharply lower than before the war when farmers seeded 6.2 million hectares.

The size of Ukraine's wheat crop depends largely on the rainfall it will receive in spring, before farmers harvest it, Vysotskiy said.

Britain's Fresh Produce Shortages Serve Up Blame Game

LONDON (Dispatches) - Shortages of fruit and vegetables – from broccoli, cucumbers and lettuce, to tomatoes, peppers and raspberries — have served up a blame game in Britain.

Are sparse shop shelves due to Brexit, bad weather in Spain, supermarket price wars, soaring energy bills on Ukraine war fallout, or the U.K. government?

Faced with low stock, an increasing number of retailers are rationing, with some allowing only three purchases per customer for certain items.

The weekly shop for millions of Britons has also been blighted for months by a lack of eggs because of bird flu.

The government insists bad weather hit harvests in southern Europe and northern Africa, while authorities and supermarket chains warn that shortages of fresh produce will continue for weeks.

London dismisses claims that Brexit is to blame, insisting it can gain control of agricultural policy after its departure from the European Union at the start of 2021.

Spain's Agriculture Minister Luis Planas also told the Financial Times that Brexit was not the cause of shortages while conceding that rising costs had forced some smaller producers to curb exports.

Mark Spencer, Britain's junior minister with responsibility for food, has urged supermarket bosses to explain what they are doing to replenish shelves.

Environment Minister Therese Coffey called on Britons to eat more local seasonal produce such as turnips rather than imported foodstuffs in short supply.

That triggered a row over the suggestion that Britons – already facing a cost-of-living crisis sparked by rampant inflation – embrace turnips, generally considered a boring root vegetable.

Experts meanwhile believe the problem runs deeper than merely bad growing conditions in key fruit and vegetable producers Spain and Morocco.

"No one is really admitting that our current food system is completely broken," chef Thomasina Miers told BBC television.

"The way we farm is incredibly oil intensive and it contributes to 30% of global greenhouse gas emissions," she added.

"So, the way we farm not only contributes to (global) warming but also it's degrading our soils."

Miers called on producers to use modern technology to help improve both output and biodiversity.

Europe's Inflation Eases Slightly But Consumer Pain Persists

LONDON (Dispatches) - Inflation eased only slightly in the 20 countries that use the euro currency as the pain from higher costs for food and fuel persists and gives the European Central Bank no reason to slow interest rate increases aimed at getting prices back under control.

The consumer price index reached 8.5% in February compared with a year earlier, a drop from 8.6% in January, the European Union's statistics agency Eurostat said Thursday. The figure was higher than analysts' expectations of 8.3%.

Inflation is down from its peak of 10.6% in October but its persistence has surprised economists, with figures from Germany, France and Spain coming in higher than expected this week.

Prices for food, alcohol and tobacco rose 15%, up from an already painful 14.1% in January, outpacing even energy costs amid Russia's war in Ukraine. Energy prices grew 13.7% from a year ago but were lower than the 18.9% boost in January.

Higher prices for natural gas, used to heat homes, run industrial processes and generate electricity, have been a key factor pushing inflation higher across the economy. Russia cut off most supplies to Europe last year as it pressured governments over their support for Ukraine.

While natural gas prices have fallen as a mild winter reduces demand for heating, it will take months for that drop to work its way through to lower bills for consumers. Meanwhile, higher prices have led to workers demanding higher pay in wage negotiations, often through strikes and protests that have swept Europe.

More alarming than the headline figure was core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices and can give a better sense of whether inflation is being baked into the economy over the longer term. That figure rose to 5.6% from 5.3%.

"February's increase in core inflation will reinforce ECB policymakers' conviction that significant rate increases are needed," Jack Allen-Reynolds, deputy chief eurozone economist at Capital Economics, wrote in an email.

European Central Bank President Christine Lagarde already has indicated the bank will raise interest rates by another large half-percentage point at its March 16 meeting. The bank is trying to bring down inflation to its target of 2% considered best for the economy.

Higher central bank interest rates make car loans, mortgages and credit card borrowing more expensive, a move to cool off spending and demand for goods.

The U.S. Federal Reserve and other central banks around the world are taking the same actions to combat inflation as demand roared back from the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion crunched food and energy supplies.

In the U.S., inflation slowed in January for the seventh straight month to an annual 6.4%, but a sharp increase in the monthly figure indicated inflation remains stubborn. That raises the possibility of more rate hikes that can make the possibility of recession more likely.

Japan Q4 GDP Likely Revised Up But Weakness Persists



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's economy likely grew a tad faster than initially estimated in the fourth quarter, a Reuters poll showed, though the recovery remains fragile as weak capital expenditure weighs on hopes for a sustained revival in demand.

Revised gross domestic product data out on March 9 will probably show the world's No. 3 economy grew 0.8 per cent annualized in October-December, versus an initial estimate of 0.6 per cent, as capital expenditure likely fell a little less than first reported, the Reuters poll of 19 economists showed.

The expansion would translate into a 0.2 per cent gain on the quarter, unchanged from the initial estimate.

Separate data will also likely show a slight decline in household spending and elevated wholesale inflation, suggesting the wave of price hikes from food to energy could weigh on private consumption.

The data next week follows other indicators that showed a big drop in factory output at the start of this year, highlighting the double whammy of a global slowdown and weak domestic demand.

Separate government data out on March 10 is expected to show household spending fell 0.1 per cent year-on-year in January. On the month, spending likely grew 1.4 per cent.

Bank of Japan data also out on March 10 will likely show corporate goods prices index grew 8.4 per cent in the year to February. It probably fell 0.3 per cent month-on-month.

Government data out on Tuesday showed factory output shrank the most in eight months in January as falling global demand hit major export sectors such as auto and chip equipment.

China to Unveil Lowest Growth Goal in Years

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China will likely set one of the country's lowest growth goals in decades at the annual National People's Congress next week, experts told AFP, hit by long-running property woes, a sluggish global economy and geopolitical tensions.

Thousands of party delegates from across China will converge on Beijing for a rubber stamp conclave set to confirm key personnel appointments and make policy for the coming year.

Among the first declarations is expected to be a target for gross domestic product growth over the coming 12 months, announced by outgoing Premier Li Keqiang at Sunday's opening ceremony.

Last year, the economy expanded just three per cent, one of its weakest in decades on the back of the Covid-19 pandemic, lockdowns and a real estate crisis.

And economists surveyed by AFP predicted goals for 2023 will be conservative, expecting policymakers to aim for 5.3 per cent, one of the lowest targets in decades.

China's housing market, which along with construction accounts for more than a quarter of GDP, remains in a slump, having been dealt a hefty blow since Beijing started cracking down on excessive borrowing and rampant speculation in 2020.

Real estate sales have since fallen in multiple cities and several developers are struggling to survive, while many homebuyers last year refused to pay mortgages on incomplete properties.

"Sales, commencements and prices are all lower," Moody's economist Harry Murphy Cruise said.

"Property developer defaults in late 2021 left more than a million pre-sold homes unfinished, spooking households, and prompting many to turn their back on the market."

An ailing international outlook was also likely to drag on growth, with economists warning of a slump in the world economy as countries battle soaring costs and central banks simultaneously hike interest rates to cool demand.

"We see empty containers piling high at Chinese ports," Gene Ma, head of China research at the Institute of International Finance, told AFP.

"Export demand is rapidly disappearing due to weaker global growth and supply-chain migration." Meanwhile, commentators warned that geopolitical tensions posed a threat to China's economic prospects — particularly if Beijing chooses to further involve itself in Russia's war in Ukraine.



Sports Minister Sajadi Released From Hospital

TEHRAN (MNA) - Sports Minister Hamid Sajadi, who sustained a brain injury on Feb. 23 in a helicopter crash, was released from hospital on Saturday.

The helicopter crashed as it was landing at a sports complex in the city of Baft, in the southern province of Kerman.

Esmail Ahmadi, a senior adviser to the sports minister and a

ministry director general, was killed in the incident, the head of emergency services in Kerman confirmed.

The Red Crescent Society in Kerman said at least 16 people were on board the helicopter when it crashed from a height of around 10 to 15 meters.

Sajadi is a former long-distance runner who represented Iran in the 1992 and 1996 Summer Olympics.



China Leads U.S. in Global Competition For Key Emerging Technology

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - China has a “stunning lead” in 37 out of 44 critical and emerging technologies as Western democracies lose a global competition for research output, a security think tank said after tracking defence, space, energy and biotechnology.

The Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) said its study showed that, in some fields, all of the world’s top 10 research institutions are based in China.

The study, funded by the United States State Department, found the United States was often second-ranked, although it led global research in high-performance computing, quantum computing, small satellites and vaccines.

“Western democracies are losing the global technological competition, including the race for scientific and research breakthroughs,” the report said, urging greater research investment by governments.

China had established a “stunning lead in high-impact research” under government programs.

The report called for democratic nations to collaborate more often to create secure supply chains and “rapidly pursue a strategic critical technology step-up”.

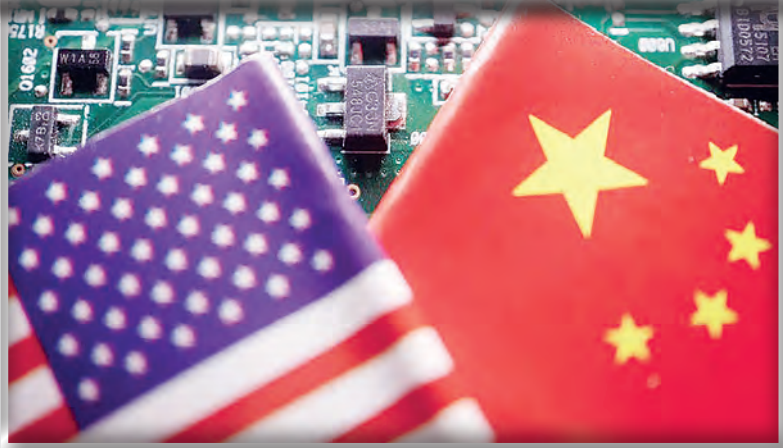
ASPI tracked the most-cited scientific papers, which it said are the most likely to result in patents. China’s surprise breakthrough in hypersonic missiles in 2021 would have been identified earlier if China’s strong research had been detected, it said.

“Over the past five years, China generated 48.49% of the world’s high-impact research papers into advanced aircraft engines, including hypersonics, and it hosts seven of the world’s top 10 research institutions,” it said.

In the fields of photonic sensors and quantum communication, China’s research strength could result in it “going dark” to the surveillance of western intelligence, including the “Five Eyes” of Britain, United States, Australia, Canada and New Zealand, it said.

National talent flows of researchers were also tracked and monopoly risks were identified.

China was likely to emerge with a monopoly in 10 fields including synthetic biology, where it produces one-third of all research, as well as electric batteries, 5G,



and nano manufacturing.

The Chinese Academy of Sciences, a government research body, ranked first or second in most of the 44 technologies tracked, which spanned defence, space, robotics, energy, the environment, biotechnology, artificial intelligence (AI), advanced materials and quantum technology.

China was bolstering its research with knowledge gained overseas, and the data showed one-fifth of the top Chinese researchers were trained in a Five Eyes country, it said.

The study recommended visa screening programs to limit illegal technology transfers and instead favour international collaboration with security allies.

Australia’s universities have said they are complying with foreign influence laws designed to stop the illegal transfer of technology to China, but also noted international collaboration is an integral part of university research.

Japan Can Achieve 90% Clean Power Share by 2035

TOKYO (Dispatches) - A decline in the cost of solar, wind and battery storage means Japan can get 90% of its power from clean electricity by 2035, a study by the Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, backed by the U.S. energy department, showed.

The study also finds Japan’s power grid, with extra battery storage and inter-regional transmission lines, can remain reliable without coal generation or new gas-fired power plants.

The Group of Seven countries, including Japan, committed last year to largely decarbonise their power sectors by 2035 to tackle climate change, but Tokyo has yet to map out a clear path for the goal.

Resource-poor Japan faces a significant energy security risk as it imports nearly all of the fuel used in its power sector. Clean electricity - which includes generation from solar, wind, hydropower, biomass, hydrogen and nuclear sources - accounts for 24% of the total.

The study finds raising the share to 90% would cut electricity costs by 6% and power sector emissions by 92% from 2020 levels.

But it also said clear policies, such as setting medium-term targets beyond 2030 and corresponding renewable deployment goals, were required to take advantage of the economic, environmental, and energy security benefits.

The study is based on modelling using the latest cost data on renewables and batteries, and is consistent with Japan’s 2030 policy goals and the G7 commitment.

Japan aims to cut greenhouse gas emissions by 46% by 2030 versus 2013 levels by boosting renewable energy in its electricity mix to 36%-38%, double 2019’s levels, and nuclear power to 20%-22% from 2019’s 6%. The world’s fifth-biggest emitter also aims to achieve carbon neutrality by 2050.

Under the scenario with the least-cost combination of generation, storage and transmission, renewable power, including floating offshore wind, totals 70% of the electricity mix by 2035, with nuclear and gas-fired power accounting for 20% and 10%, respectively, while existing coal power plants are phased out, the study said.

SpaceX Dragon Crew Enter International Space Station

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Four astronauts entered the International Space Station after their SpaceX Dragon Crew-6 mission successfully docked, a NASA livestream showed.

The SpaceX Dragon Endeavour spacecraft arrived at the orbiting station at 0640 GMT on Friday, the US space agency said in a statement.

NASA’s Stephen Bowen and Warren Hoburg, Russia’s Andrey Fedyaev and Sultan al-Neyadi of the United Arab Emirates entered the station about two hours later, the livestream showed.

A SpaceX Falcon 9 rocket carrying the spacecraft had blasted off to the station on Thursday after the launch was scrubbed just minutes before liftoff earlier in the week.

The crew will spend six months on the station, where they will conduct more than 200 science experiments and technology demonstrations, according to SpaceX.

The mission was the first space flight for Neyadi, Hoburg and Fedyaev.

Neyadi, 41, is the fourth astronaut from an Arab country and the second from the oil-rich UAE to journey to space.

Fedyaev is the second Russian cosmonaut to fly to the ISS aboard a SpaceX rocket. NASA astronauts fly regularly to the station on Russian Soyuz craft.

Space has remained a rare venue of cooperation between Moscow and Washington since the Russian offensive in Ukraine placed them in sharp opposition.

Boreal Forest Fires a Time Bomb of Carbon Emissions

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Summer wildfires in the Northern Hemisphere’s boreal forests have been expanding over the past two decades and produced record high carbon dioxide emissions in 2021, according to a study published.

“Boreal forests could be a time bomb of carbon, and the recent increases in wildfire emissions we see make me worry the clock is ticking,” said Steven Davis, one of the authors of the study published in the journal Science.

Davis, a professor of Earth system science at the University of California, Irvine, said the boreal forests have attracted less attention than tropical forests.

Boreal forests cover parts of the high-latitudes of eight countries including Canada, Russia and the United States and constitute one of the most extensive biomes on Earth. They are generally made up of pine, spruce and fir trees.

The growth in wildfires in boreal forests is linked to warming in the region, which is the fastest on Earth.

The greenhouse gases released into the atmosphere by the boreal forest fires contribute to the warming of the planet and have alarmed climate scientists.

The researchers said boreal fires typically account for 10 per cent of global fire carbon dioxide emissions.

But they contributed 23 per cent in 2021, or 480 million metric tons of carbon release, equivalent to 1.76



billion tons of CO2. That was the most recorded by the researchers in a single year since 2000 and about double the total emissions from aviation in 2021.

It was approximately equivalent to the fossil fuel emissions from Japan, said the main author of the study, Bo Zheng of Tsinghua Shenzhen University in China.

The researchers said 2021 was an “abnormal” year with boreal forests in North America and Eurasia both experiencing severe drought.

Philippe Ciais, a climate researcher at Paris-Saclay University, said there is a risk of a sort of vicious circle.

“If the fires become more frequent the forest won’t have time to recover carbon,” he said. “We will have an amplification effect on climate warming.”

Normally, 80 per cent of the carbon released by wildfires is absorbed by vegetation in subsequent seasons while the remaining 20 per cent of CO2 stays in the atmosphere.

“The increase in fire emissions poses a widening threat to climate, given that part of the emissions might not return to vegetation and soils because of postfire regrowth failure in a warming climate,” the study said.

Davis said this is “really worrisome.”

“If this ecosystem stops being such an effective carbon sink and becomes a larger source of CO2...that makes our job of stabilizing the climate much harder,” he said.

Any Military Attack on...

“Globally speaking, there are two sets of matters that are important. Clearly, there is great expectation about our joint work in order to move forward in the issues that Iran and the agency are working on, to clarify and to bring credible assurances about the nuclear program in Iran,” he said.

“The second set of issues, which is very important, has to do with scientific, technical cooperation we are having and will continue to have with Iran,” he added.

Grossi met later on Saturday with President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi and Foreign

Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, official news agency IRNA reported.

The IAEA chief said it was an “issue of necessity to have a very deep, serious systematic dialogue with Iran”. “This is why I am here. It’s been too long,” he said, adding he would “judge our degree of satisfaction at the end of the day”.

Ahead of Grossi’s arrival, spokesman for Iran’s nuclear energy agency Behrouz Kamalvandi said, “It is hoped that this trip will form the basis for greater cooperation and a clearer horizon between Iran and the IAEA.”

Old Fox and...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian spokesperson urged these countries to end their “opportunistic” approaches in the Saudi-led war on Yemen instead of shirking their responsibility in the “imposed war against the defenseless and oppressed people of Yemen.”

Britain’s Royal Navy claimed on Thursday that an Iranian boat, traveling south from Iran at high speed during the hours of darkness, was intercepted by forces from British frigate HMS Lancaster before it could navigate back to Iranian territorial waters on February 23.

According to the Bahrain-based United States Fifth Fleet, the seizure took place along a route historically used to smuggle weapons to Yemen.

Iran has on several occasions dismissed Western claims of smuggling arms to Yemen, reaffirming its support for a political solution not a military one to the conflict in the Arab country.

In a statement on Thursday, Kanaani rejected the claims that in January French naval forces had seized thousands of Iranian-supplied weapons and ammunition headed to Yemen as politically-motivated.

A report by the Oxfam charity revealed in January that weapons supplied by the United Kingdom and the United States to the Saudi-led coalition in war-torn Yemen killed at least 839 civilians and wounded 1,775 others in just over a year.

The report revealed that the Saudi-led coalition used weapons supplied solely by the UK and the US in hundreds of attacks targeting civilians in the Arab country between January 2021 and the end of February 2022.

There have been many reports even by the British media about the UK’s weapons supply to the Saudi-led coalition in Yemen but London has never accepted it despite clear crystal evidences and now it has tried to play the blame game with Iran and blame Iran for arms supply to Yemen while everybody knows it well that this is the British and even other Western countries that provide the Saudi-led coalition forces with arms.

Of course Iranians historically are aware of this game of the Old Fox and will give no damn to such baseless accusations because when the West is in weaker position against the Islamic Revolution of Iran, it resorts to such funny blame games.

If we have a glance at the recent political developments regarding Iran, whenever Iran’s nuclear issue reaches a decisive moment, such accusations are intensified and this is not a new thing. As the board of governors of the IAEA is preparing for it crucial meeting about Iran’s peaceful nuclear program, once again such baseless accusation is raised against Tehran. Of course each time one of the Western states or their allies raises such claim and this time it is the UK’s turn while before the past meeting of the BOG of IAEA, it was the U.S. and Israel which raised claims of discovering arms supply and other accusations.

So Tehran is ready for any false accusation on the eve of any critical and decisive moment and it will not be affected by such baseless claims and this type of accusation has become old and threadbare and the West should know that Tehran will not retreat from its right in having peaceful nuclear program and they have better to come to terms with Tehran rather than tabling such stupid claims and the British should also know that Iranians know them too well to think much of them.



Pakistan Invited Iran...

FROM PAGE 1

Recently, an Iranian delegation of M/s Tavanir, visited 132 KV Jiواني Grid Station with QESCO for technical review of the project. The delegation curtailed its visit schedule due to PIA flight cancellation and proposed meeting with CPPA-G in Tehran. Inter-connectivity with National Grid is expected this month.

“Iran wants to conclude new amendment number -9 to the existing electrical energy sales contract of November 6, 2002 with an aim to revise the electricity tariff,” sources added.

Presently, Pakistan is importing 74 MW of electricity from Iran for bordering areas of Balochistan, whose per unit cost is around Rs 25 per unit.

According to sources, Iranian side has proposed to revise the formula under which existing electricity is being purchased. To this end, Government of Pakistan is of the view that: (i) the current formula for electricity being supplied is applicable till December 2024.

Government of Iran may consider the same formula for additional electricity till that period and, in the meanwhile, both sides can negotiate and agree on the new pricing formula. Or, (ii) if it is imperative to revise the pricing formula for additional electricity at this point in time (e.g. to address the volatility of oil prices etc.), the same may be done, however, the prices may be capped to an upper limit of 10 Cents/kwh.

As per existing formula, the electricity is being sold to Pakistan within a range of 6.10 - 9.5 Cents, kWh. Moreover, the current basket price of Pakistan electricity pool is in the range of less than 10 Cents/ kWh.

According to sources, Minister for Power, has requested Iranian Energy Minister for his personal indulgence for favorable consideration of Pakistan’s proposals for earlier finalization of tariffs and operationalization of the project.

Flawless Kang Seizes Lead At World Championship

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - American Danielle Kang fired a flawless nine-under-par 63 to grab a one-shot halfway lead at Sentosa after a weather-delayed second round of the HSBC Women's World Championship in Singapore.

World number 18 Kang, who finished in a share of 29th after the first round, surged to the top of the leaderboard after draining nine birdies, including three in a row from the 12th.

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Alcaraz Pulls out of Acapulco With Strained Hamstring

LONDON (Dispatches) - Top seed Carlos Alcaraz pulled out of this week's ATP 500 event in Acapulco with a strained hamstring, the U.S. Open champion said.

The world number two, who was scheduled to play his opening match later on Tuesday, picked up the injury during his loss to Cameron Norrie in Sunday's Rio Open final where the pain hindered both his movement and serve. "I have a grade 1 strain in my right hamstring that will keep me out for several days, according to the tests we did this morning," Alcaraz wrote on Twitter.

Djokovic Downs Hurkacz To Reach Dubai Semis

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic stayed on course for his third title of 2023 by powering into the semi-finals of the Dubai Tennis Championships with a 6-3 7-5 win over Hubert Hurkacz.

The 35-year-old Serbian won in Adelaide before sealing his 22nd Grand Slam trophy at the Australian Open while managing a hamstring injury and has hit top form after a slow start in Dubai on his return to the tour.

Having breezed through the first set on the back of a single break, Djokovic found the going a bit tougher in the next as the big-serving Hurkacz raised his game in search of a first win over the world number one in their fifth meeting.

After a crucial hold from 0-30 down to draw level at 5-5, Djokovic grabbed another break to heap the pressure on Hurkacz and the five-times champion closed out the match on serve. "It was a challenging match as it always is against Hubert," Djokovic said. "I think he's got one of the best serves in the game. In the second set, until the 11th game I didn't have too many chances against his serve.

"Fortunately for me, I also found the rhythm on my serve... one or two points can decide the winner in matches like these.

"I'm really glad with the way I played under pressure."

Up next for Djokovic is a meeting with former world number one Daniil Medvedev, who beat Borna Coric 6-3 6-2.

Alexander Zverev earlier reached his first semi-final since last year's French Open with a 7-5 6-4 win over Lorenzo Sonego.

The seventh seed has had a torrid time after injuring his ankle at Roland Garros and undergoing surgery, only returning to the ATP tour in December after suffering a bone edema problem during his rehabilitation.

"It's been a very difficult time for me over the last nine months," world number 16 Zverev said. "I haven't played tennis at all for such a long period for the first time in my life.

"It definitely shows that the hard work is paying off and I'm extremely happy with my progress and how I'm playing right now. I'm happy to be in my first semi-final since the injury.



"Hopefully it won't be my last and hopefully there's much more to come here."

Zverev next plays defending champion Andrey Rublev after the combustible Russian overcame a late wobble to get past Botić van de Zandschulp 6-3 7-6(3).

Zverev has won each of their five meetings, including their last one in the 2021 Cincinnati final.

"It's going to be tough," Rublev said. "I have to play good, aggressive tennis."

Meanwhile seventh-seeded Mayar Sherif of Egypt saved two match points while rallying for a 3-6, 7-6 (6), 6-4 win over China's Xinyu Wang in the second round of the Abierto GNP Seguros in Monterrey, Mexico.

Wang served for the match at 6-5 of the second set, but Sherif broke to force a tiebreaker. Wang then jumped ahead 6-4 before Sherif took the final four points of the tiebreaker to extend the match. A service break in the fifth game of the final set was all Sherif needed, though it took her four match points to close out the win.

Sherif's quarterfinal opponent will be top-seeded Caroline Garcia of France, who cruised past Spain's Nuria Parrizas Diaz 6-3, 6-2.

Fourth-seeded Elise Mertens of Belgium posted a 6-3, 3-6, 6-2 win over Romania's Elena-Gabriela Ruse. She will oppose eighth-seeded Elisabetta Cocciaretto of Italy, who pulled out a 7-6 (5), 7-6 (3) win over Tatjana Maria of Germany.

Germany's Anna-Lena Friedsam prevailed in a marathon third-set tiebreaker, edging Russia's Erika Andreeva 7-5, 6-7 (2), 7-6 (8) in second-round action at Austin, Texas.

Friedsam squandered three match points in the decisive tiebreaker before Andreeva had a match point at 8-7. Friedsam bounced back and finally sealed the win.

Friedsam's upcoming quarterfinal opponent, Marta Kostyuk, also needed three sets to advance. The eighth-seeded Ukrainian defeated the United States' Madison Brengle 6-3, 3-6, 6-0.

Fourth-seeded Danielle Collins won an all-U.S. matchup against Caty McNally 6-1, 6-1, and Russia's Anna Kalinskaya ousted the United States' Coco Vandeweghe 6-3, 6-1.

Rahm Says Race for No. 1 Shows Greatness in Golf Right Now

MIAMI (Dispatches) - World number one Jon Rahm says the continuous tussle for the top ranking among himself, Rory McIlroy and Scottie Scheffler "speaks to the greatness of the game of golf right now."

Spain's Rahm returned to the top of the rankings with his victory at Riviera two weeks ago, his third US PGA Tour title of 2023 carrying him past reigning Masters champion Scheffler.

Scheffler had regained the summit just a week earlier, replacing McIlroy atop the rankings after his victory at the Phoenix Open.

Both second-ranked Scheffler and No. 3 McIlroy have a chance to return to number one this week at the Arnold Palmer Invitational in Orlando, Florida, where Rahm said on Tuesday that the tight race at the top was a testament to the current state of the game.

"I do know this is the most amount of No. 1 changes in this short period of time," Rahm said. "I saw some of those stats, because it's just really interesting, which speaks to the greatness of the game of golf right now — how good everybody's been playing," Rahm said.

Rahm himself has been in dominant form. His victory in the Genesis Invitational at Riviera was his fifth win in nine worldwide starts, a run that included his third Spanish Open triumph in October and victory in the DP World Tour Championship in November.

He opened 2023 with US Tour wins in the Tournament of Champions in Hawaii and the American Express in La Quinta, California.

After closing out a two-shot victory over Max Homa to return to the top of the rankings for the first time since March of 2022, Rahm said he didn't "need a ranking to validate anything."

But he acknowledged on Tuesday there was "a lot of satisfaction that comes when you get to be No. 1 when the other players have been playing great golf as well.

"Scottie had a great year last year, Rory had a great year last year, and then towards the end of the year I kind of picked up."

Rahm was also pleased to get back to the top with a victory.



PSG and Morocco's Hakimi Charged With Rape

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain and Morocco defender Achraf Hakimi was charged with rape, French prosecutors said.

Hakimi, 24, was questioned by prosecutors on Thursday about accusations made by a 24-year-old woman, and subsequently charged.

The Madrid-born player, who was a key part of Morocco's historic run to the semi-finals of the World Cup in Qatar last year, trained with his PSG teammates on Friday morning.

APSG spokesman said the club "gives its support" to Hakimi and "places its trust in the justice system".

Hakimi allegedly paid for his accuser to travel to his home in the Paris suburb of Boulogne-Billancourt last Saturday while his wife and children were away on holiday.

The woman went to a police station on Sunday and was questioned by prosecutors on Wednesday, according to sources close to the case.

On Monday, Hakimi appeared at the FIFA Best awards ceremony in Paris, where he was named in the FIFPro men's world team of the year.

The player's lawyer Fanny Colin said Hakimi "firmly denies all the accusations against him" and that he was the victim of "an attempted racket".

She said Hakimi welcomed the charge laid against him because "he finally has the possibility to defend himself".

Rachel Flore Pardo, the lawyer for the alleged victim, told AFP: "My client maintains everything that she said. She made the choice to speak exclusively to prosecutors and does not want the affair to become a media issue, mainly to protect her safety."

Doncic, Irving Hit 40 Points In Mavs' Win

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - March 3 - Luka Doncic amassed 42 points and 12 assists and Kyrie Irving scored 40 points to lift the host Dallas Mavericks past the Philadelphia 76ers 133-126.

The Mavericks improved to 2-4 with Doncic and Irving playing together.

Reggie Bullock added 15 and Christian Wood contributed 10 for the Mavericks, who had dropped five of their previous six games.

Philadelphia's Joel Embiid returned from a one-game absence caused by left foot soreness to score 35 points and grab eight rebounds. Tyrese Maxey added 29 points. James Harden had 27 points and 13 assists.

Meanwhile Jordan Poole erupted for 22 of his game-high 34 points in the third quarter as Golden State Warriors rallied to overtake Los Angeles Clippers 115-91 in San Francisco.

Playing once again without Stephen Curry and Andrew Wiggins, the Warriors fell behind by 12 points shortly after halftime before flipping the game in a one-sided third period.

Kawhi Leonard had a team-high 21 points and Mason Plumlee a game-high 20 rebounds to lead the Clippers, who lost their fourth game in a row.



Spurs 110, Pacers 99

Meanwhile Rookie Jeremy Sochan recorded his first career double-double with 22 points and 13 rebounds as San Antonio Spurs beat visiting Indiana Pacers 110-99.

Playing its first home game since Feb. 3, San Antonio won its second straight following a 16-game losing streak. Devin Vassell, Zach Collins and Devonte' Graham each scored 18 points.

Alonso Shines in Bahrain GP Practice

SAKHIR (Dispatches) - Sergio Perez Stopped the times for Red Bull ahead of Fernando Alonso, debuting for Aston Martin, as the defending champion team set the pace in the opening practice session at the season-opening Bahrain Grand Prix.

The 33-year-old Mexican, who was fastest on the final day of pre-season testing at the same venue, clocked a best lap in one minute and 32.758 seconds in very warm conditions.

Alonso confirmed his promising pace from testing with a lap in 1:33.196 to split the two Red Bulls and push two-time defending world champion Max Verstappen down to third, six-tenths of a second off his team-mate's time.

Lando Norris was fourth for McLaren, a further eight-tenths adrift, ahead of Charles Leclerc of Ferrari and Lance Stroll, back after recovering from a double wrist injury, in the second Aston Martin.

Kevin Magnussen was seventh for Haas ahead of Zhou Guanyu and his Alfa Romeo team-mate Valtteri Bottas with seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton finishing 10th for Mercedes.

The new season began in earnest at the Bahrain International Circuit at Sakhir, a former camel farm in the desert.

Two-time champion Alonso, recruited from Alpine, to replace retired four-time champion Sebastian Vettel, set an early marker in 1:35.048.

That lap confirmed the level of high confidence in the Silverstone-based team this year, following a strong showing in last week's three-day test.

