

A Group of Iran's Top Officials Met With the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, in Tehran Last Evening on the 13th Day of The Holy Month of Ramadan

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister's Senior Advisor For Special Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji, and Syrian Deputy Foreign Minister Reviewed the Latest Issues Related to Mutual Ties as Well as Political and Int'l Developments in Syria

VOL. XXIX, No. 7737 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

WEDNESDAY APRIL 5, 2023 - FARVARDIN 16, 1402

2 DOMESTIC

Space Program of Iran Armed Forces Advances At Rapid Pace



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Iran-Turkey Two-Month Trade Value Hits \$921m



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Ukraine Mocks Russian Claim to Have Taken Bakhmut



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Medvedev Wins Fourth Title of Year in Miami



> SEE PAGE 8

Gov't Determined to Remove Obstacles for Boosting Production

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a 4-hour meeting with President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, a group of the country's top producers and entrepreneurs discussed the economic policies of the government and explained their problems and points of view in the field of solutions to remove obstacles and boost production.

In this meeting, which was held on Monday evening, the ministers of 'Economic Affairs and Finance', and 'Industry, Mines and Trade', Governor of the Central Bank, the Vice-President for Executive Affairs, and the President's Chief of Staff were also present, during which 18 of the guests represented the country's producers and entrepreneurs in various industrial, knowledge-based and agricultural sectors.

During the meeting, the representatives expressed their problems, points of view and suggestions in order to realize the slogan of the year, and the President listened to their words and views for almost 4 hours.

See Page 7

Tehran to Take Decisive Measures To Protect Its Forces in Syria



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has warned that the Islamic Republic will take decisive measures to protect its forces and interests in Syria against any threats posed by the United States or others.

Amir Saeid Irvani made the remark in a Monday letter to the UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and the head of the Security Council, stressing that Iran's presence in Syria is totally legal and at the request of Damascus.

His remarks came after two Iranian military advisers stationed in Syria were killed in an Israeli airstrike near the country's capital Damascus last Friday. Following the attack, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) issued a stern warning to the Israeli regime on Sunday, vowing retaliation for the killing of its military advisers in Syria.

Irvani's letter also came after the US ambassador to the UN wrote a letter addressed to the president of the Security Council in an attempt to legitimize his country's ongoing violation of international law in Syria by accusing Iran of supporting the so-called non-State militia groups.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran reserves its inherent right to self-defense under international law and will take decisive measures to protect its forces, interests, and facilities from any threat or unlawful act perpetrated by the United States or others," Irvani said.

He also strongly condemned "the unlawful military strikes by the US forces against civilian infrastructure in Syria ... which resulted in the tragic loss of innocent civilian lives and severe damage to Syria's infrastructure."

"The United States must bear its responsibility for committing such a heinous crime that has violated Syrian national sovereignty and territorial integrity, the UN Charter as well as the basic rules of international humanitarian law," Iran's UN envoy said.

The Iranian diplomat went on to say that Syria has explicitly and repeatedly stated that the presence of US forces on its soil is illegal and constitutes a violation of Syrian national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

On the other hand, he said, "Iran's presence in Syria is fully legal and based on a formal request and consent from the Syrian government to provide assistance and support [to Damascus] in the fight against terrorism." He emphasized that Iran is totally committed to "Syria's national sovereignty, territorial integrity, unity, and political independence."

"The United States must acknowledge that the continued plunder of Syrian resources, the ongoing occupation of Syrian territory, and its support for separatists are the main causes of the confrontation of the Syrian people against the United States military forces and it cannot place the responsibility for its blunders and crimes on others," Iran's UN ambassador said.

Iran Eyes Exporting Oil Products to African Countries

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Iranian deputy oil minister for international affairs said that the Oil Ministry has planned for having a strong presence at the African and Latin American markets by exporting its oil products.

Ahmad Assadzadeh made the remarks on Monday and put the total annual imports value of oil products by African countries at \$100 billion.

If just 10 percent of this lucrative market is allocated to Iran, the country would export \$10 billion worth of oil products to African states, he underlined.

Turning to the measures taken by the Oil Ministry for having a presence in the African and Latin American markets, he said that African countries enjoy a high capacity for bolstering cooperation in the energy field.

Assadzadeh put the oil refining capacity of Africa at about 3 to 4 million barrels per day, half of which is inactive, adding that suitable ways have been paved for Iran to export technical and engineering services to these countries.

Iran exported between \$600 and \$800 million worth of products to these African countries in the past few years, he said, adding, "With the effective measures taken in this regard, the value of Iran's trade with this continent has surpassed \$1 billion in recent years, showing a considerable hike."

Iran Set to Extend Gas Pipeline to Oman

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - According to the state-run Iranian news agency IRNA, the Executive Director of the Iranian Gas Engineering and Development Company, Reza Noshadi, announced that Tehran is currently carrying out an operation to establish a pipeline within the regions of Koh Mubarak and Minab, in order to export gas to Oman, which began construction on 21 March 2022.

In a statement, Noshadi indicated that the company's plans involve extending the gas pipeline by 1,000 kilometers reaching several provinces in Iran. As of the end of last year, 1,067 kilometers of the pipeline had been completed.

Noshadi also confirmed the start of extending 400 kilometers of the ninth national line from Iran's Isfahan province to the holy city of Qom, adding that the beginning of this operation for the first and seventh lines is a priority. He also mentioned that the company identified five storage plans.

The executive director also claims that the development of the pipeline project amounts to over \$1 billion as of now, potentially reaching \$3 billion this year. He added that the refinery will be Iran's largest.

See Page 7

Iran Annual Gas Consumption Up 1.25%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior official at Iran's state gas company the NIGC says natural gas consumption in the country rose 1.25% in the year to March 20 to reach a total of 242 billion cubic meters (bcm).

NIGC's head of dispatching operations Mohammad Reza Julayi said that consumption by households, businesses and small industries was responsible for 123 bcm of natural gas use in Iran over the past calendar year.

Julayi said some 71 bcm of gas had been supplied to power plants across Iran over the year to late March while gas supplied to large industries, including metals and petrochemical companies, had reached 48 bcm.

He said Iran's gas consumption over the second half of the last calendar year, when the country faced rising demand for heating, had reached over 132 bcm.

The official said, however, that Iran had managed to avoid any disruption to supply of gas to customers over the year to March mainly through better consumption management practices introduced by the National Iranian Gas Company.

See Page 7

Pakistan Wants to Boost Trade With Iran

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif has called for promotion of trade between his country and neighboring Iran.

Sharif was speaking in the capital Islamabad on Monday during a meeting with high-ranking officials from Balochistan Province, southwest Pakistan, which lies on the border with Iran.

He told officials from Balochistan Awami Party and Balochistan National Party that the progress of the southwestern province is a top priority of his government, and called for steps for promoting trade with Iran, according to the statement by the PM's office.

Zubaida Jalal, a lawmaker from Balochistan's Awami Party was present at the meeting.

She told IRNA that another meeting is scheduled for this coming Wednesday to follow up agreements between the two countries, adding that Prime Minister Sharif will chair the upcoming meeting in Islamabad.

According to the lawmaker, the opening of a border market between Iran and Pakistan, as well as gas projects, are among the issues to be discussed at the Wednesday meeting.

U.S. Discussing Freeze-for-Freeze Approach to Iran Nuclear Program

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Biden administration discussed with its European and Israeli partners in recent weeks a proposal for an interim agreement with Iran that would include some sanctions relief in exchange for Tehran freezing parts of its nuclear program, according to 10 Israeli officials, Western diplomats and U.S. experts with knowledge of the proposal.

The new approach by the Biden administration shows just how concerned the U.S. is about recent advances in Iran's nuclear program. The U.S. has not ruled out diplomacy on reaching an agreement to return to the 2015 nuclear agreement but did take it off the agenda last year over Iran's military assistance to Russia and Tehran's crackdown on anti-government protests.

Iran has amassed 87.5 kilograms of 60% enriched uranium, according to an International Atomic Energy Agency report from late February. Experts say that if that uranium is enriched to 90% weapons grade, it would be a sufficient quantity to produce at least one nuclear bomb.

The Biden administration started discussing the new approach in January and briefed its Israeli and E3 — France, Germany and the U.K. — allies about it in February, according to the 10 sources.

The proposal discussed included some sanctions relief if Iran froze some of its nuclear activities, mainly halting enriching uranium at 60% purity, according to four of the Israeli officials, Western diplomats and U.S. experts.

One Israeli official and one Western diplomat said the Iranians are aware of the U.S. discussions but have so far rejected the idea. Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs did not respond to Axios' request for comment.

The approach is similar to one led by White House National Security adviser Jake Sullivan and CIA director Bill Burns, who were senior members of the Obama administration in 2013 when Iran and world powers signed the 2013 Joint Plan of Action (JPOA), which included a short-term freeze on parts of Iran's nuclear program in return for partial sanctions relief.

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

Iranian Ambassador to Baku Summoned

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Azerbaijan said it summoned Iran's Ambassador to Baku Seyed Abbas Mousavi, in reaction to a diplomatic note from Tehran addressed to the country's Foreign Ministry.

"Emphasizing that what was mentioned in the note of the Iranian side about the Azerbaijani media does not reflect objectivity, a reply note was presented to the Iranian side, as well as a list of a number of articles published in the Iranian media against Azerbaijan," read a statement by Foreign Ministry spokesman Aykhan Hajizada.

Hajizada said the Iranian note was received by the Azerbaijani Foreign Ministry earlier in the day.

Space Program of Iran Armed Forces Advances At Rapid Pace

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri, the chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces said the space program of the armed forces is progressing rapidly.

Major General Bagheri made the remarks in a meeting with the personnel of the General Staff of the Armed Forces at the end of the Nowruz holidays.

During an address to the meeting, the top Iranian general pointed to different achievements of the Iranian armed forces during the last Iranian year of 1401.

"Last year, the armed forces took fundamental steps in providing security and defense, among which we can point to the missile attacks on anti-revolution bases of armed terrorists in northern Iraq; This made the Iraqi government commit to disarm and expel these groups from the country," he said.

Bagheri also pointed to the space program of the ministry of defense and said that the space program of Iran's armed forces continues at a rapid pace.

"Launching numerous satellites and placing them in orbit was another achievement made by the armed forces last year. We now have two satellites in space that transmit the necessary information and data each day," he said.

"Moreover, many espionage and terrorist plots designed by the enemies were



discovered and neutralized by the armed forces in cities such as Mashhad and Isfahan," he further noted.

"The intense situation that we see in the occupied Palestinian territories is not a small incident; because seven times the head of this fake regime has announced that Israel is collapsing," the top general said.

He further said that the current course of developments at regional and global levels indicate that the Zionist regime is nearing its collapse and the global arrogance is losing its power while the Islamic Republic is getting stronger.

The Iranian general added, "What one sees at global and regional levels ... is [indicative of] the fact that global and regional developments are weakening the global arrogance and pushing the Zionist regime toward collapse.... On the opposite, the power of our country and the resistance axis is increasing."

Baqeri emphasized that many American thinkers and even politicians have acknowledged this fact and "even the president of this fake regime has admitted time and again that Israel is on the verge of collapse... This is exactly our Leader (Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei)'s promise that they will not see the next 25 years."

Israeli Attack on Syria Is Violation of Int'l Laws

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice-President of Iran Mohammad Mokhber has described the Zionist regime of Israel's attack on Syrian soil as a violation of international law.

Such an attack is also an indication of the occupying regime's collapse, Mokhber told reporters on the sidelines of a funeral ceremony for defenders of the holy shrines held in Tehran on Tuesday morning.

During the ceremony, the participants paid tribute to the holy shrine defenders who were killed in Syria in the recent Zionists air attacks.

Milad Heydari and Meqdad Mahqani, two Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) military advisors in Syria, were killed near Damascus in an air raid by the Zionist regime of Israel in recent days.

In response to the Zionists' air raids, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Nasser Kanaani said two days ago that Iran reserves the right to respond to the state terrorism of the fake Zionist regime in due time and right place.

Iran, Turkey Confer On Bilateral Issues

TEHRAN (IP) - The senior advisor to Iran's foreign minister for special political affairs, met with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Turkey and the accompanying delegation.

In this meeting, Ali Asghar Khaji, a senior advisor to Iran's foreign minister for special political affairs, and Burak Akchabar, Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister, discussed the latest issues related to bilateral relations and regional developments while emphasizing the historical relations between the two neighbors.

Also, in this meeting, Khaji reiterated Iran's principled approach regarding the need to choose the path of political dialogues to solve the existing issues between Ankara and Damascus, and announced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to play an effective role in advancing the normalization of relations between these two countries.

In this meeting, Turkey's Deputy Foreign Minister Burak Akchabar also emphasized the importance of the role of the Astana process in the Syrian issue, and emphasized the need to strengthen coordination between the two countries.

Iran Eyes Boosting Cultural Ties With Muslim States

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance said that Iran aims to bolster cultural ties with Muslim countries.

Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili made the remarks in a meeting with Mohammed Hamid, Minister of Culture, Tourism and Crafts of Niger in Tehran on the sidelines of 30th International Exhibition of the Holy Quran in Tehran.

He hailed the exhibition as a good opportunity for expanding cooperation between Muslim countries.

The event could lay a proper ground for promoting joint interactions in other cultural and artistic spheres, he further noted.

The official expressed hope that Niger's participation in the international section of the Holy Quran exhibition will be the beginning of a new round of cultural communication between the two countries.

Fortunately, there are broad grounds for mutual cooperation between Iran and Niger, Esmaili noted.

He voiced hope that promoting the interactions would lead to holding joint cultural weeks in the capitals of the two countries.

Int'l Exhibition of Quran Biggest in Islamic World

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance has termed the Tehran-hosted International Exhibition of the Holy Quran a glorious event in the Islamic world.



Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili made the remarks in a session named reverence of the Holy Quran and holy books from the perspective of divine religions and international law held on the sidelines of the 30th International Exhibition of the Holy Quran.

He described the Tehran-hosted exhibition as the largest and most magnificent Quranic exhibition in the Muslim world. Currently, hundreds of thousands of Quran memorizers and millions of Quranic activists are active in Iran, he noted.

Quranic sessions are underway in numerous mosques during the blessed month of Ramadan in the country, he further noted.

Touching on the participation of male and female attendees from 21 states at the event, the official said that the ongoing event will help bring together the Islamic elites to safeguard the Quranic teachings and culture.

He called for unity among the Islamic states to promote the Quranic culture in a bid to confront the anti-Quran measures.

Majlis Speaker Urges Innovation In Hijab Promotion

TEHRAN (IP) - Majlis Speaker called for an innovative approach to the promotion of the Hijab and chastity in Iranian society.

Delivering his pre-agenda speech in the very first edition of the Parliament open session in the new Iranian, Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf spoke about the issue of the hijab (Islamic code of dressing) and criticized the enemy's fomenting disunity about hijab issue in society.

He also criticized the custodians of the hijab issue and called for new development and innovation in the promotion of hijab and chastity in society.

Qalibaf also called for distinguishing between those with poor hijab and those who break norms and different treatment each of them appropriately.

He further said: "A woman with a poor hijab is essentially different from norm breakers who contaminate the atmosphere of the society."

He stated: "Many of them who do not fully observe hijab believe in God and a positive approach should be taken to promote hijab to them. But the behavior of a few people that is not compatible with the traditional and religious beliefs of the society contaminates the atmosphere of the society."

Qalibaf added: "So they know that breaking the norm is crossing the moral boundaries of the society and the duty of the guardians such as the government, the police and other responsible bodies is to stop them from these actions using smart and effective methods."

Israel's Terror Act Will Not Go Unanswered

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Government Spokesman Ali Bahadri Jahromi says the Zionist regime has once again shown that when it is facing with internal crisis, it commits terrorist acts outside the border, which can be pursued legally and diplomatically, and will not go unanswered.

Speaking at his weekly press conference, Bahadri Jahromi pointed to the Israeli attacks on Syria once again and said: The Zionist regime has once again shown that when it is facing with internal crisis, it commits terrorist acts outside the border, which can be pursued legally and diplomatically, and will not go unanswered.

He added: During the New Year holidays, good news was published about the defeat of the United States against the power and legal reasoning of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He said: The International Court of Justice's ruling against the United States was a historic failure for the United States, which was addicted to violating international regulations and laws, and ICJ clearly recognized the legitimacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the numerous violations of legal principles by the United States and he has emphasized the damages and the necessity of compensation from the US.

Jahromi further added: "This is really a historical victory and a kind of international recognition of Iran's rights in cases of the U.S. hostilities."

He also said that President Ebrahim Raisi has accepted an invitation from Saudi King Salman bin Abdul Aziz to visit the neighboring country, Saudi Arabia, adding that the President welcomed the invitation of the Saudi king to pay a visit to Riyadh without mentioning that the date and time are not exact.

In response to a question, he said: "Being invited to Saudi Arabia, Ebrahim Raisi has also invited Salman bin Abdul Aziz to visit Tehran."

He further noted: "One of the main Raisi administration policies is enhancing and strengthening ties with neighbors, since taking the office."

He highlighted that Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Saudi counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud are determined to meet in the coming days and will discuss various issues.

He stressed that earlier the two foreign ministers have held talks three times.

On March 19, 2023, the two countries agreed to resume relations in an agreement mediated by China.

Iran Ready to Share Demining Experience

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The defense minister of Iran expressed the country's readiness to share its experiences in demining activities and programs with other countries and international organizations.

Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani issued a statement on the occasion of the International Day for Mine Awareness and Assistance in Mine Action, observed on April 4 every year.

"I proudly announce today that despite the increasing sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has cleared a large part of the mine-contaminated lands across the country and has also obtained the know-how to manufacture demining equipment in the efforts to carry its humanitarian responsibilities with reliance on its domestic capabilities," the defense minister said.

Describing Iran's demining experiences and advances in mine action as an asset to human society, the general expressed the Islamic Republic's readiness to cooperate with other countries and international organizations in the clearance of landmines and explosive ordnance.

Iran has been ranked in some reports as the world's second most mine-polluted country.

Landmine and unexploded ordnance contamination in west and southwest of Iran results from the Iraqi imposed war in the 1980s. Iraq's army, under Saddam Hussain, is believed to have planted some 16 million landmines in Iran during the war, polluting an area of over 42,000 square kilometers.

Iran, however, has made great headways in clearing the minefields by developing special equipment and training expert teams.

Transit of Goods Via Iran Stands at 10.8m Tons in a Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - As announced by the Iranian deputy transport minister, 10.8 million tons of commodities were transited through the country in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

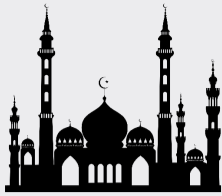
Shahriyar Afandizadeh also announced that Iran registered a new record high with the transit of 8.3 million tons of non-oil goods in 1401, adding that 2.5 million tons of oil products were also transited via the country in the previous year.

"Considering the transit of 7.5 million tons of non-oil goods in 1400, we have seen a 10.7-percent growth in the transit of this type of goods in 1401 compared to the previous year", the official said. "In 1401, we witnessed important developments and achievements in the strategic and operational areas of the country's transit, whose definitive effects will be seen gradually and steadily on the growth of transit from the country in 1402 and the coming years", the deputy transport minister further highlighted.

Afandizadeh then explained: "In line with the activation and development of the North-South International Transport Corridor, in a tripartite meeting in last September between the high-ranking officials of our country and the Russian Federation and the

Republic of Azerbaijan in Baku, while aiming to achieve the transit of 15 million tons of goods through this corridor by 2030, agreements were reached in the field of strengthening the cooperation of the three countries in joint investment and financing, the completion and development of key infrastructures and their exploitation, especially the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway line, facilitating cross-border traffic of goods and increasing the quality and quantity of this traffic", adding that the implementation of these agreements is being followed up.

He went on to say, "One of the most important events last year was Iran's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). In a short period of time after the meeting of the heads of Shanghai in September 1401 in Samarkand, the first six-party meeting of the transport ministers of Iran and the countries of Central Asia, in addition to Russia and Azerbaijan was held in Tehran in October 1401 with the goal of achieving 20-million tons of annual transit between Iran and Central Asian countries, as an area with a very high role and importance in east-west and north-south transit, especially after the recent regional and international developments, which was approved by the members."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:47
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:17
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:44

80. When the sorcerers came, Moses said to them: "Throw ye what ye (wish) to throw!"
81. When they had had their throw, Moses said: "What ye have brought is sorcery:
Allah will surely make it of no effect: for Allah prospereth not the work of those who make mischief."
Surah 10. Jonah (80 - 81)

Iran-Turkey Two-Month Trade Value Hits \$921m

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Statistical Department of Turkey in its latest report announced that the value of trade exchanged with the Islamic Republic of Iran in the first two months of the current year (January-February) has reached \$921 million.

The volume of trade exchanged between Iran and Turkey in the first two months of the current year has registered an 11 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year. Iran and Turkey exchanged \$1.38 billion worth of products in January-February 2022. According to this report, Turkey's export of products to Iran in January-February 2023 hit \$471 million, showing a 1.5 percent growth as compared to the last year's corresponding period.

Accordingly, Turkey exported \$464 million worth of products to the Islamic Republic of Iran in January-February 2022.

Another statistic indicated that Turkey's import of products from Iran in the same period hit \$451 million, recording a 21 percent decline as compared to the same period of last year.

Turkey imported \$574 million worth of products from Iran in January-February 2022. The balance of trade between the two countries of Iran and Turkey in the first two months of the current year in 2023 reached \$21 million in favor of Turkey.



The trade value exchanged between Iran and Turkey in 2022 had amounted to \$6.420 billion, indicating a 15 percent growth, the report added.

Meanwhile on Thursday, the Civil Aviation Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran (CAA) 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.

In recent years officials of both countries have decided to broaden their cooperation in all fields especially in their trade ties.

Iran Produces 95% of Its Livestock Vaccines

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The head of the State Veterinary Medicine Organization said that 95 percent of the required animal vaccines in Iran are produced in the country.

Seyed Mohammad Aghamiri put the annual livestock vaccines produced in the country at 365 million doses, saying they are produced in high quality.

The official further noted that 60 million doses of animal vaccines are imported into the country annually.

He went on to say that some animal vaccines such as foot-and-mouth vaccine are imported into the country from Russia, Turkey and Europe.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Aghamiri stated that the country produces about 3.5 billion doses of poultry vaccine annually.

The deputy agriculture minister also put the number of poultry vaccines needed in the country at 11 billion doses.

Some 7.5 billion doses of poultry vaccines are annually imported into the country from France, Italy and Spain, he said.

Handmade Carpet Output Up 10% in Year to March

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran National Carpet Center (INCC) has announced that Iran has seen a 10% increase in the production of hand-woven carpets in the past Iranian calendar year which ended on March 20.

Farahnaz Raafe' said that Iran had exported four million square meters of hand-made carpets to 15 countries around the world over the past calendar year.

Raafe' said that 40,000 new jobs related to hand-made carpet production sector were created over the same period.

She said that the United Arab Emirates was the top buyer of Iranian carpets last year, followed by Japan, Germany, Pakistan, China, Australia and India.

According to the official, the INCC has issued certificates of authenticity for hand-woven carpets produced in Iran in a bid to prevent other countries like China, Pakistan and India from presenting their carpets as Iranian carpets.

Export of Iran handmade carpet sees 10pc growth in a year

Iran's Exports to Russia 14 Times Less Than Turkey's

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Following the Russia-Ukraine war and the ensuing punitive measures, several countries replaced the U.S. and Western countries as Moscow's top exporters, but Iran lagged behind.

According to a report published by 90eghtesadi, a website close to the Islamic Republic's Conservatives, Turkey, Iran, India, Brazil, and the UAE vied for a share in the Russian market, but Ankara's exports were 14 to 18 times higher than Tehran's.

The report claimed that Turkey's exports to Russia from February 2022 – when the war started – to January 2023 reached nearly \$10 billion, but the Islamic Republic exported only about \$709 million during the timespan. Turkey's monthly exports to Russia were about seven times more than Iran's before Moscow's invasion of Ukraine but increased 14 to 18 times in different months during the past year.

The data of Russia's trade with different countries show that Iran has not been able to make good use of the opportunity created by Russia's war to expand its trade ties, the report said.

According to the monthly chart published by the website, in some months, the exports of Iranian goods to Russia hit lower than the monthly exports before the Russian aggression. The released data do not include any details about the commodities imported by Russia.

Iran, Iraq Agree to Re-Launch Tehran-Karbala Rail Project

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and Iraq have agreed to resume the construction of the Shalamcheh-Basra railroad and re-launch the Tehran-Karbala rail project.

Miad Salehi, the CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, has announced that Iran and Iraq have agreed to resume the construction of the Shalamcheh-Basra railroad and re-launch the Tehran-Karbala rail project.

The news was shared on Salehi's Twitter account following the joint economic commission held between the two countries, during which both parties reached agreements on accelerating the railroad's construction. The two nations also expressed readiness for forging a rail connection via the Khosravi Border Crossing, Financial Tribune reported.

Salehi expressed hope that the acceleration of these agreements will allow both nations to optimally benefit from the salient advantages of the project.

"During the joint commission of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Iraq, which was held yesterday and today in Baghdad, good understandings were reached with the officials of the new Iraqi government in the field of rail, especially the acceleration of the construction of the Shalamcheh-Basra railroad, and the two sides announced their readiness for a rail connection from the Khosravi border crossing of Iran [to Karbala]," he said.

According to a 2014 memorandum of understanding signed between Tehran and Baghdad, Iran is responsible for designing and building a bridge over the Arvand River, while Iraq is responsible for constructing a 32-kilometer railroad from the Shalamcheh border to the Basra Train Station in Iraq.

The completion of the Shalamcheh-Basra railroad is expected to have a significant impact on the expansion of trade between Iran and Iraq. It will also provide the latter with access to other countries, including Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and the northern regions, such as the Caucasus, Central Asia and the Far East.

Gov't Plans to Revive 8,000 Inactive, Semi-Active Economic Units

TEHRAN (MNA) - The government's representative in the economic units revival movement announced that over 4,200 inactive and semi-active units were revived in the country during the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), and the figure is planned to reach 8,000 units this year.

Referring to the motto of this year, which is "Inflation Control, Production Growth", Amir-Hossein Madani said the units to be revived this year will be knowledge-based, industrial and production, agricultural, mineral,

and service offering.

Stating that one of the policies pursued by the 13th government is investment making in industry and economy, he added that one of the main solutions for this purpose is the revival of inactive and semi-active units in different parts of the country.

As announced by the head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO), 1,714 idle production units were revived in the country during the past Iranian calendar year.

Referring to the Leader's emphasis on knowledge-based employment last year, Ali Rasoulzadeh said: "We have formulated a coherent operational package to support knowledge-based companies and considered incentives and advantages for giving land to such companies."

He added: "Last year, we gave land to more than a hundred knowledge-based companies, and we managed to meet 107 out of 378 technological needs of these companies, which were previously met from abroad, inside the country."

Pointing out that a good relationship has been established between knowledge-based companies and large enterprises, the deputy industry, mining and trade minister announced that 120 companies were added to the list of knowledge-based companies last year.

"We agreed with the Technology Department of the Ministry of Science to establish knowledge-based parks in industrial estates so that companies can take advantage of these parks", he added.

Referring to this year's slogan, which is "Inflation Control, Production Growth", Rasoulzadeh said: "We must control inflation and increase production because these two have serious effects on each other."

He called providing industrial infrastructure and supporting small industries as requirements for production growth and said: "Supporting small industries and providing their financial resources and involving the private sector are our goals."

IFDA Predicts Export of \$200 Million of Medicines This Year

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Head of the Iranian Food and Drug Administration (IFDA) said, "It is expected that \$200 million worth of medicines would be exported overseas in the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2023)."

Seyed Heidar Mohammadi made the remarks in an interview with IRNA and stated that medicine production growth is strengthened with the sustainable provision of exports."

With the studies made in this regard, it is expected that Iran would export \$200 million worth of medicines to other countries in 2023.

Presently, the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi has focused on supporting the production of medicines, medical equipment and powdered milk, he said, adding that the export of medicines, powdered milk and medical equipment has been restricted in order to meet the domestic demand.

It is hoped that the export of these products would increase next year, he emphasized.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the deputy minister of health and medical education said there is not any shortage in the field of provision of medicines in the country.

In addition to meeting the domestic demand, Mohammadi restated that \$200 million worth of medicines would be exported to other countries in the current year.



Iran, Russia Working on Integration of Payment Systems

TEHRAN (MNA) – Russia and Iran continue to work on the integration of Russia's Mir payment system with Iran's Shetab through specialized agencies, the director of the Economic Cooperation Department of the Russian Foreign Ministry said.

"Russia prioritizes financial and banking cooperation with Iran, given our common focus on ensuring the sustainability of the bilateral payment and settlement

infrastructure, independent of intermediaries from third countries. Work on the creation of a sustainable payment and settlement infrastructure is continuing through relevant agencies," Dmitry Birichevsky, told RIA Novosti last week.

In May 2022 Iran and Russia, having agreed to switch to mutual settlements in national currencies, discussed the connection of their payment systems - Mir and Shetab.

IME Posts \$474m Weekly Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- During the past Iranian calendar week (ended on Friday), Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed a trade of 2,424,272 tons of commodities with a total trading value of nearly \$474 million.

As reported by the IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,010,389 tons of commodities valued at more than \$235 million.

On this floor, the IME sold 1,226,196 tons of cement, 410,000 tons of iron ore, 264,037 tons of steel, 109,000 tons of sponge iron, 3,000 tons of aluminum, and 250 tons of zinc.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 406,986 tons of commodities worth nearly \$235 million.

Commodities traded on this floor included 104,396 tons of bitumen, 97,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 93,254 tons of polymeric products, 85,000 tons of lube cut, 23,332 tons of chemicals, 2,153 tons of base oil, 1,180 tons of petroleum products, 660 tons of sulfur and 200 tons of insulation.

The IME also traded within the same week 6,897 tons of commodities on its side market.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

Former Kosovo President Pleads Not Guilty to War Crimes

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - Former Kosovo president Hashim Thaci pleaded innocent to charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity as his trial began at a special court in The Hague, with protesters rallying outside in support of a leader once feted by the West.

Thaci and three co-defendants face 10 charges of persecution, murder, torture and forced disappearance of people during and shortly after the 1998-99 insurgency that eventually brought Kosovo independence from Serbia and made him a hero among many compatriots at home and abroad.



Bulgaria Set for Tough Coalition Talks

SOFIA (Dispatches) - Bulgaria looked set for lengthy and difficult coalition talks after a parliamentary election, the fifth in two years, again failed to produce a clear winner.

A bloc led by the centre-right GERB party of former prime minister Boyko Borissov won 26.5% of votes in Sunday's election, while a pro-Western reformist bloc led by We Continue the Change (PP) had 24.6%, according to preliminary results after nearly all votes had been counted.

"A temporary technocratic cabinet or another (sixth) snap vote remain the most likely outcomes of the election," said Andrius Tursa of the Teneo political risk consultancy.



Ukraine Mocks Russian Claim To Have Taken Bakhmut



KYIV (Dispatches) - Kyiv scorned Russian claims to have captured eastern Bakhmut, saying its foes had raised a victory flag over "some kind of toilet" and that Ukrainian forces had repelled nearly 20 attacks along the city's front line in the last 24 hours.

The battle for the mining city and logistics hub of Bakhmut has been one of the bloodiest of the conflict, now in its second year, with many casualties on both sides and the city largely destroyed by bombardments.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner mercenary force spearheading the siege, said on Sunday his troops had raised a Russian flag on the city-centre administrative building even though Ukrainian soldiers still held some western positions.

"From a legal point of view, Bakhmut has been taken," said Prigozhin, who has previously made premature claims. But Ukraine's military said fighting was still raging around the city council building, as well as in other nearby towns.

"Bakhmut is Ukrainian and they have not captured anything and are very far from doing that," Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for the eastern military command, told Reuters.

"They raised the flag over some kind of toilet. They attached it to the side of who knows what, hung their rag and said they had captured the city. Well good, let them think they've taken it," Cherevatyi added by telephone.

The Ukrainian armed forces General Staff said in an evening statement 45 enemy attacks had been repelled in total in the last 24 hours, with Bakhmut at the "epicentre of operations" along with the cities of Avdiivka and Maryinka further south.

"The enemy is attempting to take under full control the city of Bakhmut," it said on Facebook. "Ukrainian forces repelled nearly 20 enemy attacks along the front line."

John Kirby, a spokesperson for the U.S. National Security Council, told reporters in Washington that Ukraine was still fighting hard for Bakhmut, describing the battles as "quite, quite violent and quite close".

"Even if the Russians do get it, it isn't going to change the battlefield dynamics from a strategic perspective," he said.

Reuters could not verify the battlefield reports.

Lying on the edge of a chunk of Donetsk province under Russian control, Bakhmut had a population of 70,000 before Moscow invaded Ukraine in February last year.

Russian forces, bogged down in a war of attrition after a series of setbacks, are seeking a victory from their winter offensive but have suffered huge casualties around Bakhmut.

Ukrainian military commanders have said their own counteroffensive - backed by newly delivered Western tanks and other hardware - is not far off but have stressed the importance of holding Bakhmut and inflicting losses in the meantime.

Finland, which shares a 1,300-km (810-mile) border with Russia, was to join NATO on Tuesday, marking the completion of a swift journey into the Western military alliance following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, officials said.

Finnish Center-Right Eyes Coalition Talks

HELSINKI (Dispatches) - Outgoing Finnish Prime Minister Sanna Marin was left to consider her future after she conceded defeat in a tight parliamentary election on Sunday that handed her center-right rival Petteri Orpo the right to try and form a coalition.

Despite gaining three seats, Marin's left wing Social Democratic Party (SDP) came third with 43 of parliament's 200 seats behind Orpo's centre-right National Coalition Party with 48 seats and the nationalist Finns on 46.

That leaves Orpo with an uneasy choice of whether to court Marin's SDP, whose economic policy he wants to replace, or Riikka Purra's nationalists, whose climate-sceptic, eurosceptic and anti-immigration views he opposes.

"Orpo has two options: a right-wing government together with the Finns Party in which case he would struggle to find enough (smaller) allies," said Emilia Palonen, a senior researcher in political science at the University of Helsinki.

"The other option is an alliance (with SDP) and certainly Sanna Marin is ready to negotiate for that," with her party keen to defend public services and to make sure promised cuts are not excessive, she said.

If Marin, the world's youngest prime minister when she took office aged 34 in 2019, ends up outside of government, she may shift focus to a top job in Brussels, such as the 'Spitzenkandidat', the lead candidate of the European Social Democrats to head the European Commission, Palonen said.

In the run-up to the election, Orpo campaigned to "fix Finland" and its economy, vowing to curb spending and stop the rise of public debt, which has reached just over 70% of GDP since Marin took office in 2019.

In turn, Marin's Social Democrats rallied voters to support them in their defence of the Nordic welfare model of cradle-to-grave services from free education and affordable healthcare to decent pensions, against Orpo's spending cuts.

While a coalition bridging the left-right divide would not be a first of the kind in Finland, Orpo and Marin might struggle to agree on a joint programme for the economy, said Ilkka Ruostetsaari, professor in political science.

Trump in New York for Surrender, Opposes TV Court Coverage

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former U.S. President Donald Trump flew into New York City on his private plane to face charges stemming from a probe into hush money paid to a porn star, while his lawyers argued against letting cameras in the courtroom.

With New York taking security precautions and the mayor telling potential rabble-rousers to behave, Trump was due to surrender at the Manhattan District Attorney's Office on Tuesday and will likely be fingerprinted prior to appearing before a judge for an arraignment where he will plead not guilty.

Trump, a 76-year-old Republican seeking to regain the presidency in 2024, is the first former U.S. president to face criminal charges.

His plane - painted in red, white and blue with "TRUMP" in big letters on the side and an image of the American flag on the tail - arrived at LaGuardia Airport in Queens after a 3-1/2 hour flight from West Palm Beach near his Florida home.

Clad in a blue suit and wearing a red tie, Trump walked deliberately and alone down a flight of stairs from the airplane and climbed into an SUV for a drive in a motorcade to Trump Tower in Manhattan.

He got out of the vehicle, waved to people behind barricades set up by police for security purposes and walked into Trump Tower while making no public comments.

Beefing up his legal team, Trump hired Todd Blanche, a prominent white-collar criminal defense lawyer and former federal prosecutor, to join his defense, two sources familiar with the matter said. Blanche and other Trump lawyers on Monday urged the judge not to allow videography, photography and radio coverage of the arraignment.

In a letter to the court, they argued against allowing such coverage, saying it would "exacerbate an already almost circus-like atmosphere around this case" and "detract from both the dignity and decorum of the proceedings and courtroom."

Philippines Reveals Locations of 4 New Strategic Sites for U.S. Military Pact

MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines identified on Monday four more of its military bases that the United States will get access to, almost doubling the number included in a defense agreement that seeks to advance a decades-old alliance between them.

The expansion of the Enhanced Defense Cooperation Agreement (EDCA) underlines the Philippines' strategic importance to the former colonial ruler the United States, coming at a time of growing concern over China's conduct in the South China Sea and tension over self-ruled Taiwan.

The EDCA, signed in 2014 under U.S. President Barack Obama, allows U.S. access to Philippine bases for joint training, pre-positioning of equipment and building of facilities such as runways, fuel storage and military housing, but it is not a permanent presence.

The sites named on Monday are the Camilo Osias navy base in Sta Ana and Lal-lo airport, both in Cagayan province, and Camp Melchor Dela Cruz in Gamu, Isabela province and the island of Balabac off Palawan.

The locations are significant, with Isabela and Cagayan facing north towards Taiwan, while Palawan is near the disputed Spratly Islands in the South China Sea, where China has built artificial islands equipped with runways and missile systems.

Defence chief Carlito Galvez called the sites "very strategic" and stressed the Philippines had a responsibility to the international community in the South China Sea.

"That's a trade route... where more or less \$3 trillion trade passes (annually)," he said.

"Our responsibility to collectively secure that is huge." The decision of President Ferdinand Marcos Jr to expand the U.S. access was made in February but the announcement of the sites was delayed by opposition from some local government leaders concerned about being caught up in a future conflict between the United States and China.

China's embassy in Manila did not immediately respond to a request for comment on Monday's announcement. China has accused the U.S. of increasing tensions with its military deployments.

Marcos' office on Monday said the four locations should "boost the disaster response" and help humanitarian and relief operations, adding defending the east coast was also taken into consideration.

"Their locations are in areas where they are needed," said Jay Batongbacal, a South China Sea expert at the University of the Philippines.

"It also provides us with coverage not only on the West Philippine Sea (South China Sea) but also on the Pacific side," he added.



Sisi Visits Saudi Arabia Amid Financial Pressure, Regional Realignment

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Egyptian President Abdel Fattah al-Sisi visited Saudi Arabia, Saudi state news agency SPA said, as Cairo seeks financial inflows to ease pressure on its currency and bolster a faltering economy.

Oil-rich Saudi Arabia has long provided financial support to Egypt but recently signalled it would no longer provide such backing without conditions attached, which observers think may have sparked a rare media clash between the two countries.

The trip also comes amid a major diplomatic realignment in the region, with moves by Saudi Arabia and Egypt to ease tensions with Syria, Iran and Turkey.

Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman, the kingdom's de facto ruler, met with Sisi at the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah, where they discussed bilateral ties and regional developments, SPA said.

Other Saudi and Egyptian officials, including Saudi national security adviser Mousaad bin Mohammed al-Aiban and Egypt's intelligence chief Abbas Kamel, attended the meeting, it added.

Saudi Arabia and its Persian Gulf allies have repeatedly come to Egypt's help since Sisi led the ouster of Mohamed Mursi of the Muslim Brotherhood a decade ago.

When Egypt's financial difficulties were exposed and exacerbated by the fallout from the war in Ukraine last year, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Qatar made deposits in Egypt's central bank and pledged major new investments.

But those investments have been slow to materialize, putting new pressure on the Egyptian pound in recent weeks despite the currency's losing nearly half its value against the dollar since March 2022.

Egypt signed a \$3 billion rescue plan with the International Monetary Fund in December that targeted \$9.7 billion in foreign direct investment in the financial year ending in June 2023.



Insufficient Sleep Could Diminish Immune Response to Vaccines



PARIS (Dispatches) - Sleeping more than seven hours a night may help the body mount a better immune response to vaccines, according to new research.

Based on several studies, the findings of this meta-analysis suggest that getting less than six hours' sleep could result in a diminished antibody response.

Is it possible to boost the effectiveness of a vaccine by changing some of our behaviors or habits? That's the question posed by a team of researchers from the University of Chicago and the French National Institute of Health and Medical Research (Inserm).

Previous studies have shown that the immune response to a vaccine can depend on several factors, including gender, age, weight or smoking. Now, researchers are adding sleep to this non-exhaustive list.

The researchers found that people who slept less than six hours per night in the days surrounding vaccination had a blunted antibody response to the vaccine.

Conversely, people who got enough sleep (seven to nine hours per night) had a better immune response, benefiting more from the effectiveness of a vaccine.

"Insufficient sleep is a behavioural factor that can be corrected before vaccination and may not only strengthen, but also extend, the vaccine response," said the senior author of the research, Eve Van Cauter, professor emeritus of medicine at UChicago, quoted in a news release.

The findings, published in the journal *Current Biology*, were based on a meta-analysis of previous studies on the subject.

The American and French researchers also compared antibody responses according to the age and sex of the vaccinated individuals.

They found that the association between insufficient sleep and decreased immune response was strong for men, but that it was "not statistically significant" for women.

The researchers suggest that this difference was likely due to the fact that "none of the studies in women accounted for variations in sex hormone levels by menstrual cycle, use of contraceptives and menopausal status," their news release explains.

Moreover, the immunological impact of inadequate sleep was found to be greater in adults aged 18 to 60 than in those over 65. The study explains that older people tend to get less sleep in general, which does not affect their routine.

The researchers hope that their study will serve as a basis for further research on the phenomenon, with the aim of providing greater clarity on its effects on both men and women.

"We need much larger studies that control for the sex hormone environment in women in particular," said Karine Spiegel, PhD, first author on the study and a research scientist at Inserm.

"We also need a better definition of how many days of short sleep duration affect the antibody response, and whether it is just before the vaccine, or also during and after.

"Large scale studies that consider behavioural, demographic and hormonal characteristics should provide new insights that will translate to measurable impacts on vaccine efficacy."

Caffeine Could Reduce Body Fat and Type 2 Diabetes Risk



LONDON (Dispatches) - According to a new study, a high level of caffeine in the blood could curb body fat and the risk of type 2 diabetes. However, this effect may only be apparent in individuals with a certain genetic predisposition.

Previous studies had already established a link between coffee consumption and a reduced risk of diabetes. But this research remained observational. A new study, conducted by researchers from the Karolinska Institute, the University of Bristol and Imperial College London, used another approach to test this hypothesis: genetics.

For the purposes of their study, the researchers used the Mendelian randomisation technique, which establishes causation through genetic evidence. The researchers identified two common genetic mutations that affect the rate of caffeine metabolism in the body, *CYP1A2* and *AHR*. As a result, blood caffeine levels could be sequenced and analysed to see if they were associated with a lower BMI and a lower risk of diabetes.

From a sample of around 10,000 people, the researchers noticed that people with variations in these two genes metabolise caffeine more slowly. They don't need to drink a lot of caffeinated beverages to benefit from the stimulant's effects, because its absorption is more effective. These people have higher levels of caffeine in their blood than people who metabolise caffeine more quickly.

The results also showed that people with high levels of caffeine in their blood have a lower BMI and body fat than others. They also have a lower risk of type 2 diabetes.

"Our mendelian randomisation finding suggests that caffeine might, at least in part, explain the inverse association between coffee consumption and risk of type 2 diabetes," said Dr Susanna Larsson, associate professor in the Institute of Environmental Medicine at the Karolinska Institute, and lead author of the paper, quoted in a news release.

However, the researchers acknowledge various limitations to their findings, including the use of only two genetic variants and the inclusion of individuals primarily of European descent.

Still, the study may offer promising new solutions to treatment of obesity and type 2 diabetes. Benjamin Woolf, PhD student in the Tobacco and Alcohol Research Group at the University of Bristol, co-author who led on the statistics for the paper, added: "Randomised controlled trials are warranted to assess whether non-caloric caffeine containing beverages might play a role in reducing the risk of obesity and type 2 diabetes."

Mountain Forests Disappearing at Alarming Rate

PARIS (Dispatches) - Logging, wildfires and farming are causing mountain forests, habitat to 85 per cent of the world's birds, mammals and amphibians, to vanish at an alarming rate, according to a study published yesterday.

Mountain forests covered 1.1 billion hectares (2.71 billion acres) of the planet in 2000, the authors of the study published in the *Cell Press* journal *One Earth* said.

But at least 78.1 million hectares — an area larger than the US state of Texas — have been lost between 2000 and 2018,

with recent losses 2.7-fold greater than at the beginning of the century.

Key drivers of the loss are commercial logging, wildfires, "slash-and-burn" cultivation and commodity agriculture, said the authors from China's Southern University of Science and Technology and the University of Leeds.

Of particular concern, they said, is that heavy forest losses have occurred in mountain areas that are "tropical biodiversity hotspots" — refuges for rare and endangered species.



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



Turkey's Trade Deficit Jumps 51.4% in February

ANKARA (Dispatches) – Turkey's foreign trade deficit surged 51.4% on an annual basis to \$12.08 billion (TL 231.78 billion) in February, official data highlighted. Imports jumped by 10.1% to \$30.71 billion, while exports fell by 6.4% to \$18.64 billion, as per data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat). The exports-to-imports coverage ratio decreased to 60.7%, versus 71.4% in February 2022. Excluding energy products and non-monetary gold, Turkey saw a foreign trade deficit of \$2.5 billion last month, the data suggested. Most of Turkey's outbound shipments went to Germany with a worth of \$1.7 billion.



Europe's Inflation Eases to 6.9% As Energy Falls But Food Up

LONDON (Dispatches) - Inflation in the 20 countries that use the euro currency slowed to the lowest level in a year as energy prices dropped, but food costs were still on the rise, keeping pressure on the European Central Bank to hike interest rates further. Consumer prices in the eurozone jumped 6.9% in March from a year earlier, down from 8.5% in February, according to data released by the European Union's statistics agency, Eurostat.

Eurozone inflation has been easing since peaking at 10.6% in October, and the latest figure is slightly below what most economists had expected. It reflects significant drops in some of the continent's bigger economies like Spain and the Netherlands, where inflation halved in March.

Economists looked beyond the headline number to focus on so-called core inflation, which increased to a record 5.7% from 5.6% the previous month. Core inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, can give a better sense of whether inflation is becoming entrenched in the economy over the longer term.

"The potential for core inflation to remain stickier than hoped will be the main reason for the ECB to continue to hike in the near term," said Bert Colijn, ING Bank's senior eurozone economist.

Bank President Christine Lagarde said Friday that core inflation is "significantly too high" and that the ECB "has more ground to cover" to get inflation back to its 2% goal.

Speaking to students in Florence, Italy, she reiterated that the central bank will rely on incoming data to make its future interest rate decisions and "will do whatever is necessary" to bring down price spikes, while noting that recent financial turmoil and geopolitical tensions have created uncertainty.

Central bankers' jobs have become more complex after the collapse of two U.S. banks, including Silicon Valley Bank, were sparked in part by rapid interest rate rises aimed at taming inflation. The ensuing global financial upheaval forced the takeover of troubled Swiss lender Credit Suisse by rival UBS and raised concerns about the fallout in already-weak major economies.

Despite that, the ECB, U.S. Federal Reserve and Bank of England all raised interest rates this month as they focus on combating price spikes. Inflation stood at 6% in the U.S. and 10.4% in the United Kingdom in February.

In the eurozone, prices for food, alcohol and tobacco rose by a painful 15.4%, faster than the previous month's 15%, in a sign that European consumers are still getting squeezed.

Energy prices, however, fell 0.9% — an abrupt change of direction after rising at double-digit rates over the past year. The plunge was expected after the costs of oil and natural gas surged in March 2022, when Russia invaded Ukraine.

The war notably pushed up prices for natural gas used to heat homes and generate electricity last year as Russia largely cut off supplies to Europe, fueling overall inflation. The latest reading indicates that a mild winter and efforts to store and source gas from non-Russian sources have paid off.

Prices for goods dipped to 6.6% from 6.8% the previous month, while services climbed 5%, up from 4.8%.

Chinese Lithium Producers Set Price Floor as Demand Evaporates

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's top lithium producers agreed this week to set a floor price of 250,000 yuan (\$36,380) per ton of lithium carbonate, six people familiar with the matter said, in an effort to slow a plunge in the price of the battery raw material.

The price was agreed by around 10 companies including Tianqi Lithium and Ganfeng Lithium that met on the sidelines of a conference in Nanchang in southern China, said one person who attended the meeting and five others briefed on the discussions.

The people declined to be named because of the sensitivity of the topic, which was discussed in a closed-door meeting. Ganfeng said in a response to Reuters that no discussions on a floor price had taken place.

"Ganfeng always insists that product prices should be determined by the market, and will never take the initiative to control prices to influence the market," a company representative said in an email.

It added that no company in the industry has such capabilities.

Tianqi declined to comment.

Zhicun Lithium, one of the top lithium carbonate producers in China, was also represented at the meeting, said four of the people, but could not be reached for comment.

The move comes as lithium prices plunge on a significant slowdown in demand for electric vehicles (EV) in China, the world's largest EV market.

Spot prices have slumped by more than 60% since their peak in late November, with the decline picking up pace in recent weeks on a growing price war in China's auto market.



It is not clear how long the companies, which account for over half China's lithium carbonate output, will follow the floor price.

Spot prices dropped to 220,000 yuan a ton, according to a weekly price assessment by Fastmarkets, down from 260,000 yuan a week earlier.

Offers as low as 150,000 yuan were also heard in the market this week as traders sought to offload mounting stocks, said a buyer for a battery manufacturer who did not attend the meeting of lithium producers.

"Setting a floor price should strengthen the market sentiment and hold the prices from falling further," said the person who attended the meeting.

However, some buyers were sceptical that producers would stick to the floor price, given the sluggish demand.

China's Demand Comeback to Help Oil Weather Banking Crisis

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Oil will rebound after recent banking turmoil as demand from top consumer China is set to soar, but worries around economic growth will keep both benchmarks hovering below \$90 this year, a Reuters poll showed.

A survey of 45 economists and analysts forecast benchmark Brent crude would average \$86.49 a barrel this year, down from February's estimate of \$89.23.

Brent is currently trading around \$80, having been dragged to 15-month lows near \$70 earlier this month on mounting worries over the stability of the banking sector. Those fears have since largely been allayed by institutional rescue measures for struggling banks.

"Fundamentals for the oil market do not seem to have changed meaningfully in light of bank runs in the U.S. and the forced takeover of a Swiss bank," said Suvro Sarkar, energy sector team lead at DBS Bank.

"The dip in oil prices is more of a blip at the moment, rather than a sustained move below \$80 per barrel". Analysts forecast U.S. crude to average \$80.88 a barrel in 2023, down from the \$83.94 consensus last month, but still above current trades of around \$74.

Most analysts polled by Reuters expect oil prices to stay below \$90 on fears of a recession in developed economies stemming from interest rate increases to bring down inflation.

Global oil demand is seen rising by about 1 million-2 million barrels per day (bpd) in 2023, with dips related to economic jitters or slowdowns in the West likely to be countered by increases from China, the world's biggest oil importer. "Oil demand in China should pick up a bit further over the year. And while U.S. demand should slow, it won't fall, even as the economy weakens under the weight of higher interest rates," Capital Economics' Bill Weatherburn said.

Pakistan Posts Highest-Ever Annual Inflation

ISLAMABAD (Reuters) - Consumer price inflation in Pakistan jumped to a record 35.37% in March from a year earlier, the statistics bureau said, as at least 16 people were killed in stampedes for food aid.

The March inflation number eclipsed February's 31.5%, the bureau said, as food, beverage and transport prices surged up to 50% year-on-year.

Thousands of people have gathered at flour distribution centres set up across the country, some as part of a government-backed programme to ease the impact of inflation.

At least 16 people, including five women and three children, have been killed in stampedes at such centres in recent days, police and officials have said. Thousands of bags of flour have also been looted from trucks and distribution points, according to official records.

A spokesman at the statistics bureau said the inflation number was the highest ever year-on-year increase recorded by the bureau since monthly records began in the 1970s.

"This is the highest ever inflation recorded in the data we have," he said.

The consumer price index was up 3.72% in March from the previous month, the bureau said.

Higher prices of food, cooking oil and electricity pushed up the index, it said.

Annual food inflation in March was at 47.1% and 50.2% for urban and rural areas respectively, the bureau said. Core inflation, which strips out food and energy, stood at 18.6% in urban areas and 23.1% in rural areas.

The South Asian nation has been in economic turmoil for months with an acute balance of payments crisis while talks with the IMF to secure \$1.1 billion funding as part of \$6.5 billion bailout agreed in 2019 have not yet yielded fruit.

Pakistan's foreign exchange reserves have fallen to cover barely four weeks of imports.

A monthly economic outlook report issued by the finance ministry on Friday projected inflation would remain elevated.

The report cited market frictions caused by relative demand and supply gaps of essential items, exchange rate depreciation, and the recent upward adjustment in fuel prices as reasons behind higher inflation expectations.

UK Economy Avoids Recession But Businesses Still Wary

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's economy avoided a recession as it grew in the final months of 2022, according to official data which showed a boost to households' finances from state energy bill subsidies but falling investment by businesses.

With the economy still hobbled by high inflation and worries about a weak growth outlook, gross domestic product (GDP) increased by 0.1% between October and December after a preliminary estimate of no growth.

GDP in the third quarter was also revised to show a 0.1% contraction, a smaller fall than initially thought, the Office for National Statistics (ONS) said.

Two consecutive quarters of contraction would have represented a recession. Despite the improvement, British economic output remained 0.6% below its level in late 2019, the only G-7 economy not to have recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic.

"The latest release takes the U.K. a little further away from the recessionary danger zone although the report does not change the overall picture that the economy's performance was lackluster over the second half of 2022 as the cost of living crisis hit hard," Investec economist Philip Shaw said.

The International Monetary Fund (IMF) forecast in January that Britain would be the only Group of Seven major advanced economies to shrink in 2023, in large part because of an inflation rate that remains above 10%.

Since then, a string of economic data has come in stronger than expected by analysts. Ruth Gregory at Capital Economics said Friday's figures showed high inflation had taken a slightly smaller toll than previously thought.

"But with around two-thirds of the drag on real activity from higher rates yet to be felt, we still think the economy will slip into a recession this year," she said.

House prices slid in March at the fastest annual rate since the financial crisis, mortgage lender Nationwide said.

The Bank of England (BoE) last week raised interest rates for the 11th consecutive meeting and investors are split on the possibility of another increase in May.

Britain's dominant services sector rose by 0.1%, boosted by a nearly 11% jump for travel agents, echoing other data which has pointed to a surge in demand for holidays.

Manufacturing grew by 0.5%, driven by the often erratic pharmaceutical sector, and construction grew by 1.3%.

Individuals' savings were boosted by the government's energy bill support scheme and households' disposable income increased by 1.3% after four consecutive quarters of negative growth.

The BoE expects Britain's economy to have contracted by 0.1% in the first three months of 2023 but it forecasts slight growth in the second quarter.

India Keeps Domestic Gas Prices On Hold for Now



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India will provisionally keep the price of locally produced gas from old fields at \$8.57 per million metric British thermal units (mmBtu), the government said, while it considers a potential change to the pricing formula.

Under the existing formula, the price was due to go up for April-September, but to ensure fair prices for consumers and that inflation is kept in check the federal government last year set up a panel to review it.

The panel suggested the monthly price of gas from old blocks be fixed at 10% of the monthly average of the Indian crude basket, with a cap of \$6.5/mmBtu and a floor price of \$4/mmBtu.

The cabinet is expected to consider the recommendation soon.

Keeping gas prices at the current level could hit the earnings of producers such as government-run Oil and Natural Gas Corp. and Oil India Ltd.

Over 80% of India's yearly gas output of 91 billion cubic metres comes from old fields owned by ONGC and Oil India.

India currently links prices of locally produced gas from old fields to a formula tied to global benchmarks, including Henry Hub, Alberta gas, NBP and Russian gas. It revises prices twice in a year, in April and October.

"US\$ 8.57/MMBTU on Gross Calorific Value (GCV) basis, will continue to be applicable on a provisional basis beyond 31st March 2023, till further order," the government said in a statement.

However, it added it had lowered the ceiling price of domestic natural gas from difficult fields for April-September to \$12.12 per mmBtu from \$12.46 per mmBtu.

Israel Existence Based on War, Creating Insecurity in Region

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian foreign ministry spokesperson says the existence and survival of the fake Israeli regime are always based on war, creating insecurity, and division in the region. As the path of diplomacy and convergence in the West Asian region strengthens, the adventurous attempts of the usurped Zionist regime increase, which has a clear reason, Nasser Kanaani tweeted on Tuesday. He further noted that the existence and survival of the fake Israeli regime are always based on war, creating insecurity, and division in the region, and of course, there is no escape from internal collapse.



Billions Needed to Avert Unrest, Starvation

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - Without billions of dollars more to feed millions of hungry people, the world will see mass migration, destabilized countries, and starving children and adults in the next 12 to 18 months, the head of the Nobel prize-winning U.N. World Food Program warned.

David Beasley praised increased funding from the United States and Germany last year, and urged China, Gulf nations, billionaires and other countries “to step up big time.”

In an interview before he hands the reins of the world’s largest humanitarian organization to U.S. ambassador Cindy McCain next week, the former South Carolina governor said he’s “extremely worried” that WFP won’t raise about \$23 billion it needs this year to help millions of needy people

“Right at this stage, I’ll be surprised if we get 40% of it, quite frankly,” he said.

Last year, Beasley raised \$14.2 billion for WFP, more than double the \$6 billion in 2017, the year he took over as executive director. That money helped over 128 million people in more than 120 countries and territories.

Beasley said he was able to convince the United States last year to increase its funding from about \$3.5 billion to \$7.4 billion and Germany to raise its contribution from \$350 million a few years ago to \$1.7 billion, but he doesn’t think they’ll do it again this year.

Other countries need to step up now, he said, starting with China, the world’s second-largest economy which gave WFP just \$11 million last year.

Beasley applauded China for its success in substantially reducing hunger and poverty at home, but said it gave less than one cent per person last year compared to the United States, the world’s leading economy, which gave about \$22 per person.

China needs “to engage in the multilateral world” and be willing to provide help that is critical, he said. “They have a moral obligation to do so.”

Beasley said they’ve done “an incredible job of feeding their people,” and “now we need their help in other parts of the world” on how they did it, particularly in poorer countries including in Africa.

With high oil prices Persian Gulf countries can also do more, especially Muslim nations that have relations with countries in east Africa, the Sahara and elsewhere in the Middle East, he said, expressing hope they will increase contributions.

Beasley said the wealthiest billionaires made unprecedented profits during the COVID-19 pandemic, and “it’s not too much to ask some of the multibillionaires to step up and help us in the short-term crisis,” even though charity isn’t a long-term solution to the food crisis.

In the long-term, he said what he’d really like to see is billionaires using their experience and success to engage “in the world’s greatest need – and that is food on the planet to feed 8 billion people.”



“The world has to understand that the next 12 to 18 months is critical, and if we back off the funding, you will have mass migration, and you will have destabilization nations and that will all be on top of starvation among children and people around the world,” he warned.

Beasley said WFP was just forced to cut rations by 50% to 4 million people in Afghanistan, and “these are people who are knocking on famine’s door now.”

“We don’t have enough money just to reach the most vulnerable people now,” he said. “So we are in a crisis over the cliff stage right now, where we literally could have hell on earth if we’re not very careful.”

Beasley said he’s been telling leaders in the West and Europe that while they’re focusing everything on Ukraine and Russia, “you better well not forget about what’s south and southeast of you because I can assure you it is coming your way if you don’t pay attention and get on top of it.”

With \$400 trillion worth of wealth on the planet, he said, there’s no reason for any child to die of starvation.

The WFP executive director said leaders have to prioritize the humanitarian needs that are going to have the greatest impact on stability in societies around the world.

He singled out several priority places -- Africa’s Sahel region as well as the east including Somalia, northern Kenya, South Sudan and Ethiopia; Syria which is having an impact on Jordan and Lebanon; and Central and South America where the number of people migrating to the United States is now five times what it was a year-and-a-half ago.

Munitions, Anti-Tank Rockets in Next \$2.6b U.S. Pledge for Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Dispatches)

- A new \$2.6 billion U.S. military aid package that could include air surveillance radars, anti-tank rockets and fuel trucks for Ukraine’s fight against Russia is expected to be announced as soon as Monday, three U.S. officials said on Friday.



A half a dozen types of munitions, including tank munitions, are also expected to be on the list of equipment that could be finalized over this weekend, the officials who spoke on condition of anonymity said, adding that the dollar amount and specific equipment in the package could change.

Also slated for inclusion were precision aerial munitions, bridging equipment Ukraine would use to assault Russian positions, recovery vehicles to help disabled heavy equipment like tanks and additional rounds for NASAMS air defenses that the U.S. and allies have given to Kyiv.

The aid was comprised of \$2.1 billion in weapons aid coming from Ukraine Security Assistance Initiative (USAI) funding that allows President Joe Biden’s administration to buy weapons from industry rather than from U.S. weapons stocks.

The remaining \$500 million, mainly comprised of munitions to help Kyiv push a spring offensive against Russia’s invasion, was expected to come from Presidential Drawdown Authority funds, which allow the president to take from current U.S. stocks in an emergency.

The U.S. has now pledged more than \$30 billion worth of security assistance to Ukraine since the invasion.

Battle in Colombia Over River-Wrecking Gold Dragons

BOGOTA (Dispatches) - The giant skeletons of burnt and dismantled gold dredgers litter the rivers of northwest Colombia, where the government is waging a full-out war on illegal mining.

Nicknamed “dragons” by locals, the massive machines used to suck gold from riverbeds are blamed for destroying the environment and financing organized crime.

But their dismantling in a massive army operation has been met with hostility by communities who depend on mining for their daily survival.

Around El Bagre in the gold-rich Bajo Cauca region, a protest by miners that started early this month has been marked by acts of vandalism the government blamed on the Gulf Clan drug cartel for instigating.

U.S. Consumer Spending Slows

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. consumer spending rose moderately in February, and while inflation cooled, it remained high enough to possibly allow the Federal Reserve to raise interest rates one more time this year.

The slowdown in consumer spending reported by the Commerce Department followed the largest increase in nearly two years in January. That, together with February’s small gain put consumer spending on track to surge this quarter after growing at its slowest pace in 2-1/2 years in the fourth quarter.

Economists boosted their economic growth estimates for the first quarter to as high as a 3.25% annualized rate. Stronger growth this quarter is expected to help ease worries of a credit crunch, triggered by the recent collapse of two regional banks, and keep the Fed focused on taming high inflation.

“A credit crunch is never a good thing, but a credit crunch when the economy is growing at a 3% pace is far less threatening than one when the economy is near stall speed,” said Chris Low, chief economist at FTN Financial in New York. “The combination of strong growth expectations and time before the May meeting mean policy focus should be back on inflation.”

Consumer spending, which accounts for more than two-thirds of U.S. economic activity, increased 0.2% last month. Data for January was revised higher to show spending vaulting 2.0% instead of the previously reported 1.8%. January’s increase was the biggest since March 2021. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast consumer spending would gain 0.3%.

Consumers increased spending on housing and utilities as well as on healthcare, but cut back on spending at restaurants, bars and hotel accommodation. Overall, services spending rose 0.2% after advancing 1.2% in January. Outlays on long-lasting manufactured goods dropped 1.4% as a plunge in purchases of motor vehicles offset gains elsewhere. Spending on nondurable goods increased 0.9%, reflecting higher gasoline prices. There were also increases in spending on pharmaceutical products as well as food and beverages.

Adjusting for inflation, consumer spending dipped 0.1%. The so-called real consumer spending surged 1.5% in January. Even if real consumer spending remained soft in March, that would not change its sharp upward trajectory for the first quarter, economists said. JPMorgan raised its first-quarter GDP growth estimate to a 3.25% rate from a 2.5% pace. Goldman Sachs bumped up its estimate by 0.2 percentage points to a 2.4% pace.

The economy grew at a 2.6% pace in the October-December quarter. But financial market stress has amplified the risk of a recession later this year. Banks have tightened lending standards, which could make it harder for households to access credit, weighing on demand.

“The economy looks strong today, but the outlook is still in doubt as banks may pull back on the credit they provide to help the economy grow,” Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York.

Stocks on Wall Street were trading higher. The dollar rose against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury yields fell.

The Fed last week raised its benchmark overnight interest rate by a quarter of a percentage point, but indicated it was on the verge of pausing further increases in borrowing costs in a nod to financial market turmoil. The U.S. central bank has hiked its policy rate by 475 basis points since last March from the near-zero level to the current 4.75%-5.00% range.

The personal consumption expenditures price index increased 0.3% last month after accelerating 0.6% in January. Energy prices decreased 0.4%, while food rose 0.2%.

In the 12 months through February, the PCE price index advanced 5.0%. That was the smallest year-on-year gain since September 2021 and followed a 5.3% increase in January.

U.S. Discussing...

FROM PAGE 1

The original interim agreement was for a period of six months and was renewed several times until the full nuclear deal was reached in July 2015.

A White House National Security Council spokesperson said President Biden is “absolutely committed to ensuring Iran never acquires a nuclear weapon, and we still believe diplomacy is the best way to achieve that objective.”

The spokesperson added that the administration is preparing for all possible options and contingencies in full coordination with its partners and allies, including Israel. But the White House “will not comment on

second-hand rumors about diplomatic discussions, other than to caution that nearly all such rumors are false.”

Iranian officials have so far rejected the new approach, saying that it didn’t work before and they don’t want a deal that includes anything less than the 2015 nuclear agreement, according to the three Israeli officials and Western diplomats.

Not long after the Biden administration assumed office in 2021, the U.S. and Iran tried to reach an interim deal with Iran through EU mediation, but the parties couldn’t come to an agreement and decided to try to reach a full return to the 2015 nuclear deal instead.

Gov’t Determined to...

FROM PAGE 1

Further, in his speech, the President emphasized on speeding up the investigation and removal of obstacles and production boom, and announced his readiness to allocate one day a week to meet with producers and entrepreneurs with the aim of understanding and solving their problems.

Raisi also decided that this meeting should be repeated and at least quarterly in order to ensure the implementation of the demands of producers and entrepreneurs until the end of the year.

The President stated that financial support and credit provision, legal support and removal of administrative obstacles and organizing numerous circulars are the three main priorities of the government to support producers and help the growth of production in the country and said, “In line with its duties, the government will also put monitoring the process of production to consumption on the agenda, but believes in levelled and effective supervision, not parallel supervision, which itself is considered one of the obstacles facing producers and entrepreneurs”.

Stating that many of the country’s capacities have not yet been used for boosting production, the President emphasized the government’s serious attention to the private sector and cooperatives and said, “We believe that the economic field should be in the hands of the private sector, producers and entrepreneurs, and the government only plays a role of guiding, supporting, supervising and regulating”.

In another part of his speech, President Raisi mentioned the request of some producers of the industrial sector to prevent electricity and gas outages and as a result stop the production of these industries, saying, “Fortunately, the construction of power plants for the industrial sector with the aim of continuing production in this sector in all seasons has started in this government and, God willing, a significant number of them will be completed soon”.

Raisi further emphasized the need for the private sector to participate in economic decision-making and stated, “No decision in the economic sector should be made without the opinion of economic actors in the private sector and producers and entrepreneurs”.

The President described finding legal solutions to speed up production as one of the important duties of the executive bodies and emphasized the need for boldness and courage in making decisions in the expert body of the executive bodies as one of the important and central issues in the path of removing production obstacles.

He also dedicated a part of his speech to a number of other producers and entrepreneurs present in this meeting to raise their currency problems with the Governor of the Central Bank and the Minister of Economy.

Iran Set to...

FROM PAGE 1

This comes over a month after Iran and Oman held talks to discuss the stalled nuclear negotiations between Iran and the US.

According to the top Iranian diplomat, “the Omani authorities have repeatedly expressed their willingness to act as a mediator between Iran and the United States to conclude the nuclear negotiations.”

In an interview with Tasnim News Agency on 28 December, Iranian Ambassador to Oman Ali Najafi Khoshroudi said that the value of annual trade between Iran and Oman has increased by 73 percent over the past eight months and is expected to reach \$2 billion by March of 2023.

In July last year, Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani held talks with Albusaidi to discuss regional and international developments in Muscat. The deputy foreign minister said that Oman and Iran shared mutual trust, referring to it as a “precious asset” that will strengthen the bilateral cooperation of the two nations.

Oman is the only PGCC member that has strong diplomatic relations with the Islamic Republic and has played a major role in the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, serving as a center for regional dialogue.

Iran Annual...

FROM PAGE 1

The NIGC has not disclosed any figures about the total amount of gas supplied to Iran’s nationwide gas grid in the year to late March. That figure will include supplies delivered to Iraq and Turkey for exports as well as the gas injected to oil and gas reserves for the purpose of increasing production from the wells.

That comes as figures announced by the Iranian Oil Ministry authorities earlier this year indicated that the country’s gas production had exceeded 1 bcm per day.

Koepka Warms Up for Masters With Orlando LIV Win

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Brooks Koepka warmed up for next week's Masters with the second LIV Golf title of his career after clinching a two-shot victory in the upstart circuit's Orlando event.

Four-time major champion Koepka, one of the biggest names to defect from the PGA Tour to the Saudi Arabia-backed circuit last year, fired a closing three-under 68 to claim the win at Orlando's Orange County National Course.

Woods at Augusta to Prepare for Masters

AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods made his return to competitive golf at last year's Masters, defying all expectations 14 months after a gruesome car accident left his right leg and foot in dire shape. Woods not only played, but made the cut.

Woods, 47, arrived at Augusta National Golf Club yesterday ahead of the 2023 Masters hoping to build on that success.

News outlets in Augusta, Georgia, spotted Woods practicing at the course yesterday afternoon.

Medvedev Wins Fourth Title of Year in Miami

MIAMI GARDENS (Dispatches) - Russian Daniil Medvedev claimed his fourth ATP title of the year with an emphatic victory over Italy's Jannik Sinner in the final of the Miami Open. Sinner had upset world number one and defending champion Carlos Alcaraz in Friday's semi-final, but the 21-year-old struggled in the heat against the fourth seed Medvedev, who triumphed 7-5, 6-3.

The win was Medvedev's 19th career ATP title and his fifth in a Masters 1000 event and confirmed his dominance on hard courts in 2023.

Sinner, also beaten in the Miami final two years ago and now with a 0-6 record against the Russian, said he had not been at 100 per cent.

"We woke up this morning not at my best, I felt a little bit sick...unfortunately today I couldn't play at my best," said the Italian who, however said there had been no question of him pulling out of the contest.

"No, it was not that bad. But, you know, with the heat, when you run a lot, it gets a little bit worse and worse. Obviously the first half an hour we played in the sun also," he said.

Medvedev, who had already won three titles in three weeks at Rotterdam, Doha and Dubai before losing to Alcaraz in the Indian Wells final, started confidently, holding serve to love while Sinner's first service game was a real battle.

Sinner had to save a break point and fought through a 26-shot rally before coming through at the end of a 10-minute game.

In contrast, Medvedev again served to love but Sinner was showing signs of settling as he held his serve and then the Italian broke Medvedev to go 3-2 up, with a deft touch volley.

Medvedev immediately broke back, however, with Sinner's effort clipping the net and going out and after the Russian held again, the Italian had attention from the ATP trainer.

Sinner, looking uncomfortable in the bright sunshine, took a pill along with a powder in his water in the 87 F (30.5 C) heat.

Medvedev, looking composed and confident, grabbed the first set when Sinner was serving at 6-5 down and the Italian's poor shot into the net handed the Russian the crucial break.



Medvedev quickly got ahead in the second set when Sinner sent a forehand long but just as quickly handed the break back to Sinner.

But Sinner was making too many errors and when Medvedev broke again to go 3-1 up, the Italian was unable to turn things around and the world number five completed his first ever win in Miami.

"I'm really happy. Today was a tough match. It was probably the hottest day and the most humid during the day," Medvedev said.

"It was not easy conditions. I don't know if Jannik had a small injury or cramp. I was also struggling, tried not to show it," he added.

Medvedev's 19 ATP Tour wins have come at 19 different events, but he had not won a Masters 1000 event since Toronto in 2021.

"I haven't won't such a big title in probably a year and a half. At the end I was quite shaky," he said.

"Not even tight, because I'm not scared to win. But still the hands get a little shaky so the serve is a little bit tougher... I managed to get myself together and close the match."

The 27-year-old has now won five of the six hard-court ATP Masters 1000s and has also reached the final at both hard-court Grand Slams, winning the 2021 US Open.

Now he must turn his attention to the clay courts where he has had much less success.

"I love hard courts, if it would be my choice there would be only hard courts," he joked.



BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Barcelona called on La Liga president Javier Tebas to quit over "false" accusations allegedly made by him concerning their referee corruption case.

The Spanish giants made the demand after a newspaper claimed Tebas had written to the Spanish public prosecutor accusing two former Barca presidents of wrongdoing.

Last month the Catalan club was charged with corruption after payments of more than 7.3 million euros (\$7.8 million) to a company owned by a former refereeing chief were uncovered.

In a statement following La Vanguardia's report Barcelona claimed Tebas "presented false proof" to the public prosecutor "to incriminate our club".

"FC Barcelona wants to express its deep anger, indignation and disgust," the statement read.

It went on to demand that Tebas "appears in public to provide answers", adding "for the dignity and respect of the presidency of La Liga Mr Tebas should resign".

Tebas in response denied "accusing anyone" in a post on social media.

Muguruza Takes Extended Break

LONDON (Dispatches) - Garbine Muguruza is taking an extended break from tennis which will see her miss the clay and grass season this year, the former French Open and Wimbledon champion said.

Muguruza, who won the French Open in 2016 and Wimbledon in 2017, has played only four matches this year without a win. Her last match was in February at the Lyon Open where she lost to Czech teenager Linda Noskova in the first round.

"Spending time with family and friends and it's really been healthy and amazing, so I am going to lengthen this period till summer. Therefore I am going to miss (the) clay and grass season," Muguruza, now ranked 132, wrote on Instagram.

Muguruza, 29, was number one in 2017 and was ranked as high as third by the end of 2021 when she won three WTA titles. But she experienced a dip in form last year where she never got past the quarter-finals at any event.

Stuttgart Axe Labbadia and Hire Sebastian Hoernes

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Stuttgart, last in the Bundesliga, fired Bruno Labbadia as coach and appointed Sebastian Hoernes to take over.

Stuttgart have lost their last three league games without scoring. They are five points behind Hoffenheim, the club Hoernes managed for two seasons, in the last safe spot.

Stuttgart said Hoernes had signed a contract until 2025, regardless of their league status.

"It's about the immediate impact, but also about what we want to push for at VfB beyond the season," said the club's sporting director Fabian Wohlgemuth.

"Sebastian knows both how to deal with top talent in the youth sector and professional football."

Hoernes is the son of one German international, Dieter, and the nephew of another, Uli, the former Bayern Munich club president.

Clubs Afraid After Record 12 Managers Sacked



parted ways with Brendan Rodgers. Meanwhile, Tottenham Hotspur also parted ways with Antonio Conte late last month.

Klopp has been at Liverpool since 2015 but despite guiding them to Premier League and Champions League titles, he is under pressure with the Anfield club eighth in the standings — eight points off the top four after losing 4-1 to Manchester City.

"What can I say about that (the sackings)? The elephant in the room is probably why am

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool boss Jurgen Klopp jokingly questioned why he still had a job as clubs around the Premier League sacked their managers as the season enters its home stretch.

Chelsea sacked Graham Potter on Sunday with the club sitting 11th in the league, hours after relegation-threatened Leicester City

parted ways with Brendan Rodgers. Meanwhile, Tottenham Hotspur also parted ways with Antonio Conte late last month.

Klopp has been at Liverpool since 2015 but despite guiding them to Premier League and Champions League titles, he is under pressure with the Anfield club eighth in the standings — eight points off the top four after losing 4-1 to Manchester City.

"What can I say about that (the sackings)? The elephant in the room is probably why am

I still sitting here in this crazy world? Last man standing," Klopp told reporters ahead of tomorrow's game against Chelsea.

"So I think both clubs are not in the spots where they expect to be... I respect them (Potter and Rodgers) a lot. Really good people and fantastic managers, both of them. But things can go wrong.

"We all accept that part of the business, but that's it. Conte was last week, (Julian) Nagelsmann and now these two. The season is in a decisive part, people are afraid of maybe not reaching their targets."

Nagelsmann was shockingly sacked by Bayern Munich during the international break despite being in a much healthier position in the league.

The Premier League has had a record 12 managers sacked this season, which Klopp described as an "awful number".

"It is how it is. Some clubs are under achieving, definitely us too... There are expectations out there, rightly so, and if you don't reach them, then you have to accept the decisions," he said.

Messi Becomes A Target for Fan Discontent

PARIS (Dispatches) - A malaise has set in around Paris Saint-Germain since their exit from the Champions League, with a section of the club's support turning on Lionel Messi amid a run of results that has given their domestic rivals an improbable glimmer of hope in the French title race.

On Sunday Messi's name was jeered by some fans at the Parc des Princes as the teams were announced prior to PSG's home game against Lyon.

The Argentine then turned in a flat display as his team lost 1-0 against mid-table opponents, their second straight defeat in Ligue 1, both at home and both without scoring a goal.

As a consequence, PSG's apparent march towards a record 11th French title -- and a ninth in 12 seasons of Qatari ownership -- has been slowed and their lead at the top of the table from Lens and Marseille is down to six points with nine games left.

As Europe's biggest clubs prepare for the quarter-finals of the Champions League this month, PSG have to try to lift themselves to see the domestic title over the line. It is all they have left to play for. "We must show a reaction of champions," said coach Christophe Galtier after Sunday's game, which was PSG's eighth defeat in 18 outings in 2023.

It is their worst start to a calendar year since 2001, and PSG's next match will be away to a Nice side who are themselves unbeaten since early January.

"Every spring, after their elimination from the Champions League, the Parisian players display their lack of interest for all things Ligue 1 and make you doubt that the Parc des Princes is their favourite place to spend an evening in Paris," wrote Vincent Duluc in sports daily L'Equipe.



Chelsea Sack Potter After Just Seven Months in Charge

LONDON (Dispatches) - Coach Graham Potter paid for Chelsea's poor form as the Englishman was sacked after just seven months in the job.

The Blues had slipped to 11th in the Premier League table after a 2-0 home defeat to Aston Villa on Saturday despite spending over £500 million (RM2.7 billion) on new signings this season.

Former Brighton defender Bruno Saltor has been placed in interim charge.

Chelsea have won just three games in their last 11 but have progressed to the quarter-finals of the Champions League where they face defending champions Real Madrid.

That tie may have been the decisive factor in the club's new American owners pulling the trigger now, with the first leg in Madrid just 10 days away.

"We have the highest degree of respect for Graham as a coach and as a person. He has always conducted himself with professionalism and integrity and we are all disappointed in this outcome," co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali said in a statement.

"We have 10 Premier League games remaining and a Champions League quarter-final ahead. We will put every effort and commitment into every one of those games so that we can end the season on a high."

An unlikely run to the club's third European Cup now appears Chelsea's only route back into the Champions League next season as they sit 12 points adrift of the Premier League top four.

Potter becomes the second manager sacked by the consortium led by LA Dodgers co-owner Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital in their first season in charge.

Thomas Tuchel, who was appointed Bayern Munich boss last week, was dismissed in September, just over a year from leading Chelsea to Champions League glory.

Chelsea paid £21.5m in compensation to Brighton to appoint Potter.

