

An Iranian Technical Delegation Will Visit Saudi Arabia This Week To Prepare for the Reopening of The Islamic Republic of Iran's Embassy in Riyadh, ISNA News Agency Reported on Sunday

# IRAN NEWS

The Iranian Lawmakers Are Examining the Plan to Intensify The Punishment of Those Who Cooperate With Hostile Countries Against the National Security of Iran in the Open Session

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## Iran's Economy to Grow 2% in 2023

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Stating that 15 countries in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region will register lower economic growth in 2023 as compared to the same period of last year (2022), the World Bank (WB) predicted that Iran's economy will grow two percent this year.

In its latest report on the economic situation of the MENA region, the World Bank has predicted that the region will experience three percent economic growth in 2023.

This is while the average economic growth of 18 countries in the Middle East and North African region in 2022 had reached 5.8 percent.

The World Bank also said that the oil exporting countries of the region will experience a worse situation in 2023 and it is expected that the average economic growth of oil exporting countries of the MENA region will face a 55 percent decline in 2023. The average economic growth of these countries had been put at 6.1 percent in 2022.

Saudi Arabia and Kuwait will experience the sharpest drop in economic growth in 2023, the World Bank added.

Qatar, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Oman, Iraq, Algeria, Egypt, Tunisia, Jordan, Morocco, Djibouti, Palestine and Iran are the other countries of the MENA region that will experience lower economic growth in 2023 as compared to a year earlier, the World Bank added.

## Saudi Delegation in Tehran To Discuss Reopening Diplomatic Missions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A delegation of Saudi technical officials has reportedly arrived in Iran to discuss mechanisms for the reopening of the kingdom's embassy in Tehran and consulate general in the city of Mashhad.

According to the Saudi Foreign Ministry, the team arrived in Tehran on Saturday few days after Tehran and Riyadh officially restored diplomatic relations, which have been severed over the past seven years.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Saudi counterpart, Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud, met in the Chinese capital, Beijing, on Thursday a month after the two countries agreed to restore diplomatic relations under a China-brokered deal.

Following the meeting, the top Iranian and Saudi diplomats issued a statement stressing the need to implement the landmark China-brokered reconciliation agreement in an attempt to enhance mutual trust and help boost regional security.

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## Tehran, Moscow to Minimize West Dominance By Ditching Dollar in Trade



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Reducing the influence of the dollar in regional and international economic exchanges will minimize the dominance of the West over the world economy, the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council said.

Russian President's Special Aide Igor Levitin, who is on a two-day visit to Tehran, met with the secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), Ali Shamkhani on Sunday.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed implementing agreements between the two countries in various economic and banking fields, especially speeding up the start of the implementation of the North-South Corridor. Shamkhani expressed his satisfaction with the volume of economic cooperation between Russia and Iran.

The path that started to reduce the influence of the dollar in regional and international economic exchanges will limit the dominance of the West over the world economy to the minimum, he said.

He also described the finalized initiatives in the field of monetary and banking transactions as an effective model in the field of thwarting the West's illegal sanctions.

Referring to the joint efforts of Iran and Russia in the implementation of the project of the North-South corridor, he said that the corridor has a decisive role in changing the geometry of goods transit in the region.

Levitin, for his part, expressed Moscow's readiness to invest in different economic sectors of Iran, including steel, oil, and petrochemicals.

Meanwhile on Saturday evening, Iran's first vice president said that Iran and Russia can become the export center of some food items in the region with joint production and investment.

Mohammad Mokhbar made the remarks during a meeting with Levitin who was on a two-day visit to the Iranian capital of Tehran.

The two sides reviewed the latest state of joint projects and cooperation between the two countries in the framework of the North-South corridor, cooperation in the field of energy, transportation and expansion of bilateral trade relations.

Referring to the increase in the exchanges of political and economic delegations between Tehran and Moscow, the Iranian vice president said, "Fortunately, the implementation of the joint plans and projects between the two countries is in good progress and the serious and continuous follow-up of the presidents of the two countries has also laid the necessary ground for removing barriers to and speeding up the process of implementing agreements."

"Iran and Russia can become the export center of some food items in the region with joint production and investment and meet some of the needs of the countries in the region", Mokhbar added.

Levitin, for his part, announced Moscow's readiness to invest in the transit sector and to accelerate the implementation of joint plans and projects in the field of transportation.

"Russia is ready to conclude bilateral and multilateral cooperation agreements with Iran to construct these projects", Levitin pointed out.

Back in January, Levitin paid a visit to Tehran and the most important achievement of that trip was reaching an agreement between Iran and Russia for the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway mega project.

## Israel Stoking Tensions to Escape Palestinian Resistance

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has blasted Israeli forces for storming the al-Aqsa Mosque, stating that the Tel Aviv regime is stoking tensions across the occupied lands in order to escape from the Palestinian resistance and avoid retaliatory operations targeting areas deep inside Israel.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks in a meeting on Saturday with a number of IRGC commanders, officials, managers and personnel.

"Nowadays, the fake and criminal Zionist regime is creating crises across the occupied territories in the hope of staying away from a popular uprising (Intifada) and escaping from Palestinians' resistance, especially from the youths in the West Bank and elsewhere. We are now witnessing the bombardment of the Gaza Strip and brutal crimes against oppressed Palestinians. Such measures, however, will not get them anywhere," Salami said.

He said hundreds of thousands of Israelis have protested in Tel Aviv and other Israeli cities for 13 straight weeks against a controversial judicial overhaul that the hard-right administration of prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu is trying to pass, describing the protests as unprecedented.

The internal collapse within the Israeli society as well as the political chaos and disarray in the regime, something acknowledged by Israeli officials, have reached the point where the Tel Aviv regime will cease to exist sooner than within the 25-year timeframe predicted by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei, Salami pointed out.

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## ViewPoint Now It Is Time to Rise Against the Zionists

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

As the Quds Day is approaching, it seems Muslims around the world are getting united against the Zionist regime and this time it seems Muslims are more determined than ever to stand against the fake Israel and bring it down and the countdown for the collapse and destruction of the Zionist regime has started.

In recent days and after the atrocities of the Zionist regime against the Palestinians and their insult to Al-Aqsa Mosque, it seems Muslims are getting more united in giving due response to this killer regime and Muslim countries and people in the world have shown their anger against these atrocities and some international bodies and politicians have also reacted towards the Zionist regime's inhumane activities.

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) again condemned the latest Israeli aggression against the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied East al-Quds, stressing that the holy site is an exclusive place of worship for Muslims.

Hussein Ibrahim Taha, the secretary general of OIC, made the remarks at an open-ended extraordinary meeting of the body's Executive Committee on Saturday, which was held to discuss the continued Israeli aggression on al-Aqsa, following the regime forces' violent raid against Palestinian worshippers who were observing the holy fasting month of Ramadan there.

"Al-Quds is an integral part of the occupied Palestinian territory and the capital of the State of Palestine, and that the blessed Al-Aqsa Mosque in its entirety, is the exclusive place of worship for Muslims," Taha said.

He also denounced the brutal assault by Israeli regime forces on Palestinians performing Ramadan-related rituals in the compound, saying the move was "a flagrant violation of the sanctity of holy sites, freedom of worship, as well as the Geneva Convention and relevant United Nations resolutions."

Meanwhile hundreds of people held a rally in the British capital, London, to protest against the Israeli regime forces' latest attack against the Palestinian worshippers at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied East al-Quds.

The crowd gathered outside the Israeli embassy in London on Friday, as they waved Palestinian flags and chanted slogans such as "Free Palestine" to condemn the violent raid and demand an end to Israeli attacks.

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## Iran Denies Losses in Converting Iraqi Debt to Dinar

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has denied reports it suffered any losses because of converting its dollar debts from Iraq to the currency of the Arab country.

"There has been absolutely no conversion of resources outside of the official mechanisms and on irregular rates," the CBI said in a Saturday statement covered by the official IRNA news agency.

The statement came after reports suggested Iran had to forfeit some 40% of the debts it is owed for supply of energy to Iraq because it was forced to receive payments in Iraqi dinar.

Some unconfirmed reports suggest Iraq's energy arrears to Iran have reached \$18 billion. The Arab country has been unable to settle the debts in full because of US sanctions on Iran's access to the international banking system.

Iraq has been looking for alternative mechanisms to pay the debts and to prevent any disruption to imports of natural gas and electricity from Iran that can be caused by its failure to pay.

"In monetary and financial agreements with Iraq ... the arrangements have been implemented in a way that no losses could be incurred on the country's foreign exchange assets," said the CBI statement.

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## New Bill Protects Women Against Violence

TEHRAN (IP) - During the review of the bill to prevent women's injuries and improve their security, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs stressed that the bill is family-centered and defends their rights.

Attending the open chamber of the parliament on Apr.9, 2023, Ensiyeh Khazali said: "The bill was examined thoroughly by the experts." The Iranian government has submitted a long-awaited bill for the protection of women against violence to the parliament. The Protection, Dignity, and Security of Women against Violence bill was approved by lawmakers with a majority of votes in favor.

The bill titled, Protection, Dignity, and Security of Women against Violence, had been under review since September 2019. It criminalizes any act or behavior that causes "physical or mental harm" to women "as a vulnerable gender".

## Restoration of Asian Identity; Key to Peace and Stability

TEHRAN (IP) – Deputy Foreign Minister in a meeting with the Senior Deputy Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, emphasized that the developments in the relations between the countries of the Persian Gulf region showed that the restoration of the Asian identity will bring peace and stability to the region and the world.



Bagheri Kani, referring to the recent crimes committed by the Israeli regime in the occupied territories, emphasized the necessity of taking deterrent measures by all governments, especially Western governments, and said: "The clear condemnation of these crimes is the least action that can be taken in defense of the oppressed Palestinian people and the liberation of human rights from the captivity of the interests and policies of several Western powers."

In this meeting, the Senior Deputy Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan Yamada Shigeo, emphasizing the friendship between the two nations and relations based on mutual respect between the governments of Iran and Japan, pointed out the capacities of promoting bilateral relations and said: "Japan is determined to expand and consolidate its ties with Iran in the regional and international arenas beyond bilateral relations."

The 30th meeting of political consultations between the foreign ministries of Iran and Japan was held in Tehran.

The delegations of the two countries, headed by Ali Bagheri Kani, Iran's political deputy Foreign minister, and Yamada Shigeo, Senior Deputy Foreign Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, discussed and examined various issues in the relations between Iran and Japan in light of global developments.

According to Iran Press, the Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs of Iran, referring to the various capacities for cooperation between the two countries said: "The promotion of cooperation between Tehran and Tokyo, in addition to securing the interests of the two nations, creates a platform for peace and stability and does not threaten the interests of any party."

## Iran, Azerbaijan FMs Discuss Ways to Resolve Misunderstandings



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign ministers of Iran and Azerbaijan have held discussions about ways to resolve the existing misunderstandings and issues pertaining to mutual relations amid soaring tensions between the two neighboring countries.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Azeri counterpart Jeyhun Bayramov held two rounds of detailed talks on Friday night and Saturday about the developments in Tehran-Baku relations and some regional issues.

They stressed the importance of respecting good neighborliness, national sovereignty and territorial integrity.

Amirabdollahian warned of the Israeli regime's plots against unity, security and progress of the countries in the region and said, "Only enemies benefit from the existence of differences among regional countries."

The top Iranian and Azeri diplomats also stressed the need to direct media campaign in line with mutual interests.

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran were strained in January following an attack on the Eurasian country's embassy in Tehran.

Azerbaijan closed its diplomatic mission following the incident and evacuated staff over what it called a "terrorist act," with President Ilham Aliyev blaming it on the "Iranian establishment."

In a statement on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said Tehran would take "diplomatic countermeasures" in response to Azerbaijan's radical and unconstructive positions against Iranian teachers and diplomats residing in Baku.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran emphasizes the [importance of] observing the principles and basics of the neighborhood policy and paying heed to the sinister goals of the Zionist regime (Israel) in creating differences and tension in the relations among Muslim countries while at the same time, it has diplomatic countermeasure on its agenda," Kanaani added.

## Breast Cancer Number One Cancer

TEHRAN (MNA) – Breast cancer is the number one cancer in the country, the head of the Cancer Research Institute of Iran said.

Breast cancer is the number one cancer in Iran while lung cancer is the most widespread type of cancer in Western states, the head of the Cancer Research Institute of Iran stated. The age of breast cancer infection in Iran is 10 years less than the world average, Mohammad Esmail Akbari added.

The average age of infection to breast cancer in Iran is between 45 and 55 whereas the average age of the disease is 50 to 60 globally. He attributed the lower age of infection to breast cancer to the younger Iranian society as compared to the global average.

## 20 Radiopharmaceutical Projects in Progress

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says Iran has twenty radiopharmaceutical projects in progress.

Speaking during a TV program on Saturday night, Mohammad Eslami said April 9, which marks National Nuclear Technology Day, is a special day for the AEOI to take bigger steps.

"We have 20 radiopharmaceutical projects in progress," he said, vowing to step up efforts to achieve more progress in the application of peaceful nuclear technologies.

He said that in the previous Iranian year, Iranian scientists registered 159 scientific, technological, and industrial achievements.

Registering 159 nuclear achievements, he said, is a clear manifestation of being active and innovative.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the nuclear chief lamented that Iran's radiopharmaceutical industry has been targeted by inhumane U.S.-led sanctions.

"Our only radiopharmaceutical company has been sanctioned. This is a very interesting point and a very good example [against] the claim of human rights that they (Western powers) make, showing that there is no shred of humanity and human rights [in their actions]," he added.

Iran has been trying to diversify the applications of its nuclear activities in recent years. In addition to power generation, the country's nuclear industry is now focusing on a wide variety of applications, from radiopharmaceuticals and radiotherapy to particle accelerators.

Since 2006, when Iran indigenized its nuclear industry, the country has constantly been targeted by sanctions over what U.S.-led Western countries claim to be an attempt to develop nuclear weapons, something Tehran has categorically rejected and proven to be false.

## Crushing Punishment From Resistance Awaits Israel

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker has vehemently condemned the recent Israeli aggression on al-Aqsa Mosque and Palestinian worshippers in the holy fasting month of Ramadan, warning that a harsh and crushing punishment from the resistance awaits the occupying regime over its barbaric violence.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf made the remark in an address at the onset of a plenary session in the Iranian legislature on Sunday, following the Israeli regime's continued desecration of al-Aqsa and violent raid against Palestinian worshippers performing Ramadan-related rituals at the holy site.

"I strongly condemn the desecration of al-Aqsa Mosque, the first qibla (direction) of Muslims, and the arrest and beating of pilgrims and worshippers in that holy place, and the brutal attacks of the Zionist regime on the Gaza Strip and southern Lebanon," Qalibaf said.

"For decades, the Zionist regime has turned into an

unrestrained and increasingly criminal killing machine by violating all international laws," he added.

The Iranian Parliament speaker called on all Muslims across the world to stay united in support of their valiant and resistant brothers and sisters in Palestine and stand up for the cause of the Holy Quds on this year's Quds Day, the last Friday of Ramadan.

"Today, the Zionist regime is in its weakest state in history, and the resistance front's clout has forced the regime to react cravenly. The Zionist regime knows that, based on the strength of the resistance front, a harsh and crushing punishment awaits them on the promised day," Qalibaf noted.

Heavily armed Israeli forces stormed the al-Aqsa Mosque compound on Tuesday night before firing tear gas and stun grenades into the Qibli prayer hall, where hundreds of men, women, elderly people and children were staying overnight to pray. Some eyewitnesses said rubber-coated steel bullets were also fired.

## IRGC Navy to Stage Massive Parades in Solidarity With Palestine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Vessels of the popular Basij force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy will take part in a massive maritime parade in Iran's northern and southern coastal regions in support of the people of Palestine, the IRGC Navy's chief said Sunday.

According to the IRGC Navy's Public Relations, Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said that the maritime parade will be held on April 13 in the northern and southern coastal regions of the country as well as in a number of ports around the world.

"In order to defend the [oppressed] people of Palestine, support their Intifada (uprising), and condemn the heinous and cruel crimes of the Zionist regime, the largest popular parade by the vessels of the IRGC Navy's Basij is planned for 15:30 on Thursday," Tangsiri explained.

Since the beginning of the holy month of Ramadan, Israel has ramped up its atrocities against Palestinians, especially in and around the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied al-Quds. The Israeli acts of violence have prompted retaliatory rocket attacks and operations from Palestinian resistance fighters.

In a statement on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani urged the international community and responsible global bodies to take an "effective and deterrent" action against Israel.

## Asia at Center of Emerging World Power

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's government spokesman has said that Asia is at the core of the power in the new world order system.

With the increasing weakening of the enemies' front against Iran, the political and economic future of the region is determined by the plan of its nations and governments, Ali Bahadori Jahromi wrote on his Twitter account on Saturday.

He noted that the West has realized that Asia is the focus of power in the new hegemony.

The geometry of the emerging new world order will continue through effective role-playing, he added.

## Terrorist MKO Member Detained on Arrival

TEHRAN (MNA) – An Iranian security source announced the arrest of one of the elements of the notorious terrorist group Mujaheddin-e Khaleq Organization (MKO) while trying to enter the country over the past few days.

A security source with the knowledge of the matter told Iranian media that a member of the MKO terrorist group was arrested in the past days while trying to enter the country.

The source, without mentioning the name of the arrested element and the details of his arrest, "The person is a former member of the Mufaqqen (MKO) and entered Iran from Albania." Albania's capital harbors MKO on behalf of the Western countries.

The MKO terrorist group is responsible for causing the largest part of the 17,000-plus fatalities that have resulted from acts of terror since the 1979 victory of Iran's Islamic Revolution.

## Ex-Mayor of Tehran Freed After Leader's Clemency

TEHRAN (IFP) - Former mayor of Tehran and senior Iranian politician Mohammad Ali Najafi has been permanently released from prison over two years after he was forgiven by the family of his second wife he had shot dead.

Mitra Ostad, the second wife of Najafi, was murdered at her home in Tehran on May 28, 2019. The Police found Ostad's body with several gunshots in her chest.

Back on July 30, Najafi was sentenced to death for the crime, after the court arrived at the definite conclusion that a deliberate murder had happened and "issued a Qisas [retaliation in kind] verdict", meaning capital punishment for Najafi.

Despite the pardon by his wife's family, he had to serve 6.5 years behind bars.

Iranian media reported on Sunday, however, that he was released from jail thanks to a wide-covering clemency order issued by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei a few months ago.

## Iran-Russia-Turkey-Syria Meeting to Be Held in May

TEHRAN (MNA) – The quadrilateral meeting of foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria and Turkey was postponed to May, Russian Ambassador to Syria Aleksandr Yefimov said.

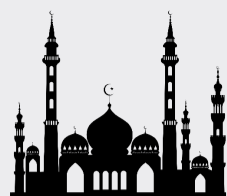
Yefimov stated that the contacts and consultations are continuing between the relevant parties to achieve positive results in this framework.

Saying that the quadrilateral meeting was supposed to be held tomorrow, but it was postponed to early May, the Russian envoy added that the road to normalization of relations between Ankara and Damascus is long and it is not possible to examine all the cases during one round of dialogue or negotiation.

Referring to his country's efforts to hold a quadrilateral meeting, Yefimov expressed hope that positive results will be achieved in this regard.

Earlier, the Russian Foreign Ministry said that the senior diplomats of Russia, Iran, Syria and Turkey discussed the planning for a four-party ministerial meeting during consultations in Moscow on April 3-4.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:51
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:09
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:37

88. Moses prayed: "Our Lord! Thou hast indeed bestowed on Pharaoh and his chiefs splendour and wealth in the life of the present, and so, Our Lord, they mislead (men) from Thy Path. Deface our Lord, the features of their wealth, and send hardness to their hearts, so they will not believe until they see the grievous penalty."  
89. Allah said: "Accepted is your prayer (O Moses and Aaron)! So stand ye straight, and follow not the path of those who know not."

Surah 10. Jonah (88 - 89)

## Iran to Establish 4 Trade Centers in China

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN -** Head of the Iran-China Joint Chamber of Commerce says the chamber is to establish four trade centers in four different points of China by the yearend and it will also hold permanent exhibitions on Iranian goods.

Speaking to ILNA, Majid Reza Hariri explained the latest developments in trade relation between Iran and China and said that the political relation of both countries is getting warmer but one should not expect any significant development in trade ties in short term after President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Beijing. He added that during the visit, both countries defined new ways for trade, and it makes him hopeful about the increase in trade volume.

He then touched upon the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia and other countries in the region, saying it will have no direct impact on Iran-China economic and political relations, adding that but it can pave the ground for removing hurdles in international levels and ultimately for some political openings in the region and then in the world, and it may also open new markets for Iran, in other words, political agreements will have economic fruits.

Hariri then blamed sanctions and banking process problem for the low trade volume of Iran and China.

On export of only 10 tons of orange to China, he said that it was just for checking the process of exporting citrus fruits and if the Chinese verify Iran's quarantine process of citrus fruits, then China has capacity to import one million tons of Iranian citrus fruits a year. He admitted that fruit producers in the country pay less heed to the international standards and it causes a headache for exports.

Hariri also pointed to the export of shrimps to China and said that there is no problem as currently considerable amount of shrimp is exported to China. He stressed



that major parts of Iran's non-oil products are exported to Iraq and Afghanistan markets and Iranian traders need to pass courses for entering other markets.

He reiterated that to have more share of China market, it needs planning and spending time, adding that Iranian traders prefer exports to Iraq and Afghanistan because they easily get their money after delivery but it is not considered export because real export needs investment in the target market and Iranian traders should at least spend from their own pockets for one year in order to have lion's from big markets like China and if they suffered losses, they should not bother and do their best to present their products in those markets.

Hariri then said that in the past 15 years the rules of international commerce have been forgotten or ignored in the country because of sanctions and this is the task of chambers of commerce and formations to concentrate on this point that foreign trade needs knowledge, investment and patience for marketing.

He said that the project for developing non-oil exports to China was defined in the joint chamber almost 3 years ago but the pandemic caused the delay in its implementation and he expressed hope this project will start in the spring and the office of the chamber would become active.

He reiterated that the chamber is to launch four trade centers in four different points of China by the yearend and also to hold permanent exhibitions of Iranian goods in China as it is also to provide services for the small and medium traders.

## MAPNA a Unique, Giant and Advanced Group



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN -** Health Minister Bahram Einollahi during his visit to the plants and companies of MAPNA Group hailed the group and called it a unique, giant and most advanced one.

Einollahi visited different sections and halls of manufacture and production of equipment and got acquainted with the achievements and existing capabilities of the group.

Health Minister Einollahi termed MAPNA Group as one of the biggest honors of the country, adding that MAPNA is a unique, giant and most advanced group and today what he saw was totally different from what he had heard about the group.

In the meeting, the CEO of MAPNA Group Mr. Abbas Aliabadi explained the programs of the group for using major capacities of MAPNA for serving the medical sector of the country, noting that today many complicated medical equipment to implants are manufactured in the companies like MAPNA.

He also reminded the minister of joint cooperation between the group and ministry and soon new equipment for x-raying and advanced implants will be unveiled by the group and they will give good news to the people.

He for the first time revealed the project of the group for manufacture of medical implants for the pelvises and knees based on the international standards which will happen in the plants of the group.

Abbasi reiterated that with implementation of this project, the final cost of the products will be almost halved. He said that medical implants enjoy having high technology and only about ten countries can design and manufacture them.

Then the minister pointed to the naming the year to year of production rise and said that it is an important roadmap for materializing the domestic production achievements. He hailed MAPNA Group for its efforts for manufacture of medical equipment like MIR and CT Scan devices and the ministry will have some agreements with the group in this field.

## Iran-Afghanistan Trade Exchange Rises to \$1b

**TEHRAN (MNA) -** Officials at the Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment announced that trade and economic relations between the country and the Islamic Republic of Iran have increased.

According to the officials of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment, as cited by the local Afghan AVA news agency, the annual trade between Kabul and Tehran has reached more than one billion dollars. The trend of trade and joint investment is expanding as time passes along with the transit from the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Afghanistan Trade and Investment Association's officials emphasized that Iran is the biggest trade partner of Afghanistan in the current situations.

Afghanistan's Ministry of Industry and Trade also said that it is trying to develop economic relations with all neighboring countries, the AVA report added.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has had deep commercial, cultural and political relations with Afghanistan for the past year.

## Level of Water in Iran's Reservoirs Up 12% in Sep-March

**TEHRAN (PressTV) -** The level of water in Iran's reservoirs has increased by 12% in just more than seven months to early March thanks to better rainfalls and as warmer weather is causing snow to melt into the rivers, according to data by the Iranian Energy Ministry.

The Ministry said in a Saturday statement that water accumulated in reservoirs since the start of the Iranian water year on September 23 had reached 28.8 billion cubic meters (bcm).

The statement said total water intake in dams since the start of the water year had also increased by 18% to 23.26 bcm.

Outflow of water from the dams reached 13.54 bcm in the more than seven months to March 8, a slight increase from 13.18 bcm recorded over the same period last year.

The ministry said Iranian reservoirs were 58% full on March 8.

The data comes amid concerns raised about potential water shortages that could happen in Iran over the upcoming summer months.

The government has repeatedly warned the rising demand for water in Iran's agriculture sector has affected supplies flowing into the reservoirs.

## Iran, Russia Increase Freight Transit Through Caspian Sea



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN -** Iranian road minister and the Russian President's Special Aide discussed the multimodal transport and maritime freight transit through the Caspian Sea.

Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash in the meeting with visiting Russian President's Special Aide Igor Levitin in Tehran considered the transportation cooperation between the two countries to be beneficial for both sides.

'Although the history of maritime trade between Iran and Russia has a very long history, using the capacity of active ports of the two countries in the Caspian Sea can be considered in new cooperation', said the Iranian minister.

Bazrpash, pointing to the berthing of a large ro-ro Russian cargo ship, Kompozitor Gasanov, at Noshahr Port in northern Iran on May 2, 2022, after about 20 years, called these traffic a giant step for developing bilateral maritime trade.

Moreover, Iran and Russia's preliminary agreement in shipbuilding as part of the broader plan to expand economic relations on the sidelines of the 25th Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) on June 18 and entering the transit train of Russia along the

International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) to Iran from Sarakhs Border on October 2, all promises more effective transport cooperation, he added.

Referring to the necessity of developing aviation cooperation between the two countries, Bazarpash said: 'expanding transit capacity of maritime routes through the Caspian Sea corridors, including the east and west corridors of the Caspian Sea, can also be effective in reducing heavy land traffic in the Caucasus'.

With the completion of 35 kilometers of routes from Rasht to the Caspian Port, which is a seaport located in the Anzali Free Zone, the rail network will connect Anzali Port and the Caspian Port to the southern ports of Iran in the Persian Gulf, especially Bandar Abbas. It will be an important development in multimodal transport with Russian ports in the north of the Caspian Sea, Iran's minister of roads and urban development added.

In the meeting, Igor Levitin summarized the expert meetings and the visit of the Russian delegation to the Rasht-Astara Railway and called for the development of transport cooperation in all modes of transport.

Previously, the two sides met in January to discuss the completion of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

## Annual Export to Oman Up Almost 100%

**TEHRAN (MNA) -** As announced by the deputy chairman of the Iran-Oman Joint Chamber of Commerce, the value of Iran's export to Oman has increased by almost 100 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Shahla Amouri said that Iran's export to Oman rose to \$1.2 billion in the past year, from \$600 million in the preceding year.

The official put the value of annual trade between the two countries at \$2 billion in the previous year.

Amouri has also said that trade activities between the two countries will be expanded.

Referring to the reduction of the cost of registering a commercial company in Oman for foreign investors, she said: "This action of the Omani government is a good opportunity for Iranian traders and businessmen to develop our country's foreign trade."

With the follow-ups, the reduction of commercial company registration fees in Oman for foreign investors has been conducted since April 1, she added.

Emphasizing that the Omani government's agreement to reduce the cost of registering commercial companies has been implemented in order to develop trade with other countries, she added that the Iranian enterprises can take advantage of this opportunity to further grow trade with Oman.

## EORC Donates 18b Tomans for Release of Inmates of Unintentional Crimes

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN -** The CEO and staff of Esfahan Oil Refining Holding (EORC) in the recent three months have donated 18b tomans for the release of inmates of unintentional crimes in Isfahan Province.

Speaking on a TV program on the 13th day of holy month of Ramadhan, Managing Director of the Public Relations and Spokesman of EORC Eng. Ahmad Reza Azimi said that so far in the recent three months, the CEO and personnel of the company have donated 18b tomans for the release of inmates of unintentional crimes.

He then pointed to production of 25% of different oil products of the country in this holding, adding that the holding by the launch of six new subsidiary companies, 400 new projects and also producing fuel with international level quality has fulfilled its most important social responsibility, namely protecting the environment.

He went on to say that one should consider that EORC has been always active in the public interest actions and has responded warmly in the shortest time to the requests and demands of the officials of Isfahan Province, NGOs and charities.

Azimi noted that concurrent with the auspicious birthday anniversary of Hazrat Zahra (AS), personnel of the company donated 15b tomans for the release of 150 inmates that most of them were women, adding that this trend will continue. He noted that the subsidiary companies of the holding also collected and donated 3b tomans to participate in this philanthropic action.



## Iraqi President Condemns Turkish Bombardment of Kurdish Region

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraqi President Abdel Latif Rashid condemned Turkey for bombarding an area near Sulaimaniyah airport in the autonomous Kurdish region, a flashpoint between the two governments.

"Turkish military operations against the Kurdistan region continue to take place, the last being the bombardment (Friday) against Sulaimaniyah civilian airport," Rashid said in a statement. Rashid, who is himself a Kurd from Sulaimaniyah, said such actions by Turkish forces have "no legal justification" and serve only to "terrorise civilians under the pretext that hostile forces are present in Iraq". He was referring to the Kurdistan Workers' Party (PKK) which has a presence in Iraq's Kurdistan region and is blacklisted as a "terrorist" organization by Turkey and its allies.



## U.S. Navy Sends Guided-Missile Submarine to Middle East

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. Navy said a nuclear-powered guided-missile submarine was operating in the Middle East in support of the Bahrain-based U.S. Fifth Fleet.

The USS Florida entered the region on Thursday and began transiting the Suez Canal on Friday, Commander Timothy Hawkins said in a statement. "It is capable of carrying up to 154 Tomahawk land-attack cruise missiles and is deployed to U.S. 5th Fleet to help ensure regional maritime security and stability," Hawkins said. The 5th Fleet patrols the crucial Strait of Hormuz, the narrow mouth of the Persian Gulf through which 20% of all oil transits. Its region includes the Bab el-Mandeb Strait off Yemen and the Red Sea stretching up to the Suez Canal, the Egyptian waterway linking the Mideast to the Mediterranean Sea.



## Chinese Planes Cross Taiwan Strait Median Line



FUZHOU (Dispatches) - Seventy-one Chinese military aircraft crossed the sensitive median line of the Taiwan Strait as China began drills around Taiwan in anger at President Tsai Ing-wen's meeting with the speaker of the U.S. House of Representatives.

The three-day drills, announced the day after Tsai returned from the United States, had been widely expected after Beijing condemned her Wednesday meeting with Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Los Angeles.

China views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control. Taiwan's government strongly objects to China's claims.

Beijing's announcement also came just hours after China hosted a visit by senior European leaders.

The People's Liberation Army said it had started the combat readiness patrols and "Joint Sword" exercises around Taiwan, having said earlier it would be holding them in the Taiwan Strait and to the north, south and east of Taiwan "as planned".

"This is a serious warning to the Taiwan independence separatist forces and external forces' collusion and provocation, and it is a necessary action to defend national sovereignty and territorial integrity," the Chinese army's Eastern Theatre Command said in a statement.

Taiwan's Defence Ministry said as of 4 p.m. (0800 GMT) on Saturday it spotted 71 Chinese aircraft, including fighter jets and bombers, crossing the median line that normally serves as an unofficial barrier between the two sides, as well as nine Chinese ships.

China was using Tsai's U.S. visit "as an excuse to carry out military exercises, which has seriously damaged regional peace, stability and security", the ministry said in a statement.

"The military will respond with a calm, rational and serious attitude, and will stand guard and monitor in accordance with the principles of 'not escalating nor disputes' to defend national sovereignty and national security."

Chinese state television released what it said was footage of the drills, set to stirring martial music and showing warships at sea and mobile missile launchers being readied, though did not show missiles being fired. It said fighter aircraft went up armed with live weapons.

Reuters could not establish when or where the material was shot.

There was no broader sense of alarm in Taiwan about the drills, where people are long accustomed to Chinese threats.

China had threatened unspecified retaliation if the meeting with McCarthy - second in line to succeed the U.S. president, after the vice president - were to take place. Beijing staged war games around Taiwan, including live-fire missile launches, in August after then-House Speaker Nancy Pelosi visited Taipei.

A senior Taiwan official familiar with security planning in the region told Reuters the aircraft involved in the morning missions had only crossed the median line briefly.

The situation was "as expected" and manageable, and Taiwan's government has rehearsed various scenarios for its response, the person said on condition of anonymity, as they were not authorised to speak to the media.

Reuters reporters in a seaside area near Fuzhou, opposite the Taiwan-controlled Matsu islands, saw a Chinese warship firing shells onto a drill area on China's coast, part of drills announced by China late on Friday.

Writing on her Facebook page, Tsai said she was briefed about the security situation and that the military was at its post around the clock.

## Russia Hits Annexed Ukraine Areas From Ground, Air

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian forces used ground- and air-fired missiles, rocket launchers and weaponized drones to bombard the provinces of Ukraine it has illegally annexed but doesn't fully control, causing casualties, building damage and power outages.

The Ukrainian military said Russian forces launched 18 airstrikes, five missile strikes and 53 attacks from multiple rocket launchers between Thursday and Friday mornings.

According to the General Staff statement, Russia was concentrating the bulk of its offensive operations in Ukraine's industrial east, focusing on the cities and towns of Lyman, Bakhmut, Avdiivka and Marinka in Donetsk province.

Most of the battlefield reports concerned the four Ukrainian provinces Russia annexed in September: Donetsk, Luhansk, Zaporizhzhia and Kherson. Russian President Vladimir Putin has ordered his military to gain complete control of the provinces, while Ukraine has indicated it will soon launch a counteroffensive to take back more territory.

Russia also annexed the Crimean Peninsula from Ukraine in 2014, a move that most of the world also regarded as illegal.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy has vowed to regain all Russian-occupied areas.

Looking ahead to how the war might end, Ukraine's defense minister, Oleksii Reznikov, told Cypriot state broadcaster CyBC ahead of talks with his Cypriot counterpart on Friday that his country would negotiate peace with Russia only after its occupied territory is liberated. He said Zelenskyy has made clear he would negotiate only with Putin's successor to ensure peaceful coexistence.

Regarding armament procurement, Reznikov said Ukraine's top priority is for anti-aircraft systems, followed by artillery ammunition, infantry vehicles, tanks and electronic warfare equipment, including drones and anti-drone technology.

In the latest fighting, the Ukrainian military said it downed a Russian Su-25 ground attack jet near Marinka. A video showed a big explosion as the plane slammed into the ground, with its pilot descending on a parachute. The Russian military, in keeping with its general silence on losses, didn't confirm the warplane's downing.

The envoys expressed particular concern about North Korea's cybercrimes and illicit labor exports, which Seoul says could possibly expand as it further reopens its borders as COVID-19 fears ease.

### North Korea Claims Another Test of Underwater Nuclear Drone

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea claimed it tested this week a second known type of nuclear-capable underwater attack drone designed to destroy naval vessels and ports, adding to a flurry of weapons demonstrations this year that have heightened tensions with rivals.

The report of the four-day test came a day after the nuclear envoys of the United States, South Korea and Japan met in Seoul to discuss the growing North Korean nuclear threat and called for stronger international efforts to crack down on illicit North Korean activities funding its weapons program.

The North's official Korean Central News Agency said the drone, named "Haeil-2" after a Korean word meaning tsunamis or tidal waves, traveled underwater for more than 71 hours before successfully detonating a mock warhead in waters near the eastern port city of Tanchon on Friday. KCNA said the test proved that the weapon could strike targets 1,000 kilometers (621 miles) away with "fatal attack ability."

North Korean state media last month reported two tests of another drone, named "Haeil-1," and described the weapon as capable of setting off a "radioactive tsunami" to destroy enemy vessels and ports.

Analysts, however, are skeptical whether such a device would add a meaningful new threat to North Korea's growing nuclear arsenal built around missiles and whether it's reasonable for the North to pursue such capabilities considering its still-limited supplies of nuclear bomb fuel. South Korea's military has said it believes North Korean claims about Haeil-1 were likely "exaggerated or fabricated."

On Friday, U.S. President Joe Biden's special representative for North Korea, Sung Kim, met with his South Korean and Japanese counterparts in Seoul where they issued a joint statement calling for stronger international support to stem North Korean efforts to evade U.N. Security Council sanctions imposed over its nuclear weapons ambitions.

## Chad to Expel German Ambassador Over Discourteous Attitude

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Chad's government has ordered the German ambassador to leave the country within 48 hours, it said in a statement.

"This decision of the government is motivated by the discourteous attitude and the non-respect of diplomatic customs," the country's communication ministry said on Twitter.

Germany's spokesman Aziz Mahamat Saleh urged the ambassador to "leave Chadian territory within 48 hours".

Two Chadian government sources told the Reuters news agency that Ambassador Gordon Kricke had criticised delays in holding elections after the coup, and a ruling last year that will allow interim military leader Mahamat Idriss Deby to run in elections in 2024.

Germany's foreign ministry did not comment on Kricke's expulsion, but a source familiar with the ministry's thinking told Reuters that the move was "absolutely incomprehensible" and that it was in contact with Chadian authorities.

Kricke has been in the role since July 2021. He has previously served as a diplomat in Niger, Angola and the Philippines. He was also a special representative for Germany in the unstable Sahel.

A government source told AFP, on condition of anonymity, that Kricke was seen as "interfering too much" in the governance of the country, and making divisive remarks.

He had been warned on several occasions, the source added.

Military leaders in the Central African country originally promised an 18-month transition to elections when Deby seized power after his father, President Idriss Deby, was killed on the battlefield during a conflict with rebels, ending decades of authoritarian rule.

But last year, the military government extended the timeline by two years, delaying elections until October 2024, sparking protests in which dozens of civilians were killed, and worrying regional powers and the United States who have warned against extending military rule.

Many diplomats in the country, which borders Libya, Niger, Nigeria, Cameroon, the Central African Republic and Sudan, sharply criticised the violence.

The German embassy joined others, such as France, Spain and The Netherlands, in expressing its concern about the delayed return to democracy.



## Estonia PM's Party Clinches New Coalition Government Deal

TALLINN (Dispatches) - Estonia's Prime Minister Kaja Kallas said that her center-right Reform Party has clinched a deal with two other parties to form a coalition government, five weeks after a general election in the Baltic country.

The party councils of Kallas' pro-business Reform Party, which overwhelmingly won Estonia's March 5 parliamentary election with 31.2% of the vote, the centrist Estonia 200 party and the Social Democratic Party said they would form the coalition after agreeing on government programs for the next four years following lengthy talks.

"This agreement ensures that Estonia is protected, that we can continue as an independent and self-sustaining country," Kallas, who will remain as prime minister, said during a news conference.

Kallas has held the premiership of Estonia — a European Union and NATO member — since January 2021, when she became the first female head of government in the nation of 1.3 million.

The Reform Party was also the senior partner in the outgoing three-party government with the Social Democrats and the conservative Isamaa (Fatherland) party.

Kallas, 45, has chaired the Reform Party since 2018, and the new Cabinet will be her third.

Reform is set to have seven ministerial portfolios, including Kallas' prime minister post, the finance minister and the defense minister portfolios in the 13-member Cabinet. It would hold a 60-seat majority at the 101-seat Riigikogu, the Parliament.

Estonia 200, which is to have the foreign minister portfolio, and the Social Democrats would have three ministerial portfolios each.

Kallas said her new Cabinet would face difficult financial, security, education and other decisions that are "necessary for Estonia."

"We want Estonia to be protected, the well-being and livelihood of our people to be guaranteed, the state's finances to be in order, education, language and culture to be preserved, and tomorrow to be better for everyone," she said.

She said defense and security would top the new Cabinet's agenda.

"Security is a main concern," said Kallas, referring to Estonia's neighbor, Russia, which is waging a war in Ukraine. "That's why we are increasing our defense expenditure ... in the coming years."



## In Mexican Jungle, Scientists Prepare For Future Pandemics



TZUCACAB (Dispatches) - As night fell in Mexico's Yucatan jungle, veterinarian Omar Garcia extracted blood and fluids from a bat as part of an investigation aimed at preventing the next potential pandemic.

The goal of the Franco-Mexican project is to detect diseases — known as zoonoses — transmitted from animals to humans in tropical climates.

Bats are under scrutiny from the international scientific community as a possible source of coronavirus transmission.

The winged mammal remained immobile while bearing its fangs, before being released by Garcia, a vector-borne disease expert.

Scientists from France's Research Institute for Development (IRD) and the National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) have been collaborating in the study since 2017, using a modern laboratory in Merida, the Yucatan state capital.

The aim is to discover how different viruses that circulate between animals such as mammals, birds and rodents, can potentially pass to humans, said Audrey Arnal, an infectious diseases expert at the IRD.

"This is zoonosis... understanding what the consequences of human contact with wildlife could be and then understanding what could be the next epidemic that can come out of nature," she told AFP.

Scientists take samples of all kinds of animals from the rich ecosystem of the tropical rainforest, where they have identified 61 species of mosquitoes.

"We have many questions" to try to "complete the history of the transmission cycle" of viruses, said UNAM biologist Maria Jose Tolsa, who after a decade of research finally feels that the importance of her work is recognised.

"A pandemic has serious consequences for health and the economy," she said.

The area was chosen for the research because rapid deforestation has made it "a highly emblematic region in terms of zoonosis emergency risks," said Benjamin Roche, a specialist in ecology and evolutionary biology at the IRD.

It is estimated that between 500,000 and 800,000 viruses could affect humans, he added.

The risks grow with the expansion of agriculture and tourism, which increase contact between animals and humans, according to researchers.

Thousands of trees have been felled in the Yucatan Peninsula to build President Andres Manuel Lopez Obrador's flagship tourist rail project, the Mayan Train, scheduled to start operating in December.

The government says that it is offsetting the loss with a tree-planting programme and the creation of the second-largest tropical rainforest reserve in the world after the Amazon.

The key is to achieve a balance between humans and nature, Arnal said.

"The population have to live, eat and develop their economy," she added.

The research is being carried out in 12 communities across the three states that make up the Yucatan Peninsula.

"In birds we've found species that have been identified as reservoirs for the West Nile virus or influenza," said Rosa Elena Sarmiento, from the virology laboratory of the UNAM Veterinary School.

Field work begins at dawn by placing a dozen fine nets to trap birds. At dusk it is the turn of bats and even owls. Once caught, blood, fluid and ectoparasite samples — if they carry them — are taken.

Scientists identify the animal, measure it, record the data and check its condition before releasing it. Later the material is analysed in the laboratory.

"DNA is a great revealer," Arnal said.

## Why Are Animal-to-Human Diseases on the Rise?



PARIS (Dispatches) - From Covid-19 to monkey pox, Mers, Ebola, avian flu, Zika and HIV, diseases transmitted from animals to humans have multiplied in recent years, raising fears of new pandemics.

A zoonosis (plural zoonoses) is a disease or infection transmitted from vertebrate animals to people, and vice versa. The pathogens involved can be bacteria, viruses or parasites.

These diseases are transmitted either directly during contact between an animal and a human, or indirectly through food or through a vector such as an insect, spider or mite.

Some diseases end up becoming specifically human, like Covid-19.

According to the World Organisation for Animal Health, 60 per cent of human infectious diseases are zoonotic.

### What types of diseases are involved?

The term "zoonoses" includes a wide variety of diseases.

Some affect the digestive system, such as salmonellosis, others the respiratory system, such as avian and swine flu as well as Covid, or the nervous system in the case of rabies.

The severity of these diseases in humans varies greatly depending on the disease and the pathogen's virulence, but also on the infected person, who may have a particular sensitivity to the pathogen.

### What animals are involved?

Bats act as a reservoir for many viruses that affect humans.

Some have been known for a long time, such as the rabies virus, but many have emerged in recent decades, such as Ebola, the SARS coronavirus, Sars-CoV-2 (which causes Covid-19) or the Nipah virus, which appeared in Asia in 1998.

Badgers, ferrets, mink and weasels are often implicated in viral zoonoses, and in particular those caused by coronaviruses. Other mammals, such as cattle, pigs, dogs, foxes, camels and rodents, also often play the role of intermediate host.

All the viruses responsible for major influenza pandemics had an avian origin, either direct or indirect.

Finally, insects such as ticks are vectors of many viral diseases that affect humans.

### Why has the frequency of zoonoses increased?

Having appeared thousands of years ago, zoonoses have multiplied over the past 20 or 30 years.

The growth of international travel has allowed them to spread more quickly.

By occupying increasingly large areas of the planet, humans also contribute to disrupting the ecosystem and promoting the transmission of viruses.

Industrial farming increases the risk of pathogens spreading between animals.

Trade in wild animals also increases human exposure to the microbes they may carry.

Deforestation increases the risk of contact between wildlife, domestic animals and human populations.

### Should we fear another pandemic?

Climate change will push many animals to flee their ecosystems for more liveable lands, a study published by the scientific journal Nature warned in 2022.

By mixing more, species will transmit their viruses more, which will promote the emergence of new diseases potentially transmissible to humans.



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## Ukraine Able to Resume Electricity Exports After Six-Month Gap

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine can now resume exporting electricity after a six-month gap, given the success of repairs carried out after repeated Russian attacks, Energy Minister Herman Halushchenko said.

Last October, Ukraine halted exports of electricity to the European Union — its main export market for energy since the war began — following Russia strikes on energy infrastructure.

“The most difficult winter has passed,” Halushchenko said in a statement on the ministry’s website, noting that the system had been working normally for almost two months.



## Yellen Downplays Recession Fears in U.S.

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen expects the world’s biggest economy will continue to grow, despite heightened recession concerns following recent turmoil in the banking sector.

The dramatic collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank last month had rattled the industry, prompting U.S. authorities including the Treasury Department and Federal Reserve to step in to prevent contagion.

While the situation has calmed, analysts warn that fallout from the recent instability could continue — as banks tighten lending standards, reducing available credit to households and businesses.

But Yellen told AFP in an interview on Thursday: “I continue to anticipate that the US economy will grow and the labor market will remain strong, and inflation will come down.”

Her comments came after JPMorgan Chase Chief Executive Jamie Dimon warned this week that the current crisis is not yet over and will be felt for years to come.

While he noted that today’s conditions are nothing like during the 2008 financial crisis, he added that it was not clear when the problems would end.

Asked about the matter, Yellen said she is committed to ensuring that all deposits are safe and monitoring banking system conditions.

Officials are also “prepared to use all of our tools as needed for any size of institutions to keep the system safe and sound,” she said.

After SVB’s collapse, U.S. authorities set out plans to ensure its customers would be able to access their deposits. A similar exception was announced for Signature Bank.

The Fed and other major central banks later launched a coordinated effort to boost lenders’ access to liquidity.

“Our banking system is sound and it’s resilient,” Yellen said, adding that it has strong capital and liquidity as well.

“The actions that we have taken are intended to reinforce that and to ensure broad public confidence,” she told AFP.

Meanwhile she said that the World Bank’s ongoing reform could result in a \$50 billion lending boost over the next decade.

Central bankers, finance ministers and participants from more than 180 member countries are expected to gather in the U.S. capital for the International Monetary Fund and World Bank’s spring meetings in the coming week.

A key topic of discussion will be the World Bank’s evolution, amid a push for lenders to revamp and meet global challenges like climate change. The United States is the largest shareholder of the World Bank Group.

“I expect there to be an update of the bank’s mission to add building resilience against climate change, pandemics, and conflict and fragility to the core goals,” Yellen said in the interview with AFP Thursday.

She added that there needs to be a recognition that these challenges aren’t separate or conflicting but rather, inextricably linked.

“Second, there will be an announcement that the bank is stretching its financial capacity to meet these objectives, and adopting changes or endorsing changes that could result in an additional US\$50 billion in extra lending capacity over the next decade,” Yellen said.

## Greek Economy to Grow 2.2% in 2023

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece’s economy will grow by 2.2% in 2023, its central bank chief said, urging the country to stick to the path of reform and fiscal prudence as it enters a period of increased political uncertainty due to elections.

Greece will hold a general election on May 21, weeks before the conservative government’s term ends. But the vote is unlikely to produce a clear winner, setting the stage for protracted political maneuvering and a runoff vote.

Athens needs to continue with credible policies to shield its economy from risks which include the impact of the energy crisis and a protracted electoral period, Yiannis Stournaras told the central bank’s annual shareholders’ meeting.

“The biggest risk for Greece’s economic prospects in a period of successive crises and increased uncertainty, would be a loss of credibility on the economic policy implemented, which was so hard to regain, and a return to the bad practices of the past,” Stournaras said.

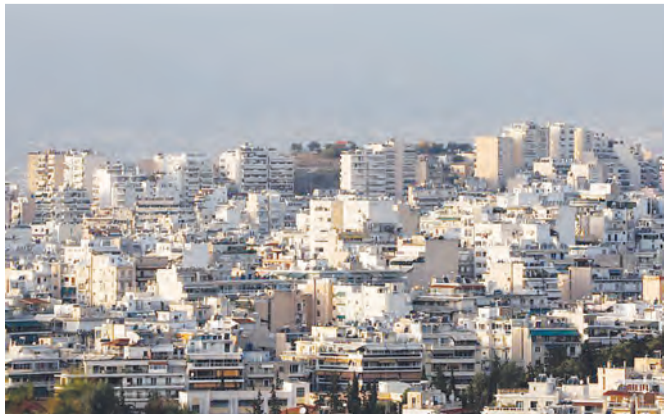
Greece emerged from international bailouts in 2018, nearly a decade after a debt crisis forced it to seek financial aid from its European peers and the International Monetary Fund in exchange for austerity to stay afloat.

His latest growth projection upwardly revises an earlier central bank estimate for economic expansion of 1.5% this year from 5.9% 2022, reflecting Greece’s fiscal progress.

Stournaras said headline inflation would remain at high levels but was expected to ease to 4.4%, and he confirmed a government projection for a primary surplus of 0.7% this year.

The country, he said, needs to be able to achieve sustainable primary surpluses around 2% of gross domestic product in the medium term, while maintaining fiscal credibility is pivotal for the aim of regaining investment grade and to keep reducing debt, the highest in the euro zone.

“Since 2023 is a year of national elections, to maintain the climate of confidence in the prospects of the Greek economy, prudence and responsibility is required from political forces, that need to support the country’s fiscal goals,” he said.



## China Steps Up Foreign Travel In Race to Find Investors

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Large delegations of Chinese city and business officials have made hundreds of trips to Asia and Europe since December, seeking to drum up foreign investment as local governments scramble to hit growth and employment targets.

District officials have joined their supervisors at city and provincial levels, along with local businesses, in crossing the border more frequently than ever, according to their social media accounts and three sources who met some of them.

After three years behind closed borders as China enforced strict “zero-Covid” measures at great cost to its economy, officials made business trips to locations ranging from Hong Kong to Paris within days of the curbs being lifted.

Their urgency highlights the pressure local governments face in boosting growth while burdened with cumulative debt of US\$9 trillion, said the sources who met Chinese officials in Hong Kong.

“There’s obvious pressure on every level of government to achieve high targets,” said Erik Yim, a legislator representing Chinese enterprises in the Asian financial hub.

Yim added that geopolitical and trade tension with the United States prompted the delegations to focus more on the rest of the world.

The world’s No. 2 economy is “open for business”, Premier Li Qiang said last week at China’s Boao Forum, a summit sometimes touted as Asia’s answer to Davos, where he vowed to win over foreign investors and support private enterprises.

While China chose a lower growth target of about 5% for 2023 than the goal of roughly 5.5% it missed last year because of lockdowns against Covid-19, it wants to create a million more jobs than it aimed for in 2022.



Two prominent executives in Hong Kong, who spoke on condition of anonymity, described the officials they met as being more determined than ever to secure investments for projects ranging from ports and biotech to art and sport.

“China needs foreign capital to boost its economy,” said one of them. “I’ve never had so many people reaching out within such a short timeframe before and also people at such niche levels.”

The other executive and Yim said they had often attended as many as eight to 10 events a day with Chinese officials.

A 200-strong delegation from China shouts slogans such as “Grab new orders, expand the market,” as it boards a 1.00am private jet to Europe, in footage posted online by the government of the eastern province of Jiangsu.

## BOJ Must Be Cautious About Changing Easy Money Policy Too Soon



TOKYO (Dispatches) - The Bank of Japan (BOJ) should be cautious about changing its unconventional monetary policy for now, given financial market uncertainty due to problems in Western banks, former top financial diplomat Takehiko Nakao told Reuters in an interview.

Nakao made the comments amid speculation the BOJ may abandon its yield curve control policy when new Governor Kazuo Ueda takes over incumbent Haruhiko Kuroda, whose term ends on April 8.

U.S. bank failures and the buyout of Credit Suisse by UBS last month have driven financial market risk aversion.

Nakao said the BOJ must carefully monitor market developments, for now, although credit anxiety was unlikely to morph into anything like the 2008/09 global financial crisis.

Japan needs to start making adjustments towards normalising fiscal and monetary policies as financial markets stabilise, because prolonged stimulus inhibits necessary corporate restructuring and job turnover, he said.

“The BOJ may need to tread even more cautiously in reconsidering and adjusting monetary policy in the face of new problems of financial market jitters,” said Nakao, former vice finance minister for international affairs, who coordinated with other countries in responding to the euro crisis in the 2010s.

“Yet, the BOJ cannot continue unconventional monetary policy, including ETF and REIT purchases and YCC, indefinitely. Doing so won’t be in the interest of Japan in the long run.”

Nakao was referring to the central bank’s purchases of assets such as exchange-traded funds and real estate investment trust and its policy targeting the bond yield curve.

## Egypt Inflation Seen Hitting All-Time High in March

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egypt’s headline inflation rate is set to hit an all-time high in March, a Reuters poll showed, following a continued shortage of foreign currency after more than a year of devaluations of the Egyptian pound.

The median forecast of 13 analysts polled showed annual urban consumer inflation rising to 33.6% in March from 31.9% in February, which itself was a five-and-a-half-year record.

Egypt, which secured a \$3 billion financial support package from the International Monetary Fund in December, has devalued its currency by half since March 2022 after fallout from Russia’s invasion of Ukraine exposed vulnerabilities in Egypt’s economy.

“We think that earlier falls in the pound will continue to feed through into Egypt’s inflation, pushing up both food and non-food inflation,” said Capital Economics, which forecast March inflation of 37.1%.

The previous record, of 32.952%, was reached in July 2017, eight months after Egypt devalued its currency by half as part of a previous, \$12 billion IMF support package.

HC Securities said it expected the March figure would reflect increases of up to 11% in petrol prices and 20% in heavy fuel oil prices in early March.

A hike in household electricity last July, a recent liberalisation of the prices of essential food commodities such as rice and a local poultry shortage would also boost inflation numbers, HC Securities added.

A median of six of the analysts also expected core inflation, which excludes fuel and some volatile food items, to climb to a record 42.25% from February’s 40.26%, also a record.

## Italy to Cut 2024 Growth View Amid ECB Rate Hikes

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy’s government plans to cut its 2024 economic growth forecast, people familiar with the matter said, as it weighs the negative impact of rising interest rates and difficulties in spending EU post-COVID recovery funds.

Rome will publish new estimates next week for this year and next in its Economic and Financial Document (DEF), which will also carry a warning that the delays in investing those European Union transfers are likely to worsen, two sources said.

Italy last November targeted a growth rate for the euro zone’s third-largest economy of 0.6% this year and 1.9% in 2024.

The 2023 projection is set to be raised to 0.9%. But the new 2024 estimate will probably be lower than 1.8%, one of the sources said.

Economy Minister Giancarlo Giorgetti said last week the 2023 economic outlook was improving but, in an implicit criticism of European Central Bank policy, that higher interest rates designed to curb inflation could pose a threat to growth. A Treasury spokesperson said the ministry adopted a cautious approach which led it to use the least upbeat forecast of a series of possible outcomes.

The DEF will also trim this year’s fiscal deficit projection to 4.35% of national output from 4.5%, the sources said.

The estimates being drawn up are under an unchanged policy scenario and so do not include support measures for families and firms that the government also intends to announce in the DEF.

Final targets, due by mid-April, are usually more ambitious than forecasts reflecting the current economic outlook.

A key issue affecting the 2024 outlook is Italy’s ability to catch up with the post-COVID recovery funding programme.

Italy is due to receive roughly 200 billion euros (\$217.88 billion) in grants and cheap loans through 2026, making it the EU scheme’s largest beneficiary in absolute terms.

However, the government is falling behind both on targets and milestones agreed with Brussels in return for the aid, and on spending money already received.

Italy’s audit court last month said overall investment spending by year-end was expected to be nearly 15 billion euros below projections in an initial financial framework set out in 2021 by Meloni’s predecessor Mario Draghi.

To gain some flexibility, EU Affairs Minister Raffaele Fitto said he was in talks with Brussels to replace some schemes in its original recovery plan.

But agreement on this was unlikely by the end of April, the source added, making budget policy planning more complicated.



## Iran Petrochemicals Export at \$26b in Year to March

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran exported petrochemical products worth \$26 billion in the last Iranian calendar year (March 21, 2022 to March 20, 2023), according to a senior official at the country's Oil Ministry.

Deputy Oil Minister and CEO of the National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Morteza Shahmirzaei announced the figures in a press

conference on Sunday, adding that some 65 million metric tons (mt) of petrochemical products were produced in Iran over the year to March.

Shahmirzaei said that the volume of exports of petrochemical products from Iran reached some 27 million mt over the past calendar year. He said that domestic sales of petrochemical products in Iran had amounted to 12 million mt worth \$10 billion over the year to late March.



## Europe Facing Costly Winter Without Enough Long-Term LNG Deals

LONDON (Dispatches) - Europe has not made enough progress in locking in long-term contracts for liquefied natural gas (LNG) as an alternative to Russian pipeline supply, which may prove costly next winter as a rebound in Chinese demand could sharply tighten the market.

Buying LNG to replace curtailed Russian flows helped the bloc weather the first winter of the Ukraine conflict, with Europe importing 121 million tons of the fuel in 2022, a 60% increase from 2021.

But that came at a cost: Europe bought largely on the spot market, where prices are much higher than those negotiated under long-term deals favored by seasoned buyers like China. According to the International Energy Agency, the cost of its LNG imports more than tripled in 2022 to some \$190 billion.

Analysts estimate that Europe accounted for more than a third of global spot market trades in 2022, from around 13% in 2021. Such exposure could reach more than 50% this year if no long-term contracts were signed.

But Europe's climate goals - the EU aims to cut net emissions at least 55% by 2030, and to reach net zero by 2050 - mean its LNG buyers struggle to commit to the timeframes necessary to lock in LNG more cheaply under contract.

Morten Frisch, senior partner at Morten Frisch Consulting, said Europe ideally needs about 70-75% of its LNG supply under firm long-term sale and purchase agreements (SPAs).

"But since the green lobby in Europe has managed to persuade politicians wrongly that hydrogen to a large extent can replace natural gas as an energy carrier by 2030, Europe has become far too reliant on spot and short term purchases of LNG," he added.

One senior supply-side source reported a "disconnection" during negotiations with European companies between their needs and the messages they get from their governments on climate.

"Some customers struggle internally... (wondering) is there is a hard stop in 2030? Is there a net-zero by 2040? This moving target... is it really a cliff?" he said.

"This makes it tough for them to commit to the medium and longer term deals, and that potentially leaves them exposed to the spot market in the future."

Asia has continued to pull ahead in the race for limited global LNG supply this year before new flows come into the market in 2025 and beyond.

"Their preference for security of supply has allowed them to continue to support new projects, whereas European buyers are concerned about committing to supply well into the start of their net-zero targets," said Felix Booth, head of LNG at energy intelligence firm Vortexa.

While gas is a fossil fuel, it produces less carbon dioxide emissions than coal, so some EU states see it as a temporary alternative to replace dirtier fuels.

Eurasia Group's managing director for energy, climate and sustainability Raad Alkadiri said Europe will not be able to lock in LNG as a replacement for Russian gas as long as the EU views it as a transition fuel, as producers want a guaranteed market in Europe over the next few decades.

Spot LNG prices have dropped more than 82% since they hit a record \$70.50 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) in 2022 after Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

But they are expected to rise again, with a hot summer that could cut hydro levels, a cold 2023-2024 winter and a rebound in Chinese LNG demand all seen as among the risk factors for price.



"EU companies would need to act first by signing a series of large-scale, long-term SPAs based on the Chinese model, to hedge themselves against any ups and downs of the turbulent global LNG market," said Victor Tenev, LNG business consultant at advisory ROITI Ltd.

"Failing to hedge their unenviable natural short position would leave the EU exposed again to the damagingly expensive spot market."

Major LNG producers and traders including QatarEnergy, Shell, Chevron and ConocoPhillips have in recent months all held talks in European capitals on securing LNG deals.

QatarEnergy's talks with the German government and top power companies such as RWE have hit a wall due to disagreements over deal length, company and industry sources said.

While Qatar typically seeks to sign contracts with at least 25-year terms, Germany has sought a term of 10 to 15 years due to its commitments to slash greenhouse gas emissions, the sources said.

"If you take gas with the delivery point Germany, you cannot go beyond 2043, because gas is not allowed in Germany after 2043," a senior German industry source said.

To resolve the issue, Qatar has offered Germany shorter term contracts of 15 years which would price the LNG at a hefty premium to the longer-term contract, the sources said.

"Nobody wants to lock in 20 years nowadays, and it's the worst possible idea when you're trying to work out what's going to happen next year," Shell Chief Financial Officer Sinead Goreman said at a conference in March.

Shell is offering supply contracts with "break clauses" to allow changes to contracts' term and destination throughout the life of the supply deal such as a three, five or 10 year mark, she said.

"That's what you are going to see more and more - the big integrated players... (being) willing to take that risk because ultimately, countries and smaller companies want to have the flexibility to say, well, let's see how fast renewables grow."

## A Sustainable Energy Economy Is Cheaper Than Sticking to Fossil Fuels

LONDON (Dispatches) - The massive rollout of clean energy solutions will need as much as \$10 trillion of investments over the next 20 years, but continued use of fossil fuels will cost even higher, \$14 trillion, Tesla said in a presentation.

In addition to initial capex, 5% per year maintenance capex with a 20-year horizon is included in the investment estimate to reach sustainable energy for the world, Elon Musk's EV maker said in the Master Plan Sustainable Energy for All of Earth report.

"Using these assumptions, building the manufacturing infrastructure for the sustainable energy economy will cost \$10 trillion, as compared to the \$14 trillion projected 20-year spend on fossil fuels at the 2022 investment rate," according to Tesla.

Speaking at the presentation of the report, Musk said, "Earth will move to a sustainable energy economy."

"And it will happen in your lifetime," said Musk as carried by Bloomberg.

Despite the rise in renewables, low-carbon energy supply needs at least double the current investment if the world has any chance of net zero by 2050, various analyses have shown in recent months.

In overall energy investment—not only supply—the energy crisis and policy actions sent global investment in low-carbon energy soaring to a record \$1.1 trillion in 2022, with the money spent on the energy transition equaling for the first time the investment in fossil fuels, research firm BloombergNEF (BNEF) said in a report last month.

Despite the largest annual jump in investment in clean energy—31%—much more investment is needed to get the world on track for net zero in the long term, according to BloombergNEF.

In the company's Net Zero Scenario, the world should invest an annual average of \$4.55 trillion for the rest of this decade.

Earlier this year, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said that as the world enters a new industrial age, total investments in clean energy technologies and infrastructure have to top \$4.5 trillion in 2030 under the net-zero emissions by 2050 scenario.

## Western Curbs on Russian Oil Products Redraw Global Shipping Map

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Global fuel suppliers are turning to longer and costlier routes that produce more carbon emissions to move their diesel and other products as Western restrictions on Russian cargoes have reshuffled global energy shipping patterns.

As a result of the European Union ban on Russian fuel that started on Feb. 5, tankers carrying clean oil products such as gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and naphtha are travelling between 16 and 18 days to bring Russian supplies to Brazil or U.S. cargoes to Europe, according to two shipping sources.

That is up from the four to six days a ship used to travel from Russia to Europe, said the two sources, a broker at a major shipbroking firm and a charterer involved in the Russian trade of naphtha, which is used to make plastics and petrochemicals.

The ban comes on top of a halt late last year on Russian crude sales into the bloc as well as Western price caps. Since the start of the ban, the Clean Tanker Index published by the Baltic Exchange, which measures average freight rates for shipping fuels like gasoline and diesel on some of the most common global routes, has more than doubled.

The redrawing of the shipping map underscores the knock-on effects of Western efforts to punish Russia over its invasion of Ukraine last year, adding to fuel supply insecurity and pushing up prices even as policymakers worry about inflation and the risk of a global economic downturn.

"Not only are voyages much longer, but vessel behaviour has also changed, keeping vessels from operating in other CPP (clean petroleum product) markets," Dylan Simpson, freight analyst at oil analytics firm Vortexa, wrote in a March 31 note.

Russian cargoes of fuel are heading to far-flung buyers in Brazil, Turkey, Nigeria, and Morocco as Moscow compensates for the lost European business, while Europe is importing more fuels such as diesel from Asia and the Middle East, according to shipping data from Refinitiv and Kpler.

## Israel Stoking Tensions to...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, the IRGC chief said the United States is in decline, stating that those who once used to blindly follow the US president, sought political refuge in Washington and tied their existence to US policies, are now distancing themselves from the White House and its decisions.

Salami also made a reference to recent riots in Iran, stating that the enemies of Islam had jointly constructed plots to topple the Islamic establishment, but they failed miserably.

"The US, Britain, France, Germany, the Netherlands, the Zionist regime and a number of reactionary regimes in the region, together with several sell-outs, political opponents and refugees, had assembled an evil coalition in order to defeat the Islamic establishment, obliterate Islam from Iran's political scene, and return Iran back to the era before the [1979]

Islamic Revolution," he said.

"The enemies did not even hesitate to officially declare that they backed the overthrow of Iran's Islamic Republic. The maximum pressure campaign intensified, strategies of isolation were placed at the heart of the enemies' policies, and a full-scale psychological warfare was openly waged against the Iranian nation, the Islamic Revolution, Ayatollah Khamenei and the IRGC," Salami noted.

"However, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution and the great Iranian nation successfully thwarted sanctions, pressures, psychological warfare, destabilizing bids, harboring opponents and even threats of military action, which were among the enemy's mechanisms, thorough resistance and steadfastness," the IRGC chief said.

## Now It Is Time to...

FROM PAGE 1

Some protesters also carried placards, reading "Stop arming Israel", "End Israeli Apartheid", "Sanctions on Israel" and "Gaza, end the siege."

The protest was organized by pro-Palestine rights groups, including Friends of Al-Aqsa, Palestinian Forum in Britain, and Stop the War Coalition. Jewish Anti-Zionist Network and Jewish Voice for Labors were among the participants.

Hundreds of people from different walks of life also marched on Saturday in Times Square in the heart of Manhattan, New York, to condemn the Israeli regime's acts of aggression against Palestinians, particularly the desecration of al-Aqsa Mosque.

The demonstrators, who were from various nationalities and different ages, shouted slogans in solidarity with Palestine and demanded an end to its occupation by the Israeli regime.

They also chanted anti-Zionist slogans and waved the Palestinian flag to show their support for the oppressed people of Palestine, while slamming the silence of international bodies in the face of Israel's blatant crimes.

These are just few signs of reactions against the Zionist crimes, and Muslims in the world gradually are finding courage to speak out their opinions against the Zionist regime despite compromise of their governments with the Zionists and the West or their fear of the West and Zionists.

Lebanese caretaker Foreign Minister Abdallah Bou Habib filed a complaint with the UN Security Council (UNSC) and UN Secretary-General António Guterres against Israel after the regime said it had struck positions belonging to the Palestinian resistance group Hamas in southern Lebanon.

According to Lebanon's official National News Agency (NNA), Bou Habib held a meeting with caretaker Prime Minister Najib Mikati on Saturday, after which he instructed the Permanent Mission of Lebanon to the United Nations in New York to submit an official complaint to the UN Security Council and the UN chief regarding the impact of the Israeli bombing and deliberate aggression at Friday dawn in areas in southern Lebanon.

The top Lebanese diplomat called the Israeli aggression a flagrant violation of Lebanon's sovereignty and a deliberate breach of UN Security Council Resolution 1701.

Recent violence and chaos inside Israel is a good opportunity for Muslims to rush to the help of the Palestinians to take back their lands from the claw of the usurper Israeli regime.

As the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution had predicted the collapse of the Zionist by saying that the Zionist regime would collapse in 25 years, it seems it has been accelerated and Israel will collapse in less than what the Supreme Lear had predicted and we can see many signs for this collapse.

The Zionists are suffering both inside and outside their usurped lands and the international pressure on this fake regime is gradually on the rise at the time the protests inside the country are climaxing, and any moment it may be torn apart. Of course Muslim nations worldwide should continue their support of Palestinians and become more united in fight against the atrocities of the Zionist regime, as they have shown their full support in recent days.

Israeli officials and their savage military forces and officials should not forget this fact that there will be an end to their atrocities very soon and they will be unable to escape unanswered from their crimes.

Muslims should help the Palestinians to liberate their lands and especially Al-Aqsa Mosque from the claws of the Zionists in order to say their prayers at the first qibla of Muslims, Al-Aqsa Mosque, in the near future because the Zionist regime is in its weakest and fragile status ever. Inshallah.

## Saudi Delegation...

FROM PAGE 1

They expressed readiness to remove all impediments to the expansion of bilateral ties and agreed to develop cooperation in any field that can ensure the security and stability of the region as well as the interests of its nations.

On March 10, after several days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume their diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and diplomatic missions after seven years of estrangement.

In a joint statement after signing the agreement, Tehran and Riyadh highlighted the need to respect each other's national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another.





## Jackson Wins Paris-Roubaix Classic

ROUBAIX (Dispatches) - Canada's Alison Jackson won a six-way sprint to achieve the greatest victory of her career in the women's Paris-Roubaix cycling classic. Italian Katia Ragusa of LIV Racing was second and Fenix-Deceuninck rider Marthe Truyen of Germany was third as outsiders took the top six in a feared racing date known as the "Hell of the North". Rain during the week combined with bright sunshine on the day made the road surfaces slick.

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## Angers Claim First Win Since September

PARIS (Dispatches) - Marooned at the bottom of France's top flight, Angers claimed their first Ligue 1 win since September as they beat European hopefuls Lille 1-0. Bosnian full-back Halid Sabanovic, on as a substitute, scrambled in the only goal of the match with six minutes left at the Stade Raymond Kopa, following in to score after Lille goalkeeper Lucas Chevalier had saved from Adrien Hunou. The result allows Angers to end a run of 21 matches without a win, in which they had picked up just three points.

# Nets Lock Up Playoff Berth

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Brooklyn Nets booked an NBA playoff berth as the Eastern Conference puzzle pieces fell into place, but suspense remained in the wild West with wins for Golden State, New Orleans and the Los Angeles Lakers. The Nets beat the Orlando Magic 101-84 and clinched the sixth seed in the East, avoiding the play-in tournament in which the seventh- through 10th-placed teams will fight for two remaining playoff berths. The Nets actually knew they had secured the spot in the fourth quarter of the contest -- when the Miami Heat fell 114-108 to the Washington Wizards to finish seventh in the East. The Heat, clearly content to headline the play-in, rested six of their top players -- including Jimmy Butler and Tyler Herro -- a strategy repeated around the league by both playoff-bound teams and those already eliminated. Even with the boost from Miami, the Nets had reason to celebrate their guaranteed berth in a tumultuous season that saw coach Steve Nash sacked after a stumbling start and Kyrie Irving suspended in an anti-Semitism row. All that before the stunning trades of Irving and superstar Kevin Durant in February. "I think it speaks to the character of the group, the maturity and just the selflessness," said Spencer Dinwiddie, who returned to Brooklyn from Dallas in the trade for Irving. "I think everybody came in here and tried to figure out what their job was going to be and execute it to the best of their ability and push forward."

## Rahm Narrows Koepka's Lead to Two

AUGUSTA (Dispatches) - After a rainy night in Georgia, Spain's Jon Rahm returned to a wet and windy Augusta National and narrowed overnight leader Brooks Koepka's advantage to two strokes. Rahm, one of the 39 players who had to complete their delayed second rounds on Saturday, had been within a shot of Koepka before bogeying the final hole. Five-times Masters winner Tiger Woods managed to battle through the wet and windy conditions to make the cut at three-over par 147 after shooting a one-over 73, but Rory McIlroy was among the big names to miss out on the final two rounds. The second round completed and the cut made, the third round got under way at 11:30 a.m. with threesomes off split tees in a bid to complete the round before sunset. Spaniard Rahm had an eventful session back on course, making birdies on the par-3 12th and par-5 15th before, in driving rain, he bogeyed by three-putting the par-3 16th. The world number three quickly made amends on the par-4 17th, where he rolled in a six-foot putt from the fringe for birdie. Three-putting the final hole, however, left Rahm on 10-under 134 overall after shooting rounds of 65 and 69 as he targets a second major win to follow his 2021 triumph at the US Open. "But I would have taken even par in the last four holes either way, and going through this afternoon, hopefully we play and I go with a lot of confidence," Rahm said. Conditions could be challenging on the rain-soaked course. "We don't know what kind of conditions we're going to have. The weather's supposed to get worse," said Rahm. "The greens have somehow maintained somewhat firm... but we don't know what's going to happen. Just a couple of greens that already had some water on them, and we'll see but obviously if I play a little bit longer, might not be able to be as aggressive in some spots."



Coby White scored 24 points to lead Chicago against a Mavs team that threw in the towel, abandoning their slim hopes of making the Western Conference play-in as they held out Irving and four other key players -- and pulled star Luka Doncic after the first quarter. "We were going to play until told otherwise," Mavs coach Jason Kidd said before the game. "And today is the day that we've been told we're going to do something different." Kidd said the Mavs players who were on the floor wouldn't "cheat the game" and indeed Dallas started off hot and led 67-54 at halftime. But Chicago clawed back and Dallas' defeat handed a Western Conference play-in berth to the Oklahoma City Thunder. Although the "tanking" maneuver could bolster Dallas' position in the NBA draft, it's an ignominious end to the season for a team that reached the Western Conference finals last year. Elsewhere in the West, the Lakers beat the playoff-bound Phoenix Suns 121-107 and the New Orleans Pelicans downed the New York Knicks 113-105 to maintain their faint hopes of escaping the play-in. D'Angelo Russell scored 24 points, Austin Reaves added 22 and LeBron James scored 16 for the Lakers, who took advantage of the absence of Suns stars Durant and Devin Booker. The Warriors, led by 29 points from Klay Thompson and 25 from Stephen Curry, moved a half-game ahead of the Los Angeles Clippers for fifth in the West with a 119-97 victory over the Sacramento Kings. The Memphis Grizzlies clinched the second seed, ahead of Sacramento, with a 137-114 victory over a Milwaukee Bucks team that rested half a dozen stars, including Giannis Antetokounmpo. Jaren Jackson scored 36 points for the Grizzlies, who trailed by one at halftime but out-scored Milwaukee 37-15 in the third quarter to take charge.



MARRAKECH (Dispatches) - Frenchman Alexandre Muller upset top seed Lorenzo Musetti of Italy 6-3, 1-6, 6-4 in the quarterfinals of the Grand Prix Hassan II in Marrakech, Morocco. Muller won 35 of 48 first-service points (72.9 percent) and will face Russia's Pavel Kotov in the semifinals. Kotov outlasted Australian Christopher O'Connell 6-3, 6-7 (6), 7-6 (3) in two hours and 53 minutes. Great Britain's Daniel Evans, the No. 2 seed, is the only seeded player left standing after he eased past Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori 6-3, 7-5. In the semis Evans will meet Spaniard Roberto Carballes Baena, who toppled Dutch fourth seed Tallon Griekspoor 6-3, 2-6, 6-2. No. 1 seed Casper Ruud of Norway needed just 78 minutes to dispatch Argentine fifth seed Sebastian Baez 6-3, 6-0 in the quarterfinals in Estoril, Portugal. Ruud's semifinal opponent will be France's Quentin Halys, who ended former world No. 3 Dominic Thiem's run by beating the Austrian 6-1, 6-4. The other semifinal will pit No. 6 seed Miomir Kecmanovic of Serbia against Italy's Marco Cecchinato. Kecmanovic beat Spaniard Bernabe Zapata Miralles 7-5, 6-2, while Cecchinato upset Spanish No. 3 seed Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-5, 7-6 (5). Rain affected the clay-court tournament in Houston for a third straight day, as Round of 16 games were postponed again until Saturday morning.

# De Lig Stunner Keeps Bayern Top of Bundesliga



2-1 in the German Cup on Tuesday, had a chance for revenge but lacked fluency despite new coach Thomas Tuchel naming an attack-heavy line-up. Sadio Mane, starting for the first time under Tuchel, had Bayern's best chance of the first half, beating goalkeeper Mark Flekken but chipping inches wide.

BERLIN (Dispatches) - A superb second-half strike from Matthijs de Ligt gave Bayern Munich a 1-0 victory at Freiburg, keeping them two points clear atop the table as title rivals Borussia Dortmund also won. Borussia Dortmund's 2-1 win over third-placed Union Berlin maintains the pressure on the perennial German champions' bid for an 11th straight Bundesliga title. Bayern, who were eliminated by Freiburg

Freiburg had a chance of their own just before half-time, Ritsu Doan's shot rebounding off the underside of the bar. Bayern broke the deadlock early in the second half, De Ligt's long-range shot taking a slight deflection and flying past a helpless Flekken. Freiburg nearly equalized late but Bayern keeper Yann Sommer got his foot to a Roland Sallai strike to preserve the visitors' advantage. "We had many chances and we should have used them better, but thankfully we did not concede a goal," said De Ligt. Bayern now have two wins and a loss under Tuchel, ahead of Tuesday's trip to Manchester City in the Champions League. A late goal from substitute Youssoufa Moukoko took Dortmund to a nervy victory over Union. Dortmund took the lead midway through the first half, Malen poking in a Raphael Guerreiro cross from close range, his third goal in as many matches.

## Chelsea Crash on Lampard Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Frank Lampard failed to spark Chelsea as his first game back in charge ended in a 1-0 defeat at Wolves, while Manchester United and Newcastle consolidated their hold on places in the Premier League's top four. Lampard made a surprise return to Stamford Bridge on Thursday when he was appointed until the end of the season following Graham Potter's sacking last Sunday after just seven months in charge. But the ex-Chelsea midfielder, who was dismissed by the club's former owner Roman Abramovich in January 2021, could not provide an immediate lift for the Blues. Chelsea, on their third manager this season following Potter's exit and Thomas Tuchel's sacking in September, remain 11th after a fourth consecutive game without a win. The presence of Lampard, Chelsea's record goalscorer, did little to inspire his players and Matheus Nunes won it for Wolves in the 32nd minute with a superb half-volley into the far corner from the edge of the area. Sacked by lowly Everton in January after less than a year in charge, Lampard will now turn his attention to Wednesday's Champions League quarter-final first leg at holders Real Madrid.



## Djokovic Will Face American in ATP Tour Return

LONDON (Dispatches) - Top seed Novak Djokovic enjoys a bye into the second round at the Monte Carlo Masters as do the other players with top eight seedings. Djokovic does at least know that he will face an American opponent as his season restarts with compatriots Brandon Nakashima and Mackenzie McDonald battling it out for the honour of facing the world No 1. The first seeded player that Djokovic can meet is Italy's Lorenzo Musetti who carries the No 16 seeding and may face the Serbian in the third round of main draw action. Musetti will first need to get beyond Djokovic's countryman Miomir Kecmanovic in the first round before a second round meeting against either Valentin Vacherot or a qualifier. Potential last eight opponents for Djokovic include Jannik Sinner, who will be his opponent if seeding holds but the Italian is in a tough section that also features Hubert Hurkacz, Jack Draper and Argentine duo Sebastian Baez and Diego Schwartzman. The man on a semi-final collision course with Djokovic is the in-form Daniil Medvedev. Though Medvedev is known to not fancy clay he arrives in good spirits after a great Sunshine Double performance.

