

The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) in Its Latest Figures Has Put the Country's Foreign Debt at \$6.497b, Down by More Than a Fourth Compared to Figures Announced In Late March 2022

# IRAN NEWS

Russia's Foreign Minister Segei Lavrov Called on the U.S. to Lift Sanctions on Iran and Return to the 2015 Nuclear Deal (JCPOA) While Emphasizing That There Is No Alternative to the JCPOA Agreement


VOL. XXIX, No. 7736 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

MONDAY APRIL 3, 2023 - FARVARDIN 14, 1402

**2 DOMESTIC**

Iran Long-Term Strategic Pact With Russia to Be Finalized in a Month



> SEE PAGE 2

**3 DOMESTIC**

Iran Seeks \$160b of Investment to Raise Oil, Gas Production



> SEE PAGE 3

**4 INTERNATIONAL**


Finland's Far Right Aims To Oust popular PM Sanna Marin



> SEE PAGE 4

**8 SPORTS**

Sinner Downs Alcaraz To Reach Miami Final



> SEE PAGE 8

## Iran to Continue Pursuing Strong Connection With Asian States

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Saying that the enemies' plan for isolating Iran has failed, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution said that Tehran's ties with Asia have witnessed huge growth and the country will continue to follow this track.

Leader of Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei delivered a speech at Imam Reza (AS) shrine in Mashhad on the occasion of the first day of Nowruz (the start of the Iranian year of 1402).

In his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that what the enemy is seeking and dubs "transformation", is in fact "changing the identity of the Islamic Republic of Iran".

"Their (the enemies') goal is to remove everything that reminds people of the (Islamic) Revolution and Islam," Leader stressed, adding that the enemies are looking for transforming Islamic democracy into a government that pleases arrogance.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei hailed the Iranians' strong faith and self-esteem in confronting consecutive foreign hostilities for several decades. [See Page 7](#)

## U.S., Certain States Made Mistakes in Iran Unrest

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has said that certain countries, including the United States, made mistakes when they intervened in the fall unrest in Iran.

The foreign minister made the remarks in an interview with Al Jazeera TV network, which was released on March 29. He pointed out to the important stances of the Islamic Republic on regional issues and the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Iran's incumbent administration pursues serious negotiations with other parties to pave the way for returning of all sides to the JCPOA commitments; so, the Iranians and the US delegations exchanged messages indirectly in the months leading to the fall unrest in Iran, he said, but following the onset of riots, certain states, including the US, made mistakes and intervened in Iran's internal affairs; however, the negotiating parties can reach a consensus and finalize a deal to revive the JCPOA if the US adopts a realistic approach. [See Page 7](#)

## ICJ Says U.S. Violated Int'l Law By Freezing Iran Assets



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Judges at the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague have ruled that the United States had violated international law by allowing American courts to confiscate nearly two billion dollars in assets from Iranian companies, and ordered Washington to pay compensation, the amount of which will be determined later.

The ICJ said Washington's freezing of funds belonging to several Iranian individuals and companies, including \$1.75 billion from the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), was "manifestly unreasonable."

The court, however, said that it did not have jurisdiction to rule on the freezing of assets from the CBI.

In reaction, the Iranian Foreign Ministry said the verdict demonstrates the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic's positions and the illegal behavior of the U.S.

"As per this important ruling, the court rightfully dismissed the unsubstantiated defenses of the United States and recognized Iran as the rightful party by emphasizing the former's violation of its commitments. The U.S. obligation to compensate for the losses will be the most cogent reason for the legitimacy of the request of the Islamic Republic of Iran," the ministry said in a statement.

It added that Tehran "considers it as one of its inherent duties to press for the rights of the Iranian nation, and will utilize all diplomatic, legal and judicial means and channels to demand the rights of the honorable Iranian people and the national interests of Iranians."

The case before the ICJ was initially brought by Tehran against Washington in 2016 for breaching a 1955 friendship treaty, signed before the 1979 Islamic Revolution, by allowing American courts to freeze the assets of Iranian companies.

The US Supreme Court in 2016 ruled that about USD 2 billion in frozen Iranian assets must be turned over to American families of people killed in the 1983 bombing of a US Marine Corps barracks in the Lebanese capital of Beirut and other attacks blamed on Iran. Tehran has long rejected allegations of involvement in the 1983 Beirut bombing.

The money confiscated under the US court ruling belongs to the CBI. The assets were blocked under US sanctions. The US formally withdrew from the 1955 treaty in 2018 after Iran filed two claims based on the accord.

Also known as the World Court, the ICJ is the United Nations' top court dealing with disputes between countries. Although the ICJ's rulings are binding, it has no power to enforce them.

Meanwhile the Iranian government spokesman said that Iran's government is determined to uphold the rights of the great nation of the country against the completely illegal behavior of the US administration.

Ali Bahadori Jahormi, wrote on his Twitter account: "The verdict of the International Court of Justice regarding compensation for the damages caused by the illegal seizure of Iranian property in the United States is a historic victory and international acceptance of the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

## Iran to Overhaul Venezuela's Largest Refinery

CARACAS (Dispatches) - The National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) and state-owned Petróleos de Venezuela (PDVSA) will soon start to revamp the Paraguaná Refining Center (CRP), Venezuela's largest refining complex, to restore its fuel production capacity, Reuters reported February 3.

NIORDC and PDVSA are expected to sign a \$460 million agreement to modernize the CRP, which has a capacity of 955,000 barrels per day. The CRP consists of the Cardón and Amuay refineries.

"The Venezuelan disaster in the oil world is enormous. The country has a very weakened and deteriorated petrochemical industry," Félix Arellano, international relations expert and professor at the Central University of Venezuela, told Diálogo on February 20. "Venezuela is a dark spot; it's an ideologically aggressive country."

The refining center modernization project will allow NIORDC to negotiate with contractors and subcontract work to repair five of the complex's nine distillation units primarily meant for crude oil refining.

Tehran will be in charge of the procurement, installation, and inspection of parts and units before returning refinery operations to PDVSA, Reuters reported. The planned refurbishment of the distillation units will have Chinese and Iranian parts and equipment in what was originally built with U.S. technology.

Venezuela, however, will not be able to carry out modifications and replacement of parts in the distillation units without considering the need to have the chemical products that the plants require, which are manufactured in the United States, said chemical engineer and former CRP manager Emilio Herrera to Venezuelan news site El Pitazo.

"In addition to the repairs that the Iranians will make, reestablishing diplomatic relations with who was our main client [the U.S.] in order to have those products is a must," Herrera said. "One thing is to repair machines, and another are the substances used for their operation." [See Page 7](#)

## Baku Urged for Explanation On Strategic Partnership With Israel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has roundly condemned remarks by Israeli foreign minister Eli Cohen regarding an agreement with Azerbaijan to establish a united front against Iran.

The Israeli minister made the remarks in a meeting with visiting Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov on Wednesday prior to the inauguration of Azerbaijan's embassy in Tel Aviv.

The move is "another proof of hostile objectives of the Zionist regime to turn the soil of the Republic of Azerbaijan to a source of threat against the national security of the Islamic Republic of Iran," Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

Referring to Bayramov's statements on the same day about a "strategic partnership" with Israel, Kanaani said the remarks implicitly confirm the anti-Iranian stance of the two parties' cooperation and called on Azeri officials to provide an explanations about the issue.

Pointing to the "unbreakable" historic and religious bonds between the people of Iran and Azerbaijan, the spokesman said Tehran has always tried to foil the plots of ill-wishers that want to create division between the two neighboring countries. [See Page 7](#)

## CBI Claims Inflation Is 46.5%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Central Bank of Iran announced the annual inflation rate stands at 46.5 percent but did not mention the point-to-point inflation of the last month of the Iranian year.

Although the official inflation rate announced by the authorities is usually less than what it seems in the market, even a 46.5-percent inflation is among the highest in Iran in more than 30 years.

The bank did not disclose the point-to-point inflation for the last Iranian calendar month, which ended on March 21, but it provided the price index of the month, from which the inflation can be extracted. The price index for the month was 794.3, which means a 64-percent point-to-point inflation rate compared to the corresponding period of the previous year at 484.6. It is the second time Iran recorded such a figure since World War II. [See Page 7](#)

## Tehran Slams Developed Nations' Inaction Against Climate Change

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's deputy permanent representative to the UN has slammed developed countries for failing to fulfill their international commitments concerning climate change, warning that extreme climate change can undermine the sustainable development of all countries.

Zahra Ershadi issued the warning while addressing a UN session on Wednesday after the UN General Assembly adopted by consensus a historic resolution asking the International Court of Justice (ICJ) to define the obligations of states to combat climate change, a legal opinion that could drive countries to take stronger measures and clarify international law.

"On global issues, such as climate change, we all are in the same boat. We are facing the same crises and are condemned to the same destiny. But all do not share the same capacities and capabilities to counter this common challenge," Ershadi said.

She further said that all do not have similar roles and responsibilities for this challenge and its illusive future, adding, "We can forgive those who were historically involved in degrading our planet and its environment, but we cannot ignore their historical responsibilities and subsequent obligations to fulfill their commitments to redress it." [See Page 7](#)

Sokhan Gostar Institute

# IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department  
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com  
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

## Iran-Iraq Trade Grows by 20% to \$9b in One Year

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The volume of trade between Iran and Iraq hit \$9 billion in the past Iranian calendar year (ending on March 21) showing a roughly 20% increase in comparison to that of the preceding year, according to a person with knowledge of the matter.

The two neighboring countries still intend to give a boost to economic trade, Yahya Al-e Eshaq, the chairman of Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce, told IRNA.

Iraq is one of the top trade partners with Iran and the authorities of the two countries have targeted to increase the volume of trade to \$20 billion.

## Iran Long-Term Strategic Pact With Russia to Be Finalized in a Month

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

**TEHRAN - Iran's foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has expressed hope that the long-term strategic cooperation agreement with Russia will be finalized in "less than a month."**

The remarks were made by Iran's top diplomat at a joint press conference with his Russian counterpart Sergei Lavrov in Moscow following the delegation-level talks between the two sides.

"Reviews on the long-term strategic cooperation agreement between the two countries have been finalized in Russia. Iran has also examined it. I hope that in less than a month, the final revision of the agreement will be carried out by Iran's Foreign Ministry," Amirabdollahian said.

"High-ranking Iranian and Russian delegations at different levels are exchanging views, and the presidents of the two countries are in constant contact with each other."

In 2001, Tehran and Moscow signed a 10-year cooperation deal that was lengthened to 20 years through two five-year extensions.

Now, the two capitals are seeking to ink a document on bilateral strategic cooperation, which may determine their future relations for the next twenty years.

Also in his remarks, the top Iranian diplomat stressed that Iran-Russia ties are advancing on the right track, hoping that bilateral cooperation in regional and international organizations will properly go on.

Lavrov, for his part, said that the talks between Iran and Russia in different areas are actively advancing.

He noted that Tehran-Moscow relations in political, commercial, investment and



economic fields as well as the implementation of key projects have developed.

There has been a steady growth in bilateral ties within the framework of the joint economic commission, he said, highlighting close cooperation in international and regional affairs.

Later, Iran's top diplomat in a Twitter post described his meeting with Lavrov as "important and productive".

He said the two sides discussed bilateral, regional and international issues during their delegation-level talks in Moscow on Wednesday.

Following up on the agreements reached between the presidents of the two countries and exchanging opinions on the long-term comprehensive pact between Tehran and Moscow figured in the discussions, he added.

During his visit to Moscow, Amirabdollahian also met with the chairman and members of the foreign policy commission of the Russian Duma on Wednesday, the foreign ministry said in a statement.

The approval of the long-term and strategic cooperation between the two countries was among the topics discussed in the meeting, the statement noted, citing the foreign minister.

He was further quoted as saying that in the coming weeks, Russia and Iran will sign the long-term treaty, which will then be submitted to the parliaments of the two countries for final approval.

## IRGC Military Advisor Martyred in Israeli Aggression on Damascus

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) announced that one of its military advisors in Syria was killed during an Israeli airstrike on Damascus, vowing retaliation.

"Milad Heidari, an IRGC advisor in Syria, was martyred in today's criminal attack of the Zionist regime on suburbs of Damascus," the IRGC said in a statement on Friday.

"The fake and criminal Zionist regime will surely receive a response to this crime," it pledged.

According to SANA, Israeli fighter jets entered Syrian territory from the northern occupied Golan Heights very early on Friday morning at 00:17 Damascus Local Time and targeted a facility in the suburbs of Damascus.

The IRGC said details about the funeral of its member will be announced later.

The statement further slammed the silence and inaction of the international bodies over the repeated Israeli attacks on Syria and the continued violation of the sovereignty and territorial integrity of the independent UN member state.

According to the Syrian outlet, the country's defenses intercepted the "hostile missiles" over the capital, but the "aggression" managed to cause some material damage. There were no immediate reports of injuries in the strike.

The attack came less than 24 hours after another airstrike targeted sites in Damascus, wounding two soldiers and causing material damage.

## Amirabdollahian Terms Oman As Reliable Friend of Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has underscored that Oman is considered as a neighbor and reliable friend of Iran.

The top Iranian diplomat made the remark in a phone call with his Omani counterpart Sayyid Badr Albusaidi on Thursday night, when both sides held talks on issues of mutual interest of Muscat and Tehran.

The Iranian foreign minister also underlined that Oman is always a good neighbor and a steadfast friend of Iran, and that the growing interactions will be strengthened as a result of the future trip to Tehran by Sultan of Oman Haitham bin Tariq Al Said.

Albusaidi, for his part, said that the regional states can shortcut the long road of development via reciprocal cooperation.

## Passenger Terminal Between Iran, Turkmenistan Reopens After Three Years

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Bajjiran passenger terminal reopened after a three-year shutdown, according to a local official.

Ja'far Shahamat, the director of Road Maintenance and Transportation Department of Iran's northeastern Khorasan Razavi Province, said that the reopening of the terminal took place after an agreement between Tehran and Ashgabat to provide services to the passengers at the joint border as they did in the pre-pandemic era.

As a result of the agreement, Turkmenistan fully reopened its border to Iranian passengers.

Shortly after the global outbreak of the coronavirus three years ago, Ashgabat one-sidedly closed Bajjiran passenger terminal operating on its joint border with Iran.

## Iranian Embassy Repudiates Baseless Claims for Planning Attacks on Jewish targets in Athens

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Greece has categorically dismissed as false and baseless the claims that the country was linked to an alleged plot to carry out attacks on areas frequented by Israelis in central Athens.

"The fabricated report is obviously part of an amateurish scenario constructed by the [Israeli] regime to divert public opinion, and an attempt to cover up its (the regime's) internal developments," the diplomatic mission said in a statement.

Greek police arrested two Pakistani nationals on Tuesday who were allegedly planning attacks against Israeli and Jewish targets in the Southeastern European country. Israel's Mossad spy agency claimed in a statement that it had assisted in the investigation, and that the two were "part of a vast Iranian network, operated from Iran across many countries."

The two men, 27 and 29 years old, are being held at police headquarters in central Athens, Greek authorities said. A third man, who is not in Greece, was wanted for questioning and charged in absentia.

## Iran Rules Out Change In Hijab Dress Code Despite Foreign Plots

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Interior Ministry says the country will not withdraw from the Islamic rule of hijab, pointing to enemies' "failed plots" to use hijab to separate the nation from the government.

In a statement, the ministry named hijab an "unquestionable" Islamic necessity and stressed that efforts to preserve and implement it in society will continue.

"No withdrawal has been and will be made from religious principles and traditional values. Hijab, as an unquestionable religious necessity, will always remain one of the practical principles of the Islamic Republic of Iran," read the statement.

The issue of hijab has been one of the fronts of enemy's "cognitive warfare" against the Iranian nation, however, its failed plots in the past several years could not "drain the will" of Iranian women and girls for maintaining their Muslim identity, it added.

"The planned projects of spy agencies" led from outside the country tried in their latest attempt to "hide their evil aims under the demagogic slogan of 'women life freedom'," however, the vigilance of Iranian people, especially women and girls, proved that the enemy suffers from "miscalculations" about the depth of people's beliefs to their religion, said the statement.

The ministry was referring to recent Western-supported violent riots across Iran that erupted in September 2022 following the death of a 22-year-old Iranian woman named Mahsa Amini in a hospital in Tehran, three days after he fainted at a police station in the Iranian capital.

"In the past year's riots, the enemies tried to use hijab to polarize the society, create deep social divisions, and separate the nation from the government," read the statement, adding that "all capacities of foreign-based social media" were used as the field for this battle.

Hijab, as a factor for strengthening the institute of family, should be protected and promoted, the statement added.

The ministry also called on religious scholars as well as cultural and social bodies to further explain the sensitive issue of hijab, noting that persuading the new generation is the "most influential" approach for improving hijab.

The statement comes months after the issue of hijab was used by some Western countries to spark riots in Iran. Iran's intelligence community has said several countries, including the United States and the UK, have used their spy and propaganda apparatuses to provoke violent riots in the country.

## Iranian Navy 86th Flotilla Docks at Port of Cape Town

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian Navy's 86th flotilla of warships has docked at the Port of Cape Town in South Africa in line with the Islamic Republic's efforts to expand its naval presence in international waters.

The Iranian Navy's flotilla, comprised of Dena and Makran warships, arrived at the port Friday morning and was welcomed by Iran's Ambassador to Pretoria Mehdi Aqa Jafari and local officials.

Addressing the ceremony, Aqa Jafari said the flotilla's travel aims to convey the Iranian nation's message of peace and friendship to the peoples of South Africa and all the African countries.

He hailed the strong presence of the Islamic Republic's strategic naval fleet in the Atlantic Ocean and South Africa's hosting of it and said the flotilla's mission would certainly play an important role in promoting global peace and stability and security of maritime connecting routes.

The Iranian diplomat noted that the visit indicates the high level of relations between the two countries and will greatly help to further strengthen cooperation between both sides' navies.

Late in January, Second-in-Command of the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy, Rear Admiral Hamzeh Ali Kaviani, said the country's 86th flotilla of warships has raised the Iranian flag in the western waters of Latin America.

Kaviani added that the Iranian Navy's flotillas also have a strong presence in the northern tip of the Indian Ocean. Dena is a Mowj-class warship that joined the Iranian Navy in June 2021. The military vessel is reportedly equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes and naval cannons.

Makran is a forward base ship weighing 121,000 tons. The warship can carry five helicopters and is employed for providing logistical support for the combat warships.

The 86th flotilla is expected to break the record for the distance an Iranian flotilla has sailed in international waters. It set sail from the south of Iran in early autumn with the purpose of circumnavigating the world. Its trip to Brazil appears to be part of a mission to the Panama Canal.

## Delegation From Bahrain Reportedly to Visit Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Following the diplomatic efforts to establish relations between Tehran and Manama, a delegation from Bahrain is going to travel to Iran, various media outlets reported.

Several Bahraini sources also announced that recently a delegation from Iran traveled to Bahrain and visited the Iranian embassy in Manama.

Recently, Bahraini sources with knowledge of the attempts to restore diplomatic ties between Manama and Tehran told Sputnik that a delegation from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran visited the Iranian Embassy along with an Iranian parliamentary delegation

that participated in the 146th Assembly of the Inter-Parliamentary Union (IPU) in Manama on March 12.

According to those Bahraini sources, after the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Saudi Arabia, meetings and exchanges of visits between Iran and Bahrain are scheduled to begin.

Earlier, some informed sources had told Sputnik that important talks between Bahrain and Iran are underway on the restoration of their bilateral relations.

After the recent agreement between Tehran and Riyadh to restore relations and reopen their embassies, Saudi King Salman invited the Iranian president to visit Saudi Arabia.

## All Enemy's Plots Against Iran Frustrated

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Republic of Iran has gained such massive clout in confrontation with the hegemonic powers in the world that all military and security options used by the enemies have become abortive, the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces said.

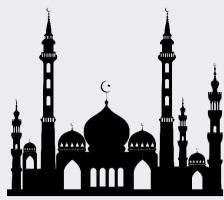
The Islamic Revolution has endowed the freedom-seeking people and nations across the world with the spirit of spirituality, independence-seeking and standing against persecution, the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces said in a statement in commemoration of the anniversary of beginning of the Islamic Republic on Farvardin 12th, dubbed the "Islamic Republic Day".

The statement said the Islamic Revolution's acceptability and massive spiritual clout among the free nations in the battle against the hegemonic system have created a situation in which all military, security, political, and cultural options of the enemies in their campaign against the Iranian nation have been frustrated and impaired.

It also noted that Iran's astounding progress and growing strength forced the hegemony to employ all of its capacities to hinder the Islamic Republic's power, pointing to the plots hatched by the enemies, above all the U.S. and the Zionist regime, to foment riots in Iran in the past autumn.

Highlighting the failure of the enemy's hybrid war and its futile attempts to disrupt the public security in Iran through riots, the statement said the huge turnout of Iranians in the February 11 demonstrations marking the anniversary of victory of the Islamic Revolution proved the miscalculation of the adversaries.

On Saturday, April 1, Iran celebrated the 44th anniversary of the outset of the Islamic Republic as the country's official ruling system, which was approved by the overwhelming majority of Iranians in a landmark referendum back in 1979.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:21
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:46

82. "And Allah by His words doth prove and establish His truth, however much the sinners may hate it!"  
83. But none believed in Moses except some children of his people, because of the fear of Pharaoh and his chiefs, lest they should persecute them; and certainly Pharaoh was mighty on the earth and one who transgressed all bounds.  
Surah 10. Jonah (82 - 83)

# Iran Seeks \$160b of Investment to Raise Oil, Gas Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Iran plans to increase its oil and gas production capacity by 50%, the head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) says.**

To achieve this, the country needs to invest \$89 billion in the oil industry and \$71 billion in the gas sector, Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr said in an interview with official news agency IRNA.

Iran is the holder of the world's largest oil and gas reserves combined, and at current recovery rates, it can continue to produce hydrocarbon resources for another 100 years.

However, sustainable production in the industry requires investment and the use of modern equipment.

"In order to increase the oil and gas production capacity in the country by 50%, we need an investment of \$160 billion," Khojasteh-Mehr said.

"With this investment, the oil production capacity will reach 5.7 million barrels and the gas production capacity will hit 1.5 billion cubic meters per day," he added.

According to the NIOC head who is also Iran's deputy petroleum minister, various plans are underway, with production set to increase from next year.

The first priority, he said, is to complete the unfinished projects and develop and start production from joint oil and gas fields.

The government is implementing 32 production maintenance projects signed by its predecessor. So far, seven plans to increase recovery and maintain production have come online and the rest are close to becoming operational, Khojasteh-Mehr said.

It is also implementing the NGL 3200 project to collect associated gas in the West Karun fields with a capacity of 500 million cubic feet for use as petrochemical feedstock and cut environmentally harmful flaring.

Iran's bid to stop flaring the gas extracted alongside crude oil at its fields hit stumbling blocks as foreign companies put their deals with the country on hold in fear of sanctions.



In the development of oil fields, Azadegan described by Khojasteh-Mehr as one of the 10 largest oil fields in the world and the largest common oil field in Iran is the top priority. To increase production from the field, the government ramped up the drilling fleet by 70% shortly after it took office, he said.

In addition, a memorandum of understanding was signed with six banks and six Iranian exploration and production companies worth \$7 billion for the integrated development of northern and southern Azadegan.

"Now, a consortium has been formed to increase production from the field from 200,000 barrels per day to 570,000 barrels in seven years," he added.

The government also increased the drilling fleet by 70% in the joint fields of Aban and Paydar Gharb and boosted production. Furthermore, it began implementing the contract for development of North and South Yaran joint fields.

For rehabilitating low yielding wells, \$500 million worth of contracts has been approved in total, the official said.

Meanwhile, a package worth \$3.6 billion has been approved to increase production from 13 gas fields, two of which are already being implemented.

"With the implementation of these plans, a total of 142 million cubic meters will be added to the gas production capacity and 100,000 barrels to the gas condensate production," he said.

Khojasteh-Mehr put the total value of contracts with Russians at \$4.5 billion, which involve seven Iranian oil fields.

Moreover, a number of oil and gas fields have entered the study phase and in some cases, these studies have been completed by Russian companies, he added.

The official touched on a campaign to localize products, citing statistics provided by domestic manufacturers, according to which 85% of goods needed in the oil industry is sourced domestically. A variety of equipment is now being built in the upstream and downstream sector, Khojasteh-Mehr said, adding 10 widely-used items have been identified and introduced to domestic manufacturers to build them.

## Iran, Turkey to Increase Number of Weekly Flights to 260

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Civil Aviation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (CAA) has announced that the number of weekly flights between Iran and Turkey will increase by nearly 20%.

CAA's spokesman Jafar Yazarlou said that Tehran and Ankara have signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to increase the number of flights between the two countries by 40 to 260 per week.

Yazarlou said the aviation MoU signed between Iran and Turkey will also cover training courses for airport staff and technicians.

## China's Private Sector Enters Iranian Port City of Bandar Abbas

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian official says China's private sector has entered the port city of Bandar Abbas on the Persian Gulf to evaluate logistics and investment opportunities.

Iran's Secretary of the Shipping Association, Masoud Polmeh however noted that so far there have been no tangible actions leading to significant investment by the Chinese.

He added that "certainly, the Chinese government has not made any investment in Iranian key port city of Bandar Abbas."

Polmeh also raised hope that the political agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia could pave the way for signing economic agreements.

China officially opened its Consulate General in Bandar Abbas in December 2022. The opening of the consulate was described as an opportunity to practically implement a 25-year deal between Tehran and Beijing signed in 2021 and China's ambitious Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), a global infrastructure development strategy to invest in nearly 150 countries.

The BRI, originally named, "One Belt, One Road," is an international development strategy as China looks to expand its influence worldwide by improving trade routes.

## EU-Iran Trade Exceeds €400m in January

TEHRAN (IRNA) - European Union's exports to Iran increased 7% year on year in January 2023 while trade exchanges between the two sides exceeded €400 million over the same month, according to figures by EU's statistical office the Eurostat.

Eurostat figures covered in a report by the IRNA showed that total trade between Iran and 27 member states of the EU had reached €401 million in January, up 5% from the same month last year.

Trade between the EU and Iran had increased by 8% last year compared to 2021, showed the figures.

The Eurostat figures showed that EU exports to Iran rose by 7% year on year in January to €323 million while imports from Iran dropped by 2% to €78 million over the same month.

The figures showed that Germany was the largest EU trade partner for Iran in January as the country imported €27 million worth of goods from Iran while exports from the country to Iran reached €99 million over the same period.

## Iran, Iraq Agree to New Payment Mechanism For Arrears

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani has said that the country and its neighbor Iraq have agreed to a new mechanism for settlement of payments related to Iraqi energy arrears to Iran.

In an interview with the IRNA just after his return from a visit to Iraq, Shamkhani said that Tehran and Baghdad had agreed to a new arrangement to use Iranian funds that remain blocked in Iraq because of US sanctions.

He said the funds will be used to purchase basic goods and to settle payments owed by Iranian merchants to trade partners in Iraq.

The top security official also referred to an agreement reached during his visit to the United Arab Emirates last week to facilitate the use of UAE dirham in trade ties between Iran and the UAE.

Shamkhani said financial agreements that he worked out in the UAE and in Iraq would positively impact the foreign exchange situation in Iran.

The SNSC chief and his Iraqi counterpart Qassim al-Araji signed a major agreement on Sunday to enable Iran and Iraq to boost security along their borders.

He told IRNA that the security pact with Iraq "is definitely regarded as a very important development".

## Raisi Administration Facilitates Trade Ties With Russia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce says that efforts made by the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi has facilitated development of exchanges between Moscow and Tehran.

Vice chairman of Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce Kambiz Mir-Karimisaid that both countries signed a ruble-rial trading agreement in last Iranian calendar year (ended March 20, 2023) and the banking and monetary cooperation is pursued by both nations.

The dual exchange rate and the difference of currencies with the free market caused some interventions in the development of the process of trading in ruble and rial, but the banking connections concerning monetary field have been created and it is working now, Mir-Karimi said. According to the official, the connection of Shetab, Mir payment systems between Iran and Russia is a very important measure.

Marketing, participating in exhibitions and exchanging trade delegations can pave the way for development of trade and economic exchanges between economic operators of the two countries, he noted.

Some Russian cities such as Kazan are mostly inhabited by Muslims; so, Halal food market in these regions can improve export opportunities for Iranian merchants, he argued. Russia and Iran also signed logistics agreements, including the increase of number of ships in the Caspian Sea and the enhancement of railways, waterways and roads of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), the official said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, he pointed to signing of free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) in the Raisi administration, which is a significant move in reaching a zero tariff of trade goods.

He further stated that thanks to President Raisi's visits and negotiations, Turkmenistan accepted to allow Iran's trucks cross the Central Asian country to reach Russia.

## Car Production Output Hit All-Time Record in Year to March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's vehicle production hit an all-time record high in the calendar year to late March despite a significant reduction in the production of foreign brands under the complete knock down (CKD) arrangement.

A senior official at Iran's industry ministry (MIMT) said that the total number of home-made vehicles sold in the year to March 20 had reached over 1.347 units, including 1.242 million new vehicles and some 105,000 unfinished vehicles that were completed and delivered to the customers.

Abdollah Tavakoli, who leads MIMT's automotive industries department, said the figure was an increase of 39% compared to Iran's vehicle output in the calendar year to March 2022.

Tavakoli said last calendar year's car production figure was in fact up from a previous record reported in 2014 when Iranian carmakers relied on CKD production for a significant part of their output.

Tavakoli said a monthly vehicle output of more than 133,000 reported in the calendar month to late February was the highest recorded in Iran since the country came under American sanctions in 2018.

He said vehicle production by private Iranian automotive companies more than doubled in the year to late March to reach nearly 195,000 units.

Iran's car production rose by 35% in the year to



March to 1.076 million while pickup truck production rose 56% to 125,000 units over the same period, said the MIMT official, adding that production of all other vehicle categories had also increased over the same period.

## South Pars Output Hits 2mt in 10 Month

TEHRAN (MNA) - The CEO of South Pars Gas Complex announced that since the beginning of the current Iranian calendar year which began on March 21, more than 165.32 billion cubic meters of gas has been produced in South Pars joint gas field.

Ahmad Bahoush said the gas has been injected into the country's trunklines and more than 1.975 million tons of ethane have been produced in this complex during the period.

He stated that the specialists and employees of the South Pars Gas Complex have been able to warm the homes of the compatriots by carrying out appropriate repairs, and innovative and effective measures, adding, "In the past 45 days of the winter season, the 13 refineries of the South Pars Gas Complex have injected over 25.841 billion cubic meters of gas to the national transmission network.

He noted the amount of gas output of South Pars refineries since the beginning of this calendar year, and stated: "With the efforts, collective wisdom and teamwork of specialists and employees, more than 165.32 billion cubic meters of gas has been injected into the country's national distribution network since the beginning of the year."

The CEO of South Pars Gas Complex, pointing out that this complex has become the country's largest gas supply gateway by supplying more than 75% of gas, added, "South Pars Gas Complex is the first company in the country in the field of using Iranian parts and equipment and first-time equipment from knowledge-based companies."

## Access to Broadband Internet In Iran Rose 6.11% in 2022

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's telecoms regulator says access to broadband internet rose by 6.11% in the country last year.

Access to broadband internet in Iran rose by 6.11% in the year to December 21, 2022, according to latest figures released by the country's telecoms regulator (CRA).

CRA figures cited in a report by the official IRNA news agency showed that the number of internet subscribers in Iran with access to broadband services had increased to nearly 113.5 million in the year to late December.

Access to mobile broadband rose to over 102.3 million from nearly 95.7 million reported at the end of 2021, showed the figures.

However, the data showed that the number of fixed broadband users in Iran remained almost flat year on year in December 2022 at just over 11 million.

Broadband penetration rate in Iran reached nearly 135%, according to figures by the Communication Regulatory Authority which indicated that the country had still a poor record on fixed broadband with a penetration rate of only 13.17%.

## Germany's Military Gaps Cannot Be Fully Bridged by 2030

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's military cannot completely fill its existing gaps by 2030, Defence Minister Boris Pistorius was quoted as saying, as Berlin seeks to revamp its armed forces after Russia's invasion of Ukraine following decades of neglect.

"We all know that the existing gaps cannot be completely closed by 2030... It will take years. Everyone is aware of that," Pistorius said in an interview with Welt am Sonntag newspaper published today.

Already worn down by decades of underinvestment since the end of the Cold War, the Bundeswehr is in even worse shape than a year ago given weapons and munitions donated to Ukraine have mostly not yet been replaced, say experts.



## Ursula von der Leyen in the Running to Be New NATO Head

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen is in the running to be the new head of NATO, The Sun newspaper reported yesterday, citing a diplomatic source.

A number of NATO member states have suggested von der Leyen would take over the alliance this October, the report said. NATO's current Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg is expected to end his term as planned in October, after his mandate has been extended three times and having served for a total of almost nine years.

The Sun report, citing UK sources, also said Britain would likely veto von der Leyen, who was the former German defense minister, citing her poor track record in charge of Germany's Armed Forces.



## Finland's Far Right Aims to Oust Popular PM Sanna Marin



HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Finnish politics could see a dramatic shift to the far right in elections yesterday as an anti-immigration party aims to replace "rock star" Prime Minister Sanna Marin's Social Democrats.

The mother-of-one, who took office in 2019 as the world's youngest prime minister at age 34, is Finland's most popular prime minister this century, polls show. But the latest polls on Thursday put her center-left Social Democratic Party (SDP) in third place, behind the anti-immigration and nationalist Finns Party and the center-right National Coalition, which held on to a thin lead.

"It is a very exciting situation and it's hard to say at the moment which party will be the biggest on election day," Tuomo Turja of the polling firm Taloustutkimus told AFP.

A top spot for the far-right Finns Party, and a far-right prime minister, would be a first in Finland -- though the party has previously served in government. It currently looks set to top its record 19 percent from the 2011 election.

Traditionally, the biggest of the eight main parties in parliament claims the top post and tries to build a government. Marin leads a center-left coalition of Social Democrats, the Centre, the Greens, the Left Alliance and the Swedish People's Party of Finland.

While some view her as a strong leader who skilfully navigated the Covid-19 pandemic and the country's NATO membership process, others say her partying scandals and youthful behavior make her unfit for office.

"Sanna Marin is a polarizing character. She has fans like a rock star, but on the other hand, she has a lot of people who can't stand her," Marko Junkkari, a journalist at daily Helsingin Sanomat, told AFP.

The leader of the opposition conservative National Coalition, Petteri Orpo, has focused his campaign on the economy, accusing the government of irresponsibly increasing public debt.

"The outlook is very bad. Our public finances will plummet and this will lead to the erosion of the foundations of our welfare society," Orpo told AFP. Finland's debt-to-GDP ratio has risen from 64 percent in 2019 to 73 percent, which the National Coalition wants to address by cutting spending by six billion euros (\$6.5 billion).

Marin has defended her track record and accused the National Coalition of wanting to "take from the poor to give to the rich."

Support for the populist Finns Party has surged since last summer, spurred by rising costs of energy and other goods in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine. The eurosceptic party wants a hard line on immigration, pointing to neighbouring Sweden's problems with gang violence and laying the blame on its large influx of migrants.

"We do not want to go the way of Sweden. We are highlighting the effects of a harmful immigration policy," Finns Party leader Riikka Purra told AFP. While the party served in a centre-right government in 2015, it later split into two factions, one hard-line and the other moderate.

Only the hard-liners, which became the second-biggest party in the 2019 election, now remain in parliament. The Finns Party sees an EU exit as its long-term goal and wants to postpone Finland's target of carbon neutrality for 2035.

Negotiations to build a government are expected to be thorny. The former heavyweight in Finnish politics, the Centre Party, has plummeted from the largest party in 2015 to record-low support, after sitting in consecutive right- and left-wing governments for nearly eight years.

It does not want to continue in Marin's current coalition, clashing in particular with the Greens. Without the Centre's support, both the SDP and the National Coalition will have a hard time building a majority. And Marin has ruled out forming a government with what she calls the "openly racist" Finns Party.

## Russia Might Put Strategic Nukes in Belarus

TALLINN (Dispatches) - Russian strategic nuclear weapons might be deployed to Belarus along with part of Russia's tactical nuclear arsenal, Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko said, ramping up his rhetoric amid tensions with the West over the Kremlin's war in Ukraine.

Russian President Vladimir Putin announced last week that his country plans to deploy tactical, comparatively short-range and small-yield nuclear weapons in Belarus.

The strategic nuclear weapons such as missile-borne warheads that Lukashenko mentioned during his state-of-the-nation address would pose an even greater threat, if Moscow moves them to the territory of its neighbor and ally.

Belarus was a staging ground for Russian troops to launch their invasion of Ukraine a little over 13 months ago. Lukashenko, in office since 1994, delivered his annual address amid escalating tensions over the conflict in Ukraine.

Both he and Putin have alleged that Western powers want to ruin Russia and Belarus.

"Putin and I will decide and introduce here, if necessary, strategic weapons, and they must understand this, the scoundrels abroad, who today are trying to blow us up from inside and outside," the Belarusian leader said. "We will protect our sovereignty and independence by any means necessary, including through the nuclear arsenal."

## U.S. Extends Carrier Deployment After Syria Attack

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States has decided to extend the deployment of the George H.W. Bush carrier strike group to provide options to policymakers after last week's deadly attacks in Syria by -backed forces, U.S. military officials said.

The decision likely means the Bush strike group and its more than 5,000 U.S. forces, which are now in the European Command operational area, will not be returning to home port in the United States on schedule.

U.S. Central Command (CENTCOM) spokesperson Colonel Joe Buccino confirmed the carrier group's extension, which was first reported by Reuters.

"The extension of the George HW Bush Carrier Strike Group, inclusive of the USS Leyte Gulf, the USS Delbert D. Black, and the USNS Arctic, allows options to potentially bolster the capabilities of CENTCOM to respond to a range of contingencies in the Middle East," Buccino said in a statement.

Buccino also noted a scheduled, expedited deployment of a squadron of A-10 attack aircraft to the region.

One U.S. official, speaking on condition of anonymity, said the Bush strike group was expected to remain in the European Command area of responsibility.

News of the deployment came a day after the Pentagon doubled its tally of the number of American troops wounded in last week's attacks in Syria to 12, following the diagnosis of six U.S. military personnel with traumatic brain injuries.

The attacks also killed an American contractor and injured another.

President Joe Biden warned Iran last week that the United States would act forcefully to protect Americans. The Pentagon has estimated eight militants were killed during retaliatory U.S. air strikes against two facilities in Syria during the tit-for-tat exchanges triggered by the first March 23 attack against a U.S. base near the Syrian city of Hasaka.

The White House said on Monday that the incidents would not trigger a U.S. pullback from the nearly eight-year-old U.S. deployment to Syria, where American troops and local Kurdish-led partners are battling the remnants of Islamic State.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy on Friday denounced Putin's plan to deploy tactical nuclear weapons to Belarus as a reflection of Russia's battlefield setbacks and its increasing global isolation. Zelenskyy argued that it also means Lukashenko has yielded completely to Moscow's control, adding: "I think he no longer decides which weapons are located on his territory."



## Greece's PM Makes Border Wall Extension an Election Pledge

THESSALONIKI (Dispatches) - Greece's prime minister promised Friday to extend an existing wall across all of the country's land border with Turkey as he campaigned for the country's general election.

Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis, who called the May 21 election earlier this week, presided over a ceremony to sign his center-right government's decision to nearly double the length of the existing steel border wall over the next year.

The wall currently spans 37.5 kilometers (25 miles), and the government plans to extend it by 35 kilometers over the next 12 months. More than 100 kilometers of wall will be added to that by 2026, government officials said.

Border security remains a high-profile issue in Greece due to long-standing disputes with Turkey and a mass migration of refugees and migrants into the European Union during 2015-16 that largely was triggered by war in Syria and Iraq.

Mitsotakis and other officials accused their political opponents from the left-wing Syriza party of trying to undermine the project and to block the government's attempt to obtain European Union funding for it.

"I would like to express my regret that there are political forces in Greece today that are fighting this project," Mitsotakis told supporters during his campaign stop in Orestiada, a town near the Greece-Turkey border.

"Let them state their position clearly: Will they tear down the wall that we have already built and return to a policy of open borders? Or will they preserve it and help secure Greece's borders?" Mitsotakis asked.

Syriza officials accused the government of misrepresenting the opposition's position, adding that the EU's executive commission already ruled out providing direct funding for border walls.

"We are not going to tear down anything," European Parliament Vice President Dimitris Papadimoulis, who heads the Syriza delegation in the EU legislature, told Greek radio station Real FM. "And of course, we support EU funding for border security needs, like funds for night vision cameras and coast guard vessels."

Papadimoulis accused the government of pandering to far-right voters and trying to distract attention from a deadly rail disaster last month that has triggered public anger and cut into Mitsotakis' lead in opinion polls.

The government argues the wall has functioned as an effective deterrent against illegal migration, helping prevent more than 250,000 crossings at the land border last year.



## Trump to Face Criminal Charges In Hush Money Probe

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Donald Trump is due to be fingerprinted and photographed in a New York courthouse next week as he becomes the first former U.S. president to face criminal charges in a case involving a 2016 hush money payment to porn star Stormy Daniels.

Trump's expected appearance before a judge in Manhattan on Tuesday, as the Republican mounts a bid to regain the presidency, could further inflame divisions in the United States. A New York judge in a document unsealed on Friday authorized Manhattan District Attorney Alvin Bragg, a Democrat, to disclose that Trump had been indicted, but it was not clear when the specific charges would be made public.

Trump plans to fly to New York on Monday from his Mar-a-Lago estate in Florida and spend the night at Trump Tower before appearing in court early on Tuesday, according to a person familiar with the matter. Trump plans to return to Florida afterward, the source said.

Susan Necheles, a Trump attorney, told Reuters he will plead not guilty. Necheles said she did not expect the charges to be unsealed until Tuesday.

"I am not afraid of what's to come," Trump said in a fundraising email on Friday.

For nearly two weeks, Trump has been using the various legal troubles he faces to rally supporters and raise money as he seeks his party's nomination to challenge Democratic President Joe Biden next year in a rematch of the 2020 election. His campaign said Trump raised more than \$4 million in the 24 hours following the news of his indictment by a Manhattan grand jury.

The first American president to try to overthrow an election defeat, inspiring the deadly 2021 assault on the U.S. Capitol, has signaled he will continue to run despite the charges.

Biden on Friday kept his thoughts on the charges against his political rival to himself, telling reporters: "I'm not going to talk about Trump's indictment."

After word surfaced on Thursday about the indictment, Trump called himself "completely innocent" and a victim of political persecution.

On Friday, Trump lashed out at Justice Juan Merchan, the judge expected to oversee the case. Trump wrote on social media that Merchan, who also presided over last year's trial in which his real estate company was convicted of tax fraud, "HATES ME" and treated the Trump Organization "VICIOUSLY." Trump was not charged in that case, which also was handled by Bragg's office.



## Antibiotics May Not Help Survival of Patients Hospitalized With Viral Infections

LONDON (Dispatches) - Most patients admitted to hospitals with acute viral infections are given antibiotics as a precaution against bacterial co-infection, but this practice may not improve survival, new research suggests.

Researchers investigated the impact of antibiotic use on survival in more than 2,100 patients in a hospital in Norway between 2017 and 2021 and found that giving antibiotics to people with common respiratory infections was unlikely to lower the risk of death within 30 days.

At the height of the pandemic, antibiotics were prescribed for around 70 per cent of Covid-19 patients in some countries, potentially contributing to the scourge of antibiotic-resistant pathogens known as superbugs.

This new data, which has not been published in a medical journal, suggests there is "a huge overuse of antibiotics," said lead author Dr Magrit Jarlsdatter Hovind from Akershus University Hospital and the University of Oslo, Norway. The overuse and misuse of antibiotics has helped microbes become resistant to many treatments, a development scientists consider one of the greatest threats to global health, given the pipeline of replacement therapies in development is alarmingly sparse.

This latest research, which will be presented at next month's European Congress of Clinical Microbiology & Infectious Diseases in Copenhagen, involved patients who tested positive via nasal or throat swab for viral infections such as the flu, RSV or Covid-19. Those with confirmed bacterial infections were excluded from the analysis.

In total, 63 per cent of the 2,111 patients received antibiotics for respiratory infection during their hospital stay. Overall, 168 patients died within 30 days, of which only 22 had not been prescribed antibiotics.

After accounting for factors including sex, age, severity of disease and underlying illnesses among patients, the researchers found those prescribed antibiotics during their hospital stay were twice as likely to die within 30 days as those not given antibiotics.

The research team noted that the sicker patients and those with more underlying illnesses were both more likely to get antibiotics and to die. Other factors such as patients' smoking status could have also played a role, they said. "Doctors have to dare to not give antibiotics, instead of doubting and giving antibiotics just in case," Hovind said.

Given the limitations of a retrospective study such as this one, a clinical trial, which Hovind and colleagues recently initiated, is necessary to determine whether patients admitted to hospital with common respiratory infections should be treated with antibiotics, she said.



## How Vietnam Is Trying to Stop Rice Warming the Planet

CAN THO (Dispatches) - As a child, Dong Van Canh watched while the rice fields of Vietnam's Mekong Delta were set alight to make way for the next crop, blackening the sky and flooding the air with potent greenhouse gases.

Rice — Asia's principal staple — is to blame for around 10 per cent of global emissions of methane, a gas that over two decades traps about 80 times as much heat as carbon dioxide.

Usually associated with cows burping, high levels of methane are also generated by bacteria that grow in flooded rice paddies and thrive if leftover straw rots in the fields after harvest.

The message from scientists is: Rice cannot be ignored in the battle to cut emissions.

In the Mekong Delta, Canh, now a 39-year-old rice farmer, does not leave straw out to decay on the paddies — nor does he burn it, as his parents did before him.

Motivated by the memory of being forced inside his home on days the smoke was thick — sometimes so acrid it made him choke or faint — he joined an initiative that removes straw from the fields and turns it into mushrooms and organic fertiliser, earning a small income on the side.

"If we can collect the straw and make money, all of us benefit," he told AFP, running his fingers through a large, soft mound of straw, cow dung and rice husks that will soon become nutritious food for Mekong crops.

The program — organized by the International Rice Research Institute (IRRI) — is one of a handful across Vietnam and the region trying to steadily shrink methane emissions from rice production.

Many of the initiatives are not new but have been spotlighted since around 100 countries signed the Global Methane Pledge two years ago, agreeing to reduce emissions by 30 per cent from 2020 levels by 2030.

Several of the world's biggest rice producers, including Indonesia, Bangladesh and Vietnam, are on board — although the two largest, China and India, failed to sign.

In Vietnam, as the harvesting season draws to a close, farmers push carts overflowing with straw bales that will later be soaked and laid out to grow straw mushrooms.

Once the fungi are ready they will be sold before the farmers take back the straw and funnel it into a composting machine. Two months later it will be ready — and can be sold for around 15 cents a kilogram (2.2 pounds).

"In the past a few farmers did this manually but it took too much manpower and the cost was high. Now we've cut costs by half and we will expand to meet the demands of the market," said Le Dinh Du, a rice farmer who also heads the local district's plant protection department.

"The rice goes on a nice journey. We don't waste anything."

Vietnam's environment ministry says irrigated rice accounted for almost half of methane emissions in 2019. Climate-friendly straw management has been introduced and spread "widely to farmers and local agricultural officials" throughout the country, according to CGIAR, an international agricultural research centre.

How many practise what they have learned is unclear. Last year the World Bank said that more than 80 per cent of rice straw in the Mekong Delta is still burned in the fields after harvest.

The need to find solutions is pressing.

Unlike other crops, rice paddies have a layer of standing water, so there is no exchange of air between the soil and the atmosphere, explained Bjoern Ole Sander, a senior scientist at the IRRI in Hanoi.

These conditions mean different bacteria are active in rice, compared to wheat or maize fields.

"And these bacteria eat organic matter and produce methane," he said.



## Eating Live Microbes Found to Be Good for Overall Health

PARIS (Dispatches) - Consuming probiotics as part of one's diet has become a popular practice in recent years with many experts touting its benefits for having a balanced digestive system.

And recent research has confirmed that ingesting live microbes is indeed good for human health, measured in various ways.

Yogurt, kimchi, pickles, kombucha... Rich in probiotics (live micro-organisms consisting of various bacteria), fermented foods are hugely

popular at the moment.

According to research published in 2022, American adults' consumption of foods with live microbes has gradually increased over the last 18 years. And rightly so, since these foods are good for our health, especially for the balance of the intestinal flora.

A recent study published in The Journal of Nutrition, conducted by American and Irish researchers, confirms this.



**Don't Waste Your Time**

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

**www.DeltaHOME.ir**

The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

**HOME**  
Real Estate

Member of **DELTA** Real Estate Group  
(021) 88888865



## Vietnam Growth Slows as Exports Slump

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam's economic growth slowed in the first quarter of the year as exports slumped due to reduced consumer demand, authorities said.

The communist manufacturing hub's economy expanded by 3.32 per cent in the January-March period, down from 5.05 per cent in the same period of 2022.

Vietnam is one of the world's largest exporters of clothing, footwear and furniture but in the first quarter of 2023 the country faced "unstable and complicated developments in the world economy", the General Statistics Office (GSO) said in a statement.



## UNDP Seeks \$550m to drive Sustainable Recovery in Quake-Hit Turkey

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) has launched an appeal for \$550 million to fund 31 projects aimed at supporting the sustainable recovery of the earthquake-hit southern region of Turkey, and is calling on international donors to contribute and support the efforts.

The projects are focused on areas such as housing, health care, education and livelihoods, and are designed to assist the government and people of Turkey in their efforts to rebuild and recover from the quakes that all but leveled the southeastern region on Feb. 6.

The UNDP's call comes following an international donor conference that took place in Brussels a week ago, mobilizing \$6.5 billion in support for the earthquake response in Türkiye.

The conference featured a presentation of the findings of the Türkiye Earthquakes Recovery and Reconstruction Assessment (TERRA), an analysis of the disaster's financial impact conducted with support from the UNDP, U.N., European Union and World Bank.

According to TERRA, the estimated loss and damage caused by the earthquakes amount to \$103.6 billion.

The twin earthquakes last month struck an area of 110,000 square kilometers (42,471 square miles), killing more than 50,000 people.

According to the UNDP, the disaster displaced 3.3 million people, more than 20% of the region's total population, and destroyed over 301,000 buildings.

Based on the findings of TERRA, the UNDP has prepared a roadmap offering 31 projects for "building back better" in the quake-hit region.

The organization is seeking \$550 million in funding to implement the projects it is proposing to support a sustainable recovery.

"The scope of the destruction is unprecedented," UNDP representative in Türkiye Louisa Vinton told Anadolu Agency (AA). "This is why we expect equally unprecedented commitments from global donors."

She said the projects the UNDP is proposing are aimed at restoring livelihoods, social services and cultural heritage.

"Reconstruction is not just about bricks and mortar, but also lives and livelihoods. People need secure employment to ensure a steady income, they need public services such as health care and education, and they need to be able to shop, relax and socialize with other people," said Vinton.

"In short, they need to get back to normal life as soon as possible. At UNDP, we are already working in the region on projects that put people at the forefront of the recovery and rebuilding efforts."

According to the UNDP's roadmap for a sustainable recovery in the region, reconstruction activities and development-oriented programs are needed to restore livelihoods and create new income and employment opportunities in the region to "halt and then reverse the ongoing exodus of the workforce" from the region.

The reconstruction in the quake-hit region offers opportunities to incorporate green and climate-resilient solutions into the recovery, the UNDP said.

## World Bank Warns of Lost Decade of Growth on China-Led Slowdown

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - An anticipated economic slowdown in China is likely to drag global growth down to its lowest level this century, the World Bank said Monday, proposing measures to prevent a "lost decade" of growth.

The world's potential growth - its maximum long-term growth rate without sparking inflation - will slow to an average annual rate of just 2.2% this decade, the World Bank said in a statement.

A confluence of factors, including the lingering impact of the Covid-19 pandemic, the war in Ukraine and the ongoing risks to the financial sector in Europe and the United States, are all acting to slow the global economy, which the bank expects to expand by just 1.7% this year.

The Washington-based multilateral lender predicts that China's economy will help keep the global economy from entering a recession due to an annual growth rate of 5% this year.

But its ability to keep the world's economy afloat will wane as its growth slows in the years ahead, the bank said.

"We've grown used to China being the tractor of the global economy, and that will have to change because China's growth rate is going to go down over time," World Bank Chief Economist Indermit Gill said during a press conference on Monday.

"Then the question is, what will we replace China with?" he said.

The answer, according to the bank, is a solution that looks to capitalize on the biggest structural changes that each country can make to keep the economy running.

The bank report said the global economy needed to make three main changes to help lift potential growth higher: greater investment in capital and human capital, working for longer hours and using more technology to boost productivity.

"China won't be replaced by one country," Gill said. "What we have to do is figure out how every country can do better."



## China Handed \$240b Bailout Loans to "Belt and Road" Countries

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has provided \$240 billion in bailout loans to 22 developing nations between 2008 and 2021, soaring in recent years as more have struggled to repay loans spent building "Belt and Road" (BRI) infrastructure, a study published showed.

Almost 80% of the lending was made between 2016 and 2021, mainly to middle-income countries, Argentina, Mongolia, Pakistan and Turkey, according to the report by researchers from the World Bank, Harvard Kennedy School, AidData and the Kiel Institute for the World Economy.

Around the world, BRI nations have come under strain as soaring inflation and interest rates, compounded by the lingering impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, have hurt their ability to repay debts.

The report says the bailouts allow the countries to extend their loans and remain solvent. China says over 150 countries have signed up to the BRI, a trillion-dollar global infrastructure push unveiled by President Xi Jinping a decade ago.

Beijing says the initiative aims to deepen friendly trade relations with other nations, particularly in the developing world.

But critics have long accused China of luring lower-income countries into debt traps by offering huge, unaffordable loans.

"China has developed a system of 'Bailouts on the Belt and Road' that help recipient countries to avoid default, and continue servicing their BRI debts, at least in the short run," the report said.

China has lent hundreds of billions of dollars to build infrastructure in developing countries. Still, lending has tailed off since 2016 as many projects have failed to pay the expected financial dividends.

"Beijing is ultimately trying to rescue its own banks. That's why it has gotten into the risky business of international bailout lending," said Carmen Reinhart, a former World Bank chief economist and one of the study's authors.

The study found that Chinese loans to countries in debt distress soared from less than 5% of its overseas lending portfolio in 2010 to 60% in 2022.

Argentina received the most, with \$111.8 billion, followed by Pakistan with \$48.5 billion and Egypt with \$15.6 billion. Nine countries received less than \$1 billion.

The People's Bank of China's (PBOC) swap lines accounted for \$170 billion of the financing, including in Suriname, Sri Lanka and Egypt. Bridge loans or balance of payments support by Chinese state-owned banks and companies was \$70 billion. Rollovers of both kinds of loans were \$140 billion.

The study was critical of some central banks potentially using the PBOC swap lines to pump up their foreign exchange reserve figures artificially.

## Six Parties Elected to Kazakh Parliament

ASTANA (Dispatches) - Six parties were elected to the Mazhilis, the lower chamber of the Kazakh Parliament, on March 19, out of seven parties that participated in the election, according to the final results announced by the Central Election Commission (CEC) at a March 27 meeting.

These six parties received enough votes to pass the required five percent threshold to gain seats in Parliament. Amanat party won a majority with 53.9 percent or 3,431,510 votes, Aul People's Patriotic Democratic Party received 10.9 percent or 693,938 votes, Respublica party - 8.59 percent or 547,154 votes, Aq Jol Democratic Party - 8.41 percent or 535,139 votes, People's Party of Kazakhstan - 6.8 percent or 432,920 votes, and National Social Democratic Party - 5.2 percent or 331,058 votes.

Baytaq received only 2.3 percent. Nearly 3.9 percent, or 248,291 voters, chose the 'against all' option on the ballot.

Based on these results, the Amanat party will have 40 seats in the Mazhilis, the Aul party - eight seats, the Respublica party - six seats, the People's Party - five seats, Aq Jol party - six seats, and the National Social Democratic Party - four seats.

Some 6,366,441 people out of more than 12 million eligible voters cast their ballots in the Mazhilis and maslikhat (local representative body) election on March 19, hitting a voter turnout of over 54 percent.

The election on March 19 took place under the new rules stemming from the changes to the Constitution adopted last year.

## Risks to Financial Stability Have Increased

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Risks to financial stability have increased, International Monetary Fund (IMF) chief Kristalina Georgieva warned, as she stressed "the need for vigilance" following the recent turmoil in the banking sector.

Speaking at a forum in Beijing, the IMF managing director said she expected 2023 "to be another challenging year," with global growth slowing to below 3% due to the war in Ukraine, monetary tightening, and "scarring" from the pandemic.

"Uncertainties are exceptionally high," with the outlook for the global economy likely to remain weak over the medium term; she told the China Development Forum.

"It is also clear that risks to financial stability have increased," she added.

"At a time of higher debt levels, the rapid transition from a prolonged period of low-interest rates to much higher rates - necessary to fight inflation - inevitably generates stresses and vulnerabilities, as evidenced by recent developments in the banking sector in some advanced economies."

Her comments came after the financial sector was shaken by the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and the enforced takeover of Swiss bank Credit Suisse by rival UBS, leading to fears of contagion.

Bank shares tumbled on Friday as fears about the financial sector's health resurfaced. German Chancellor Olaf Scholz was forced to give reassurances about Deutsche Bank after the long-troubled lender became a focus of investor concerns.

Georgieva said policymakers had acted decisively in response to financial stability risks. "These actions have eased market stress to some extent, but uncertainty is high, underscoring the need for vigilance," she said.

The IMF chief, however, pointed to China's rebound as a bright spot for the world economy. The IMF forecasts China's economy to grow 5.2% this year, driven by a rebound in private consumption as it reopens after its pandemic isolation.

"The robust rebound means China is set to account for around one-third of global growth in 2023 - giving a welcome lift to the world economy," she said.

"A 1.0% point increase in gross domestic product (GDP) growth in China leads to 0.3% point increase in growth in other Asian economies, on average - a welcome boost."

Georgieva urged China's policymakers to seek to raise productivity and rebalance the economy away from investment and towards more stable consumption-driven growth.

"Market-oriented reforms to level the playing field between the private sector and state-owned enterprises, together with investments in education, would significantly lift the economy's productive capacity," she said.

## Canada Forecasts Lower 2023 Growth



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada could fall into a "shallow recession" this year, according to a worst-case scenario outlined in the government's budget yesterday, but Ottawa is planning for a slightly brighter outlook.

Private sector economists surveyed by Ottawa forecast gross domestic product ranging from a contraction of 0.2 per cent to growth of 1.6 per cent.

The government pegged economic growth at just 0.3 per cent, rebounding to 1.5 per cent in 2024 - both figures down from previous estimates.

Finance Minister Chrystia Freeland's budget presented 15 to 30 per cent tax credits to spur investment in tidal and nuclear energy, as well as extraction of critical minerals for EV batteries - seeking to narrow a gap with US subsidies for clean technologies.

It offered targeted inflation relief such as a grocery rebate for "the most vulnerable still feeling the bite of higher prices."

Freeland also highlighted money recently announced for health care, and a new dental care plan for up to nine million uninsured Canadians.

The government vowed to crack down on hidden fees and predatory lending, and to bring in "right to repair" rules for electronics and home appliances, as well as common charging standards for phones and computers - similar to the EU - to cut costs and waste.

Freeland had already slashed spending after doling out pandemic aid that pushed the national debt to a record C\$1.2 trillion (RM3.9 trillion).

Yesterday, she reported a lower deficit in fiscal 2023-2024 than originally expected to C\$40.1 billion.

Canada's debt-to-GDP ratio, meanwhile, is expected to rise slightly to 43.5 per cent before falling in subsequent years.

## Iran to Launch Zafar-2 Satellite in Coming Weeks

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology Issa Zarepour recently has said that the country will soon put the domestically-built satellite Zafar-2 (Triumph-2) into orbit. Zarepour stated that it is predicted the satellite Zafar-2 put into orbit in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (starting March 20, 2023). Earlier, Mansour Anbia, Dean of Iran University of Science and Technology (IUST) said the university has so far built four satellites, with Navid being the first satellite built in 2011, Mobin as the second one launched in 2013, and Zafar 1 in 2015. Zafar 2 is the fourth satellite built by IUST, Anbia said, adding that 64 pieces are used to make a satellite.



## Global Emissions Trading Raised a Record \$63b in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - Emissions Trading Systems (ETS) raised a record \$63 billion for governments last year, as the energy crisis pushed policymakers to double down on decarbonization efforts, intergovernmental forum International Carbon Action Partnership (ICAP) said in a new report.

ETSs generally set the total amount of greenhouse gases that can be emitted by operators or sectors. The cap is gradually reduced so that total emissions drop. In jurisdictions with ETSs, operators buy or receive emission allowances, which can be traded as needed.

"ETSs are generating record level of revenues that can be used to both deliver further GHG reductions and to alleviate the burden on low-income communities and households, either directly via rebates or indirectly, such as funding energy efficiency improvements in state housing," ICAP said.

Currently, there are 28 such systems operating around the world, and 21 at different stages of development and consideration, the report noted.

"As a result of higher allowance prices and an increasing use of auctioning, more than half of the total revenue raised by ETSs since 2008 was collected in 2021 and 2022, with many governments channeling these resources back into further climate action, subsidizing emerging technologies, or supporting lower-income households," ICAP said.

"Emissions trading sends an important price signal to direct investment to decarbonization and can also, if designed well, ensure an inclusive and just transition



by directing help to those communities which need it the most," said Stefano De Clara, Head of the ICAP Secretariat.

In the EU, the biggest ETS market in the world, the allowance price averaged \$83.10 per metric ton of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO2e) in 2022.

According to ICAP's report, prices in the world's emissions trading systems ended 2022 largely unchanged on the year.

Last year also saw three new ETSs come into effect, while an additional 20 ETSs are currently under development or consideration, particularly in Latin America and Asia. The year 2022 also saw the first concrete steps toward compliance emissions trading in Africa.

### Iran to Continue...

FROM PAGE 1

Turning to recent riots in Iran, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution stressed that several Western presidents openly supported the internal riots in Iran while several other western governments supported the unrest not only verbally but by providing weapons and financial aid. "But what happened on the scene was the opposite of what they wanted. The Islamic Republic (of Iran) showed that it is strong," he emphasized.

"Westerners tried to isolate Iran earlier. What happened had the opposite result. Yes, our relationship with the West weakened, but we made our relationship with Asia one hundred percent stronger," Ayatollah Khamenei underlined, adding that the country will follow this track after on.

"We continue political, economic, technical, and scientific relations with the important part of Asian countries. We became a member of some of the important treaties. The enemy wanted to isolate us and failed. Our relations with the nations and governments of the region were strengthened."

Saying that Tehran seeks to establish strong connections with Africa and Latin America, Ayatollah Khamenei stressed that Iran is also ready to work with any of the European governments and countries if they do not blindly follow the US policies.

Emphasizing Iran's support for the Axis of Resistance, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution rejected the lie that Iran is involved in the Ukraine war. "We categorically reject any presence in the Ukraine war. And such a thing is not true at all," he said.

Ayatollah Khamenei also referred to America's role in the Ukraine war, stating that America waged the Ukraine war in order to expand NATO to the east and now while the people of Ukraine are in trouble and grappling with problems, America and its weapons manufacturing companies are making the most of this war in terms of profits. And for this reason, they stand in the way of the necessary things to end this war."

Meanwhile a day earlier and in his New Year address, Ayatollah Khamenei commended the Iranian nation for achieving great success despite the West's harshest sanctions and its attempts to undermine the Islamic establishment.

In a televised annual New Year address on Tuesday – the first day of the Iranian New Year – at the holy shrine of Imam Reza in the city of Mashhad, the Leader said Iran's enemies have "four points of strength" in the cross-hairs.

The Islamic Republic has made big headways in sectors including science, technology and defense, among others in the face of the sanctions, Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The enemy is seeking to change the very nature of the Islamic Republic, the Leader stated, by resorting to all means at its disposal. Through attempts to polarize the nation and disappoint the young generation, Ayatollah Khamenei argued, the enemy looks for an establishment in Iran fully in sync with the way of the global arrogance and imperialism.

The Leader also referred to the recent riots in Iran. He said the West, not least the United States and its allies, pulled out all the stops to support the disturbances with the purpose of undermining the Islamic establishment. But the Iranian nation, Ayatollah Khamenei said, gave the enemy a great slap in the face.

In remarks given during an address earlier in the day delivered from the capital Tehran, the Leader underscored the country's growth in the insurance industry, and its good performance in the fields of construction, water, gas, roads and environmental sectors.

The Leader called on officials to work hard to overcome difficulties and generate prosperity in people's lives and bring food to their tables, especially among the lowest stratum of society.

### Iran to Overhaul...

FROM PAGE 1

In recent years, Iran has expanded its role in Venezuela, sending multiple oil tankers to the country to cope with the lack of gasoline in defiance of U.S. sanctions, the University of Navarra's Center for Global Affairs and Strategic Studies in Spain, indicated in a report. "Maduro has turned to gold to pay for Tehran's services," it added.

Oil production plummeted under the Nicolás Maduro regime. While the regime blames it on the economic sanctions, official figures indicate a gradual drop in production long before the U.S. announced measures between 2019 and 2020, Voice of America reported.

"The relationship between Tehran and Caracas is more active, with much more opacity," Arellano said. "Even without the sanctions, technical support would also have been necessary due to inefficiency, incapacity, and the ideological vision that privileged the loyalists, weakening the industry."

In recent months Iranian technicians have inspected the refineries several times to prepare for the arrival of at least 400 Iranian workers, who will work with some 1,000 to 1,500 local employees and contractors, Reuters reported.

"For Iran, Russia, and China Venezuela is a token that does not add much in the geopolitical game, but neither does it bring higher costs. It allows Tehran a small element of expansion in a territory very close to the United States," Arellano said. "Having a bridge country, an ally, that supports, covers up, and is useful for shady business, is not a loss if in exchange you have a banner, a spearhead in Latin America for ideological discourse. Venezuela is fundamentally an ideological token."

As part of the close relationship between the two countries, Caracas will contract an Iranian shipyard to build two oil tankers to expand its own fleet. The tankers will cost \$67.5 million, Reuters reported. Third parties will operate the tankers to move crude oil amid sanctions that prevent the state-owned company from securing the seaworthy classifications and insurance to sail in international waters. PDVSA has an aging fleet of some 30 tankers that remain in jurisdictional waters due to lack of repairs, Miami-based daily Panam Post reported.

"We are facing a dangerous and delicate scenario for the Latin American region," Arellano said. "Venezuela is associated with aggressive, authoritarian, militaristic, expansionist governments, because both Iran and Russia show all this disposition; they promote hybrid war but also hot war when they need it," he said. "In order to maintain peace and security in the region we must highlight the importance, the benefit, and the need to defend liberal values, freedoms, and human rights," Arellano concluded.

### CBI...

FROM PAGE 1

The latest CBI report also lacks the price index changes of different groups of goods and services, unlike the usual procedure. Moreover, the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI) has not published its inflation report for the past month. SCI has been the only government entity regularly announcing the inflation rate in the past four years.

SCI said that the reason behind the delay is the process of changing the "base year" from the year 1395 to 1400, which ended on March 20, 2022. A base year is used for comparison in the measure of a business activity or economic or financial index. It can also describe the starting point from a point of growth or a baseline for calculating financial transactions.

"Due to the changes in the content of the market basket over time, according to international recommendations, it is necessary to change the base year at certain time intervals," the Statistical Center of Iran said.

Considering the devaluation of Iran's currency rial from 260,000 against one dollar to about 500,000 this month, the inflation rate is expected to hit new highs in coming months.

The inflation rate factors in numerous commodities and services but the one most important for Iranians is increasing food prices, with some categories doubling or tripling in the past 12 months. Official figures show there was a sharp increase in food prices and most items witnessed a more-than 50 price inflation.

### Tehran Slams...

FROM PAGE 1

"It is unfortunate that those in the global North who hold historical responsibility for this emerging global challenge continue to disregard their international responsibilities through their actions or omissions, especially towards developing countries."

Ershadi noted that humanity is facing a global, all-consuming, complex and multifaceted crisis that has immense impacts on all aspects of human life and global affairs, stressing the need for common solutions and joint efforts to tackle such a common, cross-border challenge.

She also pointed to situations and circumstances that prevent states from fulfilling their environmental obligations in full or in part, urging the ICJ to consider the well-established principle of common but differentiated responsibilities as principle 7 of the Rio Declaration on Environment and Development.

She emphasized that climate change has taken its toll on Iran in the form of a serious decline in rainfall and increases in temperatures and incidences of sandstorms and expressed regret that the final text does not incorporate the Iranian delegation's suggestion to explicitly request the ICJ to identify and consider those situations and circumstances which also preclude states' required actions.

"It also focuses unduly on one assumed cause of climate change. We believe it is necessary for the General Assembly resolution to ask comprehensive questions and for the Court to consider the matter holistically and comprehensively. The current resolution does not bring this clarity and thus lacks much-needed balance," the Iranian envoy said.

She recognized the mutually reinforcing link between the necessity of a healthy environment and the realization of economic, social and cultural rights as well as the right to development.

She also underlined that the linkage between human rights and the environment lacks not only a clear definition but also an understanding among states and does not appear at the core of international human rights treaties.

Moreover, unilateral coercive measures have prevented Iran from accessing vital technologies, knowledge and financial resources, she lamented, adding that Iran expects the ICJ to address the obligatory nature of developed countries' international commitments when it comes to their environmental obligations toward the rest of the world.

Ershadi expressed her country's readiness to mitigate its greenhouse gases emission compared with the business-as-usual scenario, subject to the termination of all sanctions, access to financial resources and the required technologies.

"Accordingly, Iran welcomes cooperation and partnership in the implementation of our globally agreed agenda," she said.

## Iran Diplomatic Apparatus Vows to Protect National Interests

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry has commemorated the 44th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic.

In a statement on Saturday, the ministry said Iran's diplomatic apparatus renews its commitment to fully defend the Islamic Republic in various international arenas under the aegis of the guidelines of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The Foreign Ministry also vowed to raise the proud flag of Iran on the peaks of power and sustainable development in cooperation with the Iranian nation while observing the principles of dignity, wisdom and expediency in the field of foreign policy. It hailed bravery of the Iranian people during the Sacred Defense against the Saddam regime's eight-year invasion of Iran and their resistance in the face of the anti-human crimes of the sanctions regime against the country's independence and self-reliance. Iran on Saturday marked the 44th anniversary of the establishment of the Islamic Republic on the back of a historic referendum, in which Iranians voted overwhelmingly in favor of departure from monarchical rule weeks after the collapse of the US-backed Pahlavi regime.

In a landmark two-day referendum held on March 30-31, 1979, more than 98.2 percent of eligible Iranians voted "yes" for the establishment of an Islamic Republic in the country. The vote, which was held less than two months after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, is considered a turning point in the modern history of Iran.

## Iran Oil Exports Up 0.76% to 2.65m bpd in February

LONDON (Dispatches) - Latest figures by the International Energy Agency (IEA) show that Iran continued to increase its oil exports in February despite the US sanctions.

IEA figures released on the agency's website and cited in a report by the official IRNA news agency showed that Iran had supplied an average of 2.65 million barrels per day (bpd) of oil to the markets in February, up 0.76% from export figures reported in January.

The figures indicated that Iran had maintained a sustainable oil production capacity of 3.8 million bpd in February, meaning that the country can reach that capacity level within 90 days and sustain it for an extended period.

The figures confirm statements by Iranian government officials suggesting Iran has continued to increase its oil production and exports in early 2023.

That comes following reports by international tanker tracking services showing that Iranian oil exports increased significantly last year compared to figures seen in 2021 to reach records not seen since the US imposed sanctions on the country's oil trade in May 2018.

Meanwhile Iran oil minister Javad Owji said that Iran will set a new record in oil exports in the new Iranian calendar year 1402 which started on Tuesday.

Speaking to national Iranian radio Radio Eghtesad (Economy), the minister added that 83 million more oil barrels were exported in 1401 (March 21, 2022-2023), when compared to the preceding Iranian year, and

nearly 190 more barrels were sold in comparison with the year of 1399 (March 20, 2020-2021.)

The oil ministry is among those departments that meet the country's need for foreign currency reserves, said Owji, continuing, "Despite the tightened oppressive sanctions against Iran, crude oil, gas condensate, and petrochemical exports have hit new highs during the 13th [Raisi] administration."

Turning to the objectives outlined in the country's budget plan, he said the major part was done by the ministry last year and its obligations were fully accomplished in 1400.

The minister described the industry's production as "desirable", recalling that Phase 2 of Abadan Refinery with a daily processing capacity of 210,000 barrels of oil was put into operation on the last day of the previous year, and also the refinery of South Pars Gas Field Phase 14 with a daily refining capacity of 50 million cubic meters came on stream.

Owji added the ministry has outlined plans to boost oil, gas, and petrochemical output, expressing hope that some projects will become operational this year and some next year.

The current government has drawn up plans to develop supplementary industries and complete value chain in petrochemical industry, continued the minister.

Iran has about 60 petrochemical complexes, stated the minister, explaining that their products are still raw and semi-processed while they need to go through the production cycle.

### U.S., Certain States...

FROM PAGE 1

On prisoner swap between the US and Iran, he noted that Tehran proposed a text in this regard from March 2022 and the two sides exchanged non-paper messages in recent weeks to update the plan.

Pointing to the role of Qatar in the previous negotiations as well as prisoner swap, he noted that Doha has always played a constructive role in this respect and it is expected to continue this path.

As to recent regional developments, the top diplomat said that the region is approaching to a high understanding of the realities; so, the regional players focus on dialogue, peace and security.

Touching upon the Manama-Tehran ties, he said that Iran has always welcomed natural relationship with Bahrain, and that the two sides have agreed upon dispatching technical delegations to visit their embassies and diplomatic hubs.

Asked about the impact of Saudi-Iran agreement on the situation in Yemen, he argued that Tehran has always tried to play a constructive role in promoting establishment of peace, stability and security in the region through political negotiations.

On potential meeting between foreign ministers of Saudi Arabia and Iran, Amirabdollahian said that they will decide on the venue and timing of the meeting in the coming days. He further pointed to China's role in the Saudi-Iran agreement to resume diplomatic ties, stating that Chinese President Xi Jinping naturally pursues the security of energy transfer as well as stability and tranquility in the region to implement its development projects; thus, the Chinese government follow up a constructive attitude in dealing with the West Asia region.

### Baku Urged for...

FROM PAGE 1

"It is expected from Azerbaijan's government to stay away from the trap set by enemies of the two countries' relations," he said, adding, "It is evident that the Islamic Republic of Iran cannot remain indifferent to the Zionist regime's plot from the soil of the Republic of Azerbaijan." Azerbaijan's relations with Iran were strained in January following an attack on the Eurasian country's embassy in Tehran.

Azerbaijan closed its diplomatic mission following the

incident and evacuated staff over what it called a "terrorist act," with President Ilham Aliyev blaming it on the "Iranian establishment."

This is while an initial investigation pointed to "personal and family-related problems" as the motive of the assailant.

Recent estimates show that Azerbaijan has become Israel's largest supplier of oil while Tel Aviv is now responsible for almost 70 percent of Baku's weapons.

## Yin, Kim Share LPGA LA Open Lead

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - China's Yin Ruoning fired eight birdies in a career-low LPGA round of seven-under 64 yesterday to grab a share of the second-round lead with Kim Hyo-joo at the Los Angeles Open. Yin, 20, teed off on the 10th at Palos Verdes Golf Club and was three-under through her first eight holes. She picked up four birdies in a five-hole stretch, including three straight at the fifth, sixth and seventh on the way to a 10-under par total of 132.

**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448  
**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450  
Editorial Board: 44253449  
**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395  
**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234  
**Website:**  
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

**E-Mail Address:**  
info@irannewsdaily.com  
**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:**Honar Sarzmin Sabz  
**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Argentina Bids to Host U-20 World Cup

A SUNCION (Dispatches) - Argentina has submitted a formal bid to host this year's Under-20 World Cup in place of Indonesia which was stripped of its rights to stage the tournament, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said. Argentina was the only country to submit a formal offer. The Fofa Bureau will decide whether to accept the proposal in two or three days with the tournament scheduled to start on May 20.

# Sinner Downs Alcaraz to Reach Miami Final

MIAMI GARDENS (Dispatches) - Italy's Jannik Sinner ended Carlos Alcaraz's hopes of the "Sunshine Double" and his reign as world number one, triumphing 6-7 (4/7), 6-4, 6-2 in their Miami Open semi-final.

Sinner will meet Russian Daniil Medvedev in the final while Alcaraz will lose his number one ranking to Novak Djokovic.

Medvedev reached his fifth straight ATP Tour final with a 7-6 (7/5), 3-6, 6-3 win over fellow Russian Karen Khachanov.

The disappointment for the 19-year-old Alcaraz, the defending champion in Miami and coming off a title at Indian Wells, will be tinged with frustration after he struggled in the third set with leg cramps.

It had been an enthralling and entertaining power-hitting performance from both men in the first set, won by the Spaniard after a tie-break, but an inspired Sinner fought back in the second.

Sinner broke in the first game and although Alcaraz broke back to make it 2-2, the 21-year-old Italian sensed his moment was arriving and showed confidence in his powerful groundstrokes.

Sinner broke again to go 5-4 up and then held for the set to end Alcaraz's streak of 21 winning sets.

The world number one was moving with difficulty and was broken on his first serve in the deciding set. Looking in discomfort, he crouched down on his baseline in between points and shot some worried and confused looks to his team in the stands.

Sinner lost his focus for a while, his blistering shots replaced by some conservative strokes but he soon regained focus as he ran out the winner in three hours.

The 27-year-old Medvedev, playing against his boyhood friend, survived a second-set comeback but his trademark precision stroke play saw him through against the big-serving Khachanov in a high quality encounter.

The contest saw a series of long rallies as Medvedev fended off Khachanov's thumping shots from the baseline and then pinned his opponent back on his service game.

Medvedev hit 13 aces and saved four of six break points as the match turned decisively in his favour when he broke Khachanov in the fourth game of the third set.



Medvedev won 82 per cent (14 of 17) of his first-serve points in the final set and was relieved to have beaten a player who knows his game so well.

"In my opinion, it was a top match," Medvedev said. "In the first set when we lost our serves, it was just a good game from the returner."

"In the second set, I had one bad game and he won the set. I had one break point, I could have done better. He had a break point in the first game of the third set, I managed to play well. He had one bad game in the third set, I managed to take it and I am really happy to be through. It was a very tough match."

While aware that a very tough test awaits in the final, the Russian said he was capable of beating any player on the tour.

"I have to believe in myself. I know I am capable of winning big titles. I know I can play well and beat anybody," Medvedev said.

"Carlos is on fire right now but you can't win 100 matches in a row. At one moment someone is going to put the water on the fire. It might be Sinner today, it might be me on Sunday, it might be someone else next tournament."

Khachanov said he had played at his best and felt he was a little unfortunate to end up on the losing side.

"To be honest with you, I think it was really one of the greatest matches, I felt from the beginning 'til the end in terms of level, in terms of speed, intensity, attitude, everything," he said.



## Messi Statue to Stand Next to Maradona, Pele at CONMEBOL Museum

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi stepped out of Diego Maradona's shadow by leading Argentina to World Cup victory last year and a statue of the diminutive forward will stand alongside those of his predecessor and Brazil great Pele at the South American federation's museum.

Messi, holding a replica of the World Cup trophy, stood beside the life-size statue at an unveiling ceremony at the South American Football Federation (CONMEBOL) headquarters in Luque, Paraguay before the Copa Libertadores draw.

The 35-year-old emulated the late Maradona by leading Argentina to their first World Cup triumph in 36 years in Qatar in December.

"I had never dreamed or thought about this," Messi said. "My dream was to enjoy what I liked when I was little, to be a professional soccer player, to do what I always loved in this life."

"I had a very long road, many decisions and defeats, but I always looked ahead and wanted to go for a triumph, for a victory."

"I think that is the most important thing, to fight for your dreams, that everything is possible and to enjoy the game, which is the most beautiful thing there is."

The Argentina players and coach Lionel Scaloni also received miniature trophies of the World Cup and the Copa America, which they won in 2021.

## Kvitova Downs Cirstea in Miami Open

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Petra Kvitova powered into the final of the WTA Miami Open yesterday with a straight sets victory over Romania's Sorana Cirstea.

Czech veteran Kvitova advanced to a Saturday showdown against Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina with a 7-5, 6-4 win in 1hr 41min.

In a battle of two of the WTA's more experienced players, Cirstea, playing in her first WTA semi-final in a decade, was fastest out of the blocks, taking a 5-2 lead in the first set.

But the Romanian, who is enjoying a revival in form having also reached the last eight at Indian Wells, failed to convert on either of the two set points she had on serve at 5-4 with Kvitova breaking twice to take the set.

The Czech's momentum carried over into the second set where she broke Cirstea in the opening game, her third straight break, and from then it was smooth sailing for the 33-year-old.

The two-time Wimbledon winner lost just seven points in five service games in the second set as she advanced to the Miami final for the first time.

It was a disappointing end for the 32-year-old Cirstea, whose performances have been transformed since she began working with Swedish coach Thomas Johansson in the off-season.

Kvitova's victory gives her the chance of her ninth career WTA 1000 title in what will be her 13th final.

The Czech hasn't won a WTA 1000 since triumphing in Madrid for a third time in 2018.

Rybakina beat American Jessica Pegula in straight sets in the other semi, played on Thursday, and is looking to complete the "Sunshine Double" having won at Indian Wells earlier this month.

Kvitova and Rybakina have met twice previously with the Kazakhstan player winning in Ostrava but the Czech enjoying revenge in Adelaide in January.



# Klopp Promises Liverpool Spending Spree After Anomaly Season

Champions League final 1-0 to Real Madrid.

But Liverpool's hopes of winning silverware this season are already over.

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said the Reds will spend in the transfer window to improve on a disappointing season but hit back at criticism of the club behind the scenes.

Klopp's men came close to winning an unprecedented quadruple last season as they lifted the FA Cup and League Cup before falling just short to Manchester City in the Premier League and losing the

A top-four finish is all that Klopp's side can now salvage from the campaign, but he said criticism of the club's medical and physical preparation was misplaced despite the role injuries to key players have played in a difficult season.

"(This season is) an anomaly but I would prefer we were still in the Champions League spot," said Klopp. "It doesn't change overnight, you don't lose all our brains and fitness and medical (department)."

"Things happen and then you have to react, but when you are a little bit unlucky in this direction then it's really difficult and the league is running away at that moment."

"That is where we were. The football part, we didn't deal well enough with setbacks through the season."

Attention has already turned to how Liverpool will strengthen in the summer, with Borussia Dortmund's Jude Bellingham reportedly their top target.

## Medvedev Happy at End to Wimbledon's Russia Ban

MIAMI GARDENS (Dispatches) - World number five Daniil Medvedev welcomed Wimbledon's decision yesterday to allow Russian and Belarusian players to compete in this year's tournament.

Medvedev reached his fifth straight ATP final with a three-set victory over fellow Russian Karen Khachanov in the semi-finals of the Miami Open, just hours after the decision from the All England Club.

"I'm happy to know about this. I always said that if I can play Wimbledon, I will be really happy to be there," Medvedev said.

"That's a tournament I love. That's the only slam where I haven't been in quarters yet. And I cannot say I hate grass at least. I kind of like it. So I really want to do well there. It's a beautiful tournament. And I'm happy that I have the chance to play this year," he added.

Wimbledon last year banned players from Russia and Moscow-allied Belarus after the invasion of Ukraine and the LTA also barred players from other events.

Elsewhere, players have been able to compete on their tours as neutrals, including at the other Grand Slams.

Competitors from the two countries will be able to enter the Grand Slam in July if they compete as "neutral" athletes and comply with certain conditions.



## Saka Needs to Learn to Deal With Growing Expectations

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal's in-form winger Bukayo Saka must learn to deal with growing expectations and attention, manager Mikel Arteta said, jokingly adding that he had a "stick ready" in case the hype gets to the youngster's head.

Saka, who came through Arsenal's youth ranks, has been in top form for the London club this season with 12 goals and 10 assists in the Premier League as they lead the points table.

The 21-year-old also stole the limelight for England during the international break, scoring a goal and setting up another in their 2-0 victory over Ukraine in the Euro 2024 qualifying Group C at Wembley. "He's going to have to deal with expectations of the media, with attention on the pitch," Arteta told reporters on Friday, a day before Arsenal host Leeds United.

"When you want to fulfil a role like the one he has at the moment, you need to be capable of doing that. So don't read too much, don't listen too much, just focus on what you have to do every day. That's it."

"And we always have a stick ready, don't worry."

Saka has bounced back brilliantly from missing a decisive penalty in the shootout in the Euro 2020 final and is tipped to be a serious rival to Manchester City's Erling Haaland for the Player of the Season award.

