

**IRAN NEWS Extends Its Condolences to Its Shiite Readers On the Occasion of the Martyrdom Anniversary of Imam Ali (AS) and National Holiday. The Next Issue Will Hit the Newsstands on Saturday**

# IRAN NEWS



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## Conflict in Caucasus Benefits No Country

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top security official says tension and conflict in the Caucasus region benefit no country, while indicating Iran's opposition to any geographical change in that region.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani made the remarks in a meeting with the visiting Secretary of Armenia's Security Council Armen Grigoryan in Tehran on Sunday. "Any geographical change in the South Caucasus region is a tension-building measure, which will play into the hands of the enemies of regional security and stability," Shamkhani said.

Iran's top security official added that continuous dialogue and interaction must replace any "hard approach" to ending regional challenges.

His remarks came against a backdrop of decades of tension between Armenia and Azerbaijan over the disputed Nagorno-Karabakh region on the border between the two countries.

Karabakh is internationally recognized as part of Azerbaijan, but has a primarily Armenian population that has resisted Azerbaijani rule since a separatist war there ended in 1994.

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## IRGC Successfully Tests New Homegrown Suicide Drone

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Ground Force has successfully tested a new suicide drone, dubbed Me'raj 532, designed and manufactured by young Iranian experts.

General Ali Kouhestani, head of IRGC Ground Force's Research and Self-Sufficiency Jihad Organization (RSSJO), said the unmanned aerial vehicle (UAV) with a piston engine has a one-way range of 450 kilometers.

The kamikaze drone, he added, is capable of flying up to a height of 12,000 feet for 3 hours and taking off from a vehicle.

"With its 50-kilogram warhead, the drone can hit the desired targets with high accuracy. Additionally, the drone's design is of the easy set-up type, reducing the time of its preparation and increasing the speed of reaction and use," Kouhestani told Tasnim news agency.

He also noted that the process of developing drones at IRGC Ground Force's RSSJO is progressing at a proper speed, and that in the near future, other combat, training and suicide UAVs will be added to the combat fleet.

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## Islamic Ummah Urged to Defend Palestine Against Zionists



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN, Apr. 10 (MNA) - Pointing to the brutal attacks of Zionists on the al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinians, foreign ministry spokesman urged the Islamic Ummah to take proper measures regarding this issue and defend the Palestinians.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks speaking at his weekly press conference on Monday morning. Referring to the developments in Palestine, the senior Iranian diplomat strongly criticized the Zionists' recent brutal attacks on the Al-Aqsa Mosque and the Palestinian worshippers.

Noting that the Zionists are continuing their hostilities in spite of dealing with dense internal crises, Kanaani stressed that the Israeli regime will not give up any opportunity to continue its criminal actions against the Palestinian nation and the countries of the region.

"Fortunately, we are witnessing the awakening of the Islamic Ummah. We are witnessing more and more nations and governments paying attention to the Palestinian people," he cited, expressing hope that the upcoming International Quds Day would be held as gloriously as possible.

Saying that the Islamic countries have a primary responsibility regarding the Palestinian issue," the senior Iranian diplomat cited, "The existence of the Zionist regime is a threat to the stability and security of the region. The Palestinian people are at the forefront of the fight against the regime that has been exporting terrorism to all the countries in the region."

Helping the Palestinian nation is both a support for the oppressed and an action in the direction of preventing the terrorist actions of the Zionist regime and the export of organized terrorism in the region, he continued.

Turning to the negotiations between Yemen and Saudi Arabia, Kanaani stated, "As the Islamic Republic of Iran, we had a principled, clear and announced position in relation to Yemen since the beginning of this crisis. From the beginning, we rejected the military solution and emphasized that the only solution to the Yemeni crisis is a political solution that all Yemeni parties decide on the fate of this country based on the interests of Yemen. As a country with a role in regional issues, Iran had proposed a political solution."

Saying that Tehran is still supporting the political process, Kanaani expressed Iran's readiness to play a facilitating role if any of the Yemeni and regional parties and the United Nations ask it to do so.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the spokesman spoke about the recent visit of a Saudi delegation to Tehran, saying that based on the agreements between the two countries, a technical delegation from Riyadh arrived in Tehran on Saturday for the resumption of official relations and the activation of relations. He added that the Saudi delegation is reviewing the conditions for the reopening of the embassy in Tehran and the consulate general in Mashhad.

He added that an Iranian delegation will depart for Saudi Arabia in the coming days to provide the grounds for the reopening of the embassy and consulate general, as well as Iran's office in the Organization of Islamic Cooperation.

Speaking about the impact of the Tehran-Riyadh agreement on the region, Kanaani underlined that it will definitely have positive effects on strengthening cooperation to increase peace, stability and security, as well as strengthening economic and trade relations between the countries of the region.

"We believe that the improvement of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia will have regional and extra-regional positive effects in addition to bilateral dimensions," he emphasized.

Kanaani, elsewhere in his remarks, also touched upon the relations between Tehran and Baghdad, saying, "During the past years, we have established a very good foundation in bilateral relations with Iraq with the efforts of the two governments, and the relations between the two countries are on a good track."

Tehran and Baghdad are enjoying close relations in different fields including politics, security, economy and trade, he stressed.

Answering a question regarding the recent visit of Iran's transport minister to Iraq, the senior Iranian diplomat cited that the visit was in line with the cooperation between the two countries in the field of transportation.

The Iraqi government accepted the necessary commitment regarding the establishment of the Shalamcheh-Basra railway and promised to provide the basis for this action, according to him.

"Iran accepted the responsibility for the construction of the bridge in Shatt Al Arab. If the conditions go well, we will witness the connection of the railway lines of the two countries," he added.

Regarding the inappropriate interpretations in the media of the Republic of Azerbaijan regarding the relations with Iran and the reports of changing Iran's ambassador to Baku, Kanaani stated that changes and transformations of diplomatic posts in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs are customary and nothing new is going to happen in relation to the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Stressing that Iran attaches importance to its relations with Azerbaijan as a neighboring country in the region, Kanaani called on Azeri side to focus on common interests and not to allow any misuse to be committed by the parties who wish to realize their illegitimate interests by creating differences and tensions between regional and neighboring countries. ----- [See Page 7](#)

## ViewPoint

### By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## Ditching Dollar to End U.S. Dominance

For centuries, the U.S. has tried to dictate itself on the other countries in the world and one of its tools for dominance over the nations has been its currency, dollar, which has been used as a weapon to bring down the nations and their economies, and it had made this country as the economy number one in the world but it seems the world is gradually awakening and nations have decided to fight with this economic weapon through ditching the dollar and soon the U.S. dollar will lose its grandeur and will become an ordinary currency.

Many countries especially independent and big ones have decided to come out of the shadow of the U.S. dollar by reinforcing their currencies and cutting dependence of their economies on the dollar and it is a great blow for the U.S. dollar which has made the Americans worry about the fate of their national currency.

As many economists have predicted, China will soon replace the U.S. as the world economy No.1 and gradually its currency, yuan, is dominating in the global economy and many countries are following the footsteps for replacing dollar with yuan in their trade and this is something which has angered the U.S. and it is a serious threat to the U.S. dominance in the world economy and politics.

The dollar has been an effective weapon for the U.S. in dictating its policies in the world and sanctions by the U.S. on nations is because of their dependence on the dollar otherwise sanctions would be ineffective and the U.S. will be unable to use sanctions as a tool for dominance.

In recent years many countries have decided to come out of the shadow of the dollar dominance by exchanging trade in their own currencies and this sounds warning for the grandeur of the U.S. economy and dollar, and we see the sign of decline inside the U.S. itself.

The Islamic Republic of Iran and many countries like India, Russia, Brazil and Turkey for years have decided to cut their dependence on the dollar through trade in national currencies and it will help countries like Iran and Russia to round the unfair and unilateral sanctions of the U.S. Of course in the near future the number of these countries would increase and the dollar through being ditched in trades by the countries will turn into a normal currency without any power and the Americans will be unable to impose more unilateral sanctions on other countries.

Iran's top security official on Sunday said the move to reduce the use of dollar in regional and international transactions, joined by several countries, will minimize the West's dominance over the global economy.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran with Russia's State Council Secretary Igor Levitin, who is also a senior aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin. [See Page 7](#)

## Russia, Iran, Turkey, Syria's FMs Meeting Postponed

TEHRAN (IP) - The meeting of the foreign ministers of Russia, Iran, Turkey, and Syria has been postponed to early May, Russian Ambassador to Damascus Alexander Efimov said in an interview with the Al Watan newspaper.

"The meeting, which was scheduled for Monday, has been rescheduled for early May. Contacts and consultations continue between the parties to achieve positive results on this issue," he said.

Efimov emphasized that Moscow will continue to make attempts to convene a quadripartite summit, and added that all issues between the parties can be settled in one or more rounds of negotiations. "This is a long road, but we're taking it step by step," the diplomat said.

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# So-Called Iranophobia Project Failed

TEHRAN (MNA) –Foreign Ministry Spokesperson said that the new Iranian year was concurrent with the failure of the Iranophobia policy and the development of ties with different nations.

On his twitter account, Nasser Kanaani said that Nowruz and the blessed month of Ramadan simultaneously occurred with the failure of the Iranophobia policy.

The two events took place concurrent with the development of ties with different countries and nations, he added.

The official concluded the comment with a proverb that “April and May are the keys of the year.”

## Israel No Match For Iran's Army

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - The chief commander of the Iranian Army says the Israeli military, which heavily relies on sophisticated Western-built munitions, is no match for Iran's Armed Forces, dismissing hostile remarks by the Israeli army's chief of staff that Israel is “ready” to attack Iran even without U.S. support.**

Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi said on Monday that such comments are merely meant to boost the morale of the Israeli soldiers and fix the internal problems of the regime.

“Anyone already familiar with the military capabilities of both sides knows well that the updated size and scale of the Zionist regime's military would maximally correspond only to one of the plentiful operations that Iran's Armed Forces undertook during the 1980-1988 Iraqi-imposed war on the Islamic Republic,” Mousavi said.

“The Zionist regime, which is sinking and the signs of its collapse are now becoming more evident than before, is too feeble to be viewed as a threat to the Islamic Republic of Iran. The actions of its leaders, which are far from rationality and prudence, will only accelerate the downfall of the regime,” the top General added.



“We are ready to act against Iran. The Israeli army has the ability to strike both in distant countries and near home,” Israeli army's Chief of Staff Herzl Halevi said on Wednesday.

He further claimed that the Israeli military will enhance its capabilities for a pre-emptive strike on Iran in the next few years, and such a strike would be “overwhelming” despite the geographical distance.

Iran's Army chief has already dismissed Israel's military threats, saying the regime is unable to take an Iranian response to any hostile act that it may carry out given the political tensions it faces inside the occupied territories and its sense of insecurity in the broader region.

Addressing a meeting with senior Army commanders on December 22 last year, Mousavi said Iran is closely and constantly monitoring all the enemy's moves, and that the Armed Forces are fully ready to counter any threat at once.

“We will give a crushing response to any place from which an attack might originate against the security of the Islamic Republic and its interests or help is provided to the Zionist regime,” the top General added.

## Tehran-Kabul Economic Ties Improved

TEHRAN (MNA) – Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI) officials say trade and economic relations between Afghanistan and Iran have increased.

According to ACCI officials, annual trade between Kabul and Tehran exceeds \$1 billion, Ariana News reported.

Simultaneously, the process of trade and joint investment is also expanding between the two counties on a daily basis, the officials said.

ACCI has also emphasized that Iran is the biggest trading partner of Afghanistan in the current situation.

“I think Iran is Afghanistan's first-rate partner because the exchange of goods [between Kabul and Tehran] does not have any banking problems and our imports from Iran are more,” said Khanjan Alkozi, a member of ACCI.

Meanwhile, officials of Afghanistan's Ministry of Industry and Commerce (MoIC) say they are trying to develop economic relations with all neighboring countries.

According to MoIC, economic relations with Iran are developing day by day and joint investments may be developed in the near future.

“We have good trade relations with all the neighboring countries and we have more relations with Iran, Iran has invested in various sectors in the country and has the will to invest, especially in the agriculture sector,” said Akhundzada Abdul Salam Jawad, a spokesman for MoIC.

Economic experts, meanwhile, believe that if economic and trade relations with all neighboring countries are developed, deep and positive economic changes will occur in the region.

Officials of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment recently said a joint chamber of commerce with Iran will be formed in the new solar year that started on March 21.

## President Urges Muslim Nations to Forge United Front Against Israel



TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi says Muslim nations should strengthen cooperation and form a united front against Israel to support the Palestinian people.

“Iran and Algeria have close and common positions on regional and global issues, especially on the issue of Palestine and the rights of the oppressed people of this country,” Raisi said in a phone conversation with Algerian President Abdelmadjid Tebboune.

Tensions have been running high since Tuesday night, when dozens of heavily armed Israeli forces stormed the al-Aqsa Mosque compound 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.

Israeli officers then beat worshipers with batons and riot guns, wounding many, before arresting them.

Within less than 24 hours, the regime's forces staged a second attack against the Palestinian worshipers at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound. In response to the Israeli aggression on al-Aqsa, more than 30 rockets were fired towards the occupied territories from southern Lebanon on Thursday, with the occupying regime targeting Gaza and positions of the Palestinian resistance movement Hamas in Lebanon.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Raisi hailed growing relations between Tehran and Algiers and expressed hope that the two sides would promote relations, particularly in the trade and economic sectors.

The Algerian president, for his part, said the oppressed Palestinian people are suffering from savage acts of the Israeli regime during the holy month of Ramadan.

Tebboune expressed hope that the Palestinian people would be saved from the Zionists' oppression in cooperation with Muslim countries.

In a phone call with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad earlier in the day, Raisi said the world order is changing in favor of the resistance front and against the global arrogance and the Israeli regime.

“The crimes of this regime (Israel) are a sign of its weakness and desperation and it is proof that the future is bright and promising for the resistance front,” Raisi added.

## World Order Changing in Favor of Resistance Front

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has told his Syria counterpart Bashar al-Assad on the phone that the world order is changing in favor of the axis of resistance and to the detriment of the global arrogance and the Zionist regime.

President Raisi added that the crimes of the Zionist regime are a sign of its decline and desperation and show that the future is bright for the resistance front.

The Iranian president also congratulated Assad on the holy month of Ramadan. The Syrian president for his part congratulated Raisi on Ramadan.

Assad further referred to Iran's and Syria's resistance against common enemies for 4 decades, saying today, signs are emerging of implosion in the Zionist society.

Assad added that this is the result of resistance and perseverance on the part of the Palestinian people.

The Israeli regime has bombarded Syria frequently over the past few years amid a foreign-backed insurgency against the Syria government.

The airstrikes has killed many Syrians and even Iranian military advisors. Last week, two military advisors of the Islamic Republic of Iran were killed in Israeli air raids in Syria.

Iran says it will take revenge for their killing by the Zionist regime at the time and place of its choosing.

## Iran, Pakistan Resume Mirjaveh-Taftan Border Market Activities

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A border market at a major crossing between Iran and Pakistan was opened in line with a memorandum of understanding signed with Islamabad to expand trade ties.

The market at the Taftan-Mirjaveh border crossing, which had been closed by the Pakistani side, resumed its activities on Sunday.

The reopening of the border market has been among one of the more pressing demands of businesspeople in the Pakistani province of Balochistan, which borders Iran's Sistan-Baluchestan province.

“The resumption of activity at this market will greatly enhance the economic situation of Balochistan, and most importantly, it will increase trade relations with the friendly



and neighboring country of Iran,” said Pakistani Senate Speaker Mohammad Sadegh Sanjarani.

Iran's Consulate in Quetta, in southwestern Pakistan, played a key part in reopening of the border market.

In January, Iran and Pakistan signed a series of

memoranda of understanding (MoUs), which, if implemented, could help elevate trade volumes between the two neighboring countries to around \$5 billion per year.

The Taftan-Mirjaveh border crossing is a main checkpoint through which trade is carried out between Iran and Pakistan by road, boosting overall bilateral trade and providing economic sustenance for residents on either side of the border.

## Diplomat Calls for Paying Heed to Israeli Crimes

TEHRAN (IRNA) -Those, who claim to be the flag-bearers of human rights, should open their eyes and watch the crimes committed by the occupying Zionist regime against the Palestinian people.

Iran's former Ambassador to Damascus Mehdi Sobhani told the al-Ahed news website that the time was ripe for the so-called flag-bearers of human rights to open their eyes and see the crimes of the occupying regime against worshipers at al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Zionist regime is facing social and internal crises, so it wants to export its own woes to territories out of the usurped lands, Sobhani said, noting that the response by the Palestinian brothers indicates the vitality of the resistant nation of Palestine.

Touching upon the Islamic Republic's support for the Palestinians, he noted that Iran abides by its promise to back Palestine and the resistance movement.

The Zionist regime's armed forces raided al-Aqsa Mosque on Wednesday, beating Palestinian worshipers, injuring more than 200, and arresting 400 others.

As a result of the raid, Palestinian resistance groups fired rockets toward occupied territories.

## Deep Economic Ties to Strengthen Iran-Saudi Rapprochement

TEHRAN (IRNA) - An Iranian lawmaker has said that improvement of Tehran-Riyadh relations after the recent rapprochement between the two countries can clear dark atmosphere of Iranophobia.

Jalil Rahimi-Jahanabadi, a member of Majlis (Parliament) National Security and Foreign Policy Commission, said that joint investment and deep economic ties can strengthen the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

Rahimi-Jahanabadi said that if deep economic ties are formed between Iran and

Saudi Arabia to serve their common interests, the two Muslim countries could enjoy a friendship that cannot be affected by religious or political tensions.

He underlined that despite wasting time for military tensions, the two countries could spend more time on fostering bilateral cooperation.

On March 10, China, Iran and Saudi Arabia issued a joint statement in Beijing announcing they would resume their diplomatic relations after some seven years.

## “The Dream of A Horse’ to Compete at Italian Film Festival



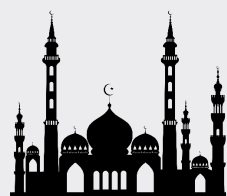
TEHRAN (MNA) - Directed by Marjan Khosravi, the Iranian short documentary “The Dream Of A Horse” is scheduled to vie at the 2023 edition of the Trento Film Festival in Italy.

The documentary narrates the story of a 15-year-old nomadic girl who, far from the modern urban environment, dreams of big dreams, dreams beyond the mountains that surround her.

Founded in 1952, Trento Film Festival is the oldest international film festival dedicated to the mountains, adventure and exploration. The Trento festival has represented the point of reference on these subjects for almost 70 years, over time transforming itself into a genuine testing ground for visions and ideas on the highest lands on earth, embracing an ever-increasing range of interests, including environmental and cultural issues and current affairs, making the festival environment and program even more varied and stimulating.

The Trento Film Festival of mountain films will take place in Trento from 28 April to 7 May 2023.





## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:52
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:08
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:35

90. We took the Children of Israel across the sea: Pharaoh and his hosts followed them in insolence and spite. At length, when overwhelmed with the flood, he said: "I believe that there is no god except Him Whom the Children of Israel believe in: I am of those who submit (to Allah in Islam)."

91. (It was said to him):

"Ah now! - But a little while before, wast thou in rebellion! - and thou didst mischief (and violence)!"

Surah 10. Jonah (90 - 91)

## Iran Ready to Launch Direct Shipping Line With Saudi Arabia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Director-General of the Ports and Maritime Department of Hormozgan says the organization is ready to launch direct shipping line to Saudi Arabia, noting that it depends on the rise in trade between the two countries.**

Speaking to ILNA, Hossein Abbasnejad said that before recent agreement between Tehran and Riyadh, the volume of trade exchanges between the two countries was limited and insignificant and Iran's goods were sent to Saudi Arabia via the UAE and currently the trade volume with Saudi Arabia is not significant but in case economic activists demand the launch of direct line between Iran and Saudi Arabia to reduce the cost of export to Saudi Arabia, the organization is ready to take action.

He said that in case demand for the launch of the line and the trade volume with any destination increases, the department can launch direct line to that destination.

He reiterated that the launch of line depends on the rise in the trade volume which is pursued by the related bodies.



On the possible launch of the shipping line in the near future, he said that the department as the custodian of maritime affairs is ready for restoring shipping line with countries and it can launch whenever the condition is ready.

He once again reiterated that there is no technical problem for the launch of the line and it depends on the demands.

Abbasnejad further said that in the past, there was direct shipping line between Iran and Saudi Arabia for transporting goods and it will not be the first time if the direct line is launched in the future. He admitted the amount of trade exchange with Saudi Arabia is not as much as with the UAE for witnessing plies of vessels between Iran and Saudi Arabia.

## MSC Sets Record in Shipping Different Types of Steel Products



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – Manager of sales planning and transport of products of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) Younes Hamzavi says MSC, in the past Iranian calendar year of 1401 with sending and delivering over 8.364 tons of different types of products to its domestic and foreign customers, set a considerable record in annual delivering of goods.

Hamzavi noted that this amount of shipping shows 924,000 tons growth in weight and 12.4% total growth comparing to the preceding year, stating that the figure shows some 8% growth comparing to the past record which had been the year before.

He went on to say that the registered statistics show that the performance of the company in transport has been 2% ahead of the annual schedule.

Meanwhile head of planning and transport control of products of MSC Mr. Majid Fakhari said that 87% of the products have been carried by road and been delivered to the customers which shows one million tons growth and 16% growth comparing to the past year and 11% growth comparing to the preceding year.

He added that some 7.1m tons of the products which equals to 85% of the total amount of the products were sent to the domestic customers in different parts of the country which is 15% more than the preceding year and it is a new record.

He went on to say that some 1.25m tons of export products were transported to Bandar Abbas Port and other custom border checkpoints and were delivered to the customers via those port and custom border checkpoints.

Fakhari went on to say that over 1634,000 tons of semi-final products (slab and bar), 4887,000 tons of different hot products and 1842,000 tons of different types of cold products were delivered to domestic and foreign customers by road and rail and in all spheres the company has annual records of transporting products.

## Russian Planes Are Repaired in Iran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Minister of Road and Urban Development and Head of Civil Aviation Organization says according to the agreement, Russian planes are repaired in Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, Mohammad Mohammadbakhsh touched upon the details of agreement between Iran and Russia for cooperation in the field of air industries during the recent visit of Aide to the Russian President Igor Levitin and said that last year a delegation was in Moscow to discuss increasing the number of direct flights as well as boosting cooperation of the two countries in the air industry.

On the agreement between Tehran and Moscow in the field of manufacture and repair of plane, he emphasized that both sides agreed that Russian planes to be repaired in Iran based on the approval of civil aviation organizations of both states.

When he was asked why almost half of Iranian air navigation fleet is grounded despite this capability of repairing planes, he said that fortunately the grounded planes of airliners are under repair and in recent weeks some of them have been repaired and joined the fleet.

Mohammadbakhsh also said that some of the parts of planes are manufactured and produced in the country by the knowledge-based companies and dependence on the foreign companies has reduced to the considerable extent.

## Over 9.3m Tons of Goods Transited Via Iranian Roads

TEHRAN (MNA) - Over 9.3 million tons of commodities were transited through the Iranian roads network during the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), the head of Iran Road Maintenance and Transportation Organization (RMTO) announced.

Referring to the growth of about one percent of road transit via Iran compared to the year 1400 and a 42 percent growth compared to the year 1398 (the year before the outbreak of the coronavirus), Dariyoush Amani said: "Despite the relative change in terms of tonnage, in terms of the number of transit truck trips we have seen a four percent growth year on year".

He said Bazargan border terminal, in northwestern West Azarbaijan province, with a 16 percent growth in transit, was the most active transit border in the past year compared to the previous year.

"Last year, despite the improvement of international transportation conditions after the coronavirus pandemic and the removal of most of the relative global and regional restrictions caused by the pandemic, due to some regional and international challenges, achieving the goals set in the field of transit faced difficulties. However, the four percent growth of



transit truck traffic in a situation where most countries were facing an employment crisis in the field of international transportation, shows the importance of Iran's transit route compared to other alternative routes in the region to access markets from east to west and north to south and vice versa", the official further explained.

According to the fundamental approach of the 13th government based on political and commercial integration with neighboring countries, and the pursuit of the government's active regional diplomacy in the form of regional economic agreements such as those with the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO) and Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), it is definitely possible to achieve the goal of transiting 20 million tons of goods through Iran in this Iranian year through the cooperation and empathy of all cooperating institutions in the governmental and private sectors, Amani commented.

As previously announced by the Iranian deputy transport minister, 10.8 million tons of commodities were transited through the country in the past Iranian calendar year.

## Electricity Production Capacity Up by 6.1 GW

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Energy Ministry says its electricity production capacity rose by 6.1 GW in year to March. Iran raised its electricity production capacity by 6.1 gigawatts (GW) in the calendar year to late March amid efforts to respond to a rising demand for power in the country's household and manufacturing sectors.

Head of Iranian Energy Ministry's department for electricity Homayoun Haeri said on Sunday that Iran had launched 4,150 GW of new power plants over the past calendar year.

Haeri said that the capacity at other power plants in Iran had increased by 1,350 GW over the year to March while another 0.6 GW had been added to the country's power generation capacity as a result of repair projects implemented on idle or damaged electricity stations.

"Another record registered last (calendar) year was the increase in the efficiency rate at power plants which reached 39.1%," he said.

The official added that some 1,316 GW of new power plants launched in Iran in the year to March were of the efficient combined cycle type which rely on a system in which the exhaust heat from a first turbine is used to raise steam in a boiler.

"That helped save some two billion liters of fuels," said Haeri. Iran relies on thermal power plants for a bulk of its electricity demand. Government figures show the country has a power generation capacity of around 90 GW and a peak demand of nearly 66 GW over hot summer days.

## Leading Car Makers Raise Prices by Average 29%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's two leading car manufacturing companies have raised their prices despite concerns that the hikes could fuel hoarding and speculative trade in the country's car market.

Lists released on local media on Sunday showed that the price of various models produced by the Iran Khodro Company (IKCO) and Saipa had increased by an average of 29%.

The last time the two companies had raised their car prices was in the summer of 2021.

IKCO and Saipa are partly owned by the Iranian government and any price increases should obtain the approval of the state-controlled price regulator the Competition Council.

That comes as Iranian economists have warned that car price hikes could negatively impact the market where some models are sold at prices four times higher than those announced by the companies.

In an order issued earlier this week, Iranian Vice President Mohammad Mokhber demanded a revision of car prices which he said could have major inflationary impacts on the market.

Saipa's CEO Mohammad Ali Teymouri said on Sunday that carmakers were planning to increase their prices by an average of 40% but then decided to comply with the government order.

Tables released by IKCO showed that the company will offer its flagship homegrown model Dena Plus at a price of 4.57 billion rials (\$9,400) nearly half the price of the car in the market.

Saipa's most expensive model Shahin would be available for 3.6 billion rials (\$7,200) while its market price was around 7 billion rials on March 9.

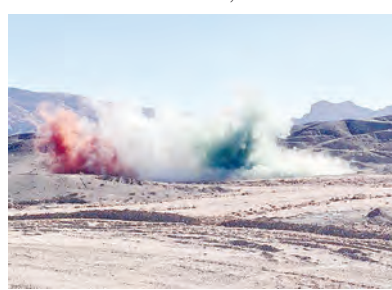
## Iran Ranks 4th in Lithium Reserves in World

HAMEDAN (IRNA) - Managing director of Hamedan Industry, Mine and Trade said that based on the map of lithium reserves in the world, Iran ranked fourth in having this rare and strategic metal.

Iran is standing in fourth position after Bolivia with a capacity of 21 million tons, Argentina with 19.3 million tons, and Chile with 7.9 million tons of lithium reserves, Ahmad Shaniyan told IRNA.

Based on the new studies in the Qahavand lithium mine, its reservoir is more than 8.5 million tons, he added.

He noted that Iran will no longer need lithium imports after discovering the Qahavand lithium mine.



## Thailand Calls on Iran To Assist Bridge Project

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Thailand Transport Ministry is seeking cooperation from Iran on cargo transport via a "land bridge" project in the southern region once it is completed.

Chayathan Phromsorn, permanent secretary for transport, met Seyed Reza Nobakhti, Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran, on Friday to discuss transport cooperation with Thailand.

He said the project aims to develop a transportation system that is safe and accessible for the public under a 20-year development strategy.

The strategy promotes a "sustainable transport system", mainly focused on eco-friendly methods, he said.

The project aims to connect the transport systems of the Andaman Region and the Gulf of Thailand. The project, including a bridge to connect ports with rails and motorways, could ease transport logistics.

The government is also touting a "one port, two sides" system, which aims to use technology for seamless connectivity. The system reduced transport time in the Malacca Strait by five days, Mr Chayathan said.

This would help not only water transport but also the country's global economic competitiveness, he said. The bridge project is set to start in 2030.





## Four Killed in French Alps Avalanche

PARIS (Dispatches) - Four people were killed and more injured in an avalanche Sunday near Mont Blanc in southeastern France, Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin said.

"Emergency responders are still at work" and the toll is "provisional", Darmanin wrote on Twitter, adding that he was "thinking of the victims and their loved ones."

Nine people apart from the four killed were "involved" in the avalanche, which measured 1,000 metres (yards) long by 100 metres wide, the prefecture of the Haute-Savoie department told AFP. The people involved, whose identities have not yet been determined, were hiking near the Glacier d'Armanette as part of one or several groups.



## Hundreds of Tunisians Protest Opposition Arrests

TUNIS (Dispatches) - Hundreds protested in the Tunisian capital on Sunday for the release of about 20 opponents of President Kais Saied arrested since February.

Around 300 demonstrators from opposition parties waved Tunisian flags and carried signs with the images of detainees at the rally organized by the main opposition coalition, the National Salvation Front, according to AFP journalists.

Since early February, authorities in the North African country have arrested more than 20 political opponents and personalities including politicians, former ministers, businessmen, trade unionists and the owner of Tunisia's most popular radio station, Mosaïque FM. Local and international rights groups have criticised the arrests.



## Macron Says Europe Must Not Be Follower of U.S., China on Taiwan



PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron said in an interview published Sunday that Europe must not be a "follower" of either the US or China on Taiwan, saying that the bloc risks entanglement in "crises that aren't ours". His comments risk riling Washington and highlight divisions in the European Union over how to approach China, as the US steps up confrontation with its closest rival and Beijing draws closer to Russia in the wake of its invasion of Ukraine.

"The worst thing would be to think that we Europeans must be followers and adapt ourselves to the American rhythm and a Chinese overreaction," Macron told media including French business daily Les Echos and Politico as he returned Friday from a three-day state visit to Beijing.

Citing his prized ideal of EU "strategic autonomy", the French leader said that "we must be clear where our views overlap with the US, but whether it's about Ukraine, relations to China or sanctions, we have a European strategy." "We don't want to get into a bloc versus bloc logic," he added, saying Europe "should not be caught up in a disordering of the world and crises that aren't ours".

China views democratic, self-ruled Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to take it one day, by force if necessary. Angered by Taiwanese president Tsai Ing-wen's meeting last week with US House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Beijing launched massive military exercises around the island immediately after Macron departed for France, including simulated strikes on its territory.

Macron discussed Taiwan with Chinese leader Xi Jinping on Friday, during a visit in which he was feted but more hawkish EU Commission President Ursula von der Leyen was kept mostly at arm's length.

His Elysee Palace office said the talks had been "dense and frank" and that the French president was concerned about "growing tensions in the region" that could lead to "a terrible accident".

Macron was "simply talking about the risk of Chinese 'overreaction', forgetting China wishes to change the status quo by taking over Taiwan one way or the other," Antoine Bondaz of the Paris-based Foundation for Strategic Research (FRS) commented on Twitter.

"Why this desire never to recall we have an interest in maintaining stability?" he added, warning that "this ambiguity... instils doubt in our like-minded partners".

Taiwan island was just one area that risked "an acceleration of tensions breaking out between the duopoly" of China and the US, Macron said.

If the confrontation escalates too quickly, Europeans "won't have the time or the resources to finance our strategic autonomy and will become vassals, whereas we can build a third pole if we have a few years," he added.

Europe's emergence as an independent geostrategic player has been a goal of Macron's for years, in line with a tradition going back to Fifth Republic founding president Charles de Gaulle who saw France as a balancing power between the Cold War blocs.

## China Simulates Striking Taiwan On Second Day of Drills

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - China's military simulated precision strikes against Taiwan in a second day of drills around the island, with the island's defense ministry reporting multiple air force sorties and that it was monitoring China's missile forces.

China, which claims democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, began three days of military exercises around the island on Saturday, the day after Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen returned from a brief visit to the United States.

Chinese state television reported that the combat readiness patrols and drills around Taiwan were continuing. "Under the unified command of the theatre joint operations command centre, multiple types of units carried out simulated joint precision strikes on key targets on Taiwan island and the surrounding sea areas, and continue to maintain an offensive posture around the island," it said.

The Chinese military's Eastern Theatre Command put out a short animation of the simulated attacks on its WeChat account, showing missiles fired from land, sea and air into Taiwan with two of them exploding in flames as they hit their targets.

A source familiar with the security situation in the region told Reuters that China had been conducting simulated air and sea attacks on "foreign military targets" in the waters off Taiwan's southwestern coast.

"Taiwan is not their only target," the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity as they were not authorized to speak to the media. "It's very provocative." Taiwan's defense ministry said that as of 0800 GMT on Sunday they had spotted 70 Chinese aircraft, including Su-30 fighters and H-6 bombers, as well as 11 ships, around Taiwan.

The ministry said they were paying particular attention to the People's Liberation Army's Rocket Force which is in charge of China's land-based missile system. "Regarding the movements of the Chinese communists' Rocket Force, the nation's military also has a close grasp through the joint intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance system, and air defence forces remain on high alert," the ministry said.

It reiterated that Taiwan's forces will "not escalate conflicts nor cause disputes" and would respond "appropriately" to China's drills.

## Afghan Special Forces Kill 2 IS Fighters in Raid

KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's special forces killed two Islamic State fighters and arrested a third during an operation in the country's west on Sunday, a regional official said.

The raid on the hideout in the district of Sayed Abad in Nimroz province sparked a clash lasting 30 minutes, said Mufti Habibullah Ilham, the province's information and culture director.

Ilham said there were no casualties among the troops or civilians and that some military equipment was seized. The regional affiliate of the IS group — known as the Islamic State in Khorasan Province — has been the key rival of the ruling Taliban since the religious group's takeover of Afghanistan in August 2021.

IS has increased its attacks in Afghanistan, targeting both Taliban patrols and members of Afghanistan's Shiite minority. On Friday, security forces killed an IS fighter during an operation in northern Parwan province. They also arrested three women and seven children, said Hikmatullah Shamim, a spokesman for the Parwan governor.

Deputy Afghan government spokesman Bilal Karimi said authorities were serious about Afghanistan's boundaries and sovereignty. "The Islamic State has no place in the country or among the people, nor does the Islamic emirate allow it," he told The Associated Press.

"The number of (IS) fighters killed or arrested so far is in the hundreds, but there is no exact number." The Islamic State group has claimed responsibility for a number of high-profile attacks in Afghanistan. It said one of its members was behind a deadly bombing near a checkpoint in January at Kabul's military airport, the same man who took part in an assault on a hotel in the capital last December, and a gun attack on the Pakistani embassy.

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## Saudi Delegation in Yemen for Peace Talks With Huthi

SANAA (Dispatches) - A Saudi delegation was in Yemen's capital on Sunday to negotiate a potential new truce with the Huthi who control the city, diplomats said, as Riyadh sought a way out of the war.

The Saudi officials are "in Sanaa to discuss moving forward to create peace in Yemen," said a Yemeni diplomat based in the Gulf region, information that was confirmed by a second diplomat.

Saudi officials did not respond to requests for comment. The delegation's arrival comes roughly a month after China helped broker a surprise rapprochement between Saudi Arabia and Iran, fuelling hopes for progress on ending the Yemen conflict that has claimed hundreds of thousands of lives.

The top Saudi and Iranian diplomats met in Beijing on Thursday, pledging to work together to bring "security and stability" to their turbulent region.

Omani mediators arrived in the Yemeni capital, Sanaa, on Saturday. The Huthis seized the city in 2014, triggering the conflict with the internationally recognised government which has been backed for eight years by a military coalition led by Riyadh.

A truce announced roughly a year ago has significantly reduced active hostilities within Yemen, and is still largely respected even though it officially expired in October.



A Yemeni government source, speaking to AFP on condition of anonymity, said on Saturday that the Saudis and Huthis had agreed in principle on a six-month truce to pave the way for three months of talks on establishing a two-year "transition" for the war-torn country.

The deal is expected to fulfil key Huthi goals, including paying salaries of civil servants in Huthi-controlled areas and lifting operational restrictions on Huthi-controlled airports and ports.

Also on Saturday, the head of the Huthis' prisoners of war committee told rebel media that 13 prisoners freed by the Saudis had arrived in Sanaa, in exchange for one Saudi released earlier.

Saudi officials have not commented on the report. In early March, the United Nations confirmed that the rebels and Yemen's internationally recognised government had agreed to exchange more than 880 prisoners.

Sanaa residents told AFP on Sunday that they hoped for a breakthrough that would go beyond a Saudi exit, stressing the need for a political resolution among their country's warring parties. "The visit of a Saudi delegation to Sanaa bodes well. We want the war to end. We are tired," said 23-year-old Ali Hussein.

Abd al-Salam Shamir, 29, said: "The country is exhausted from the war, and we want all politicians to be one hand now in building Yemen."

## Ukraine Likely to Face Bloody Crimea Fight

DOHA (Dispatches) - An analysis of satellite images by Al Jazeera has revealed that Russian forces are fortifying the Crimean peninsula in anticipation of a Ukrainian attempt to recapture it.

Experts say that those defenses are likely to make any such effort difficult and bloody. Russia annexed Crimea in 2014, eight years before launching a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. As the war grinds on for more than a year, Ukraine's political and military leadership has made it clear that it defines victory as reclaiming its 1991 borders, which Russia had recognised. The United Nations and all of Ukraine's Western allies also recognise those borders, which include Crimea.

The investigation by Al Jazeera's Sanad news verification and monitoring unit found that between February and March, the Crimean border and surrounding areas were transformed into a fortified barrier ahead of an expected spring counteroffensive by Ukrainian forces.

In particular, an extensive network of trenches and defences was constructed and now extends across the border villages of Crimea. Construction and expansion of several significant military bases also took place during the same period, according to the images provided to Sanad by SkySat and Planet.com.

Images taken on April 1 also show that authorities in Crimea have set up a sea barrier at a dock of the Russian Black Sea Fleet in the Sevastopol port, in addition to several new buildings and infrastructure developments within the port area.

Meanwhile, advertisements for workers to build fortifications have appeared on Russian job sites in Crimea over the past few months. Analysts say a shortage of manpower could be a significant reason why these trenches are not yet fully effective.

"None of the trenches in any of the photos are 100 percent complete. All indicate ongoing work, as the trench networks are not connected and lack complete communications trenches," Zev Faintuch, senior intelligence analyst at security company Global Guardian, told Al Jazeera after seeing the photographs.





## Prescribing Nature Baths Can Help Treat Anxiety as Well as Hypertension



PARIS (Dispatches) - A new meta-analysis conducted by Australian researchers supports the idea that prescribing nature baths can be beneficial to the mental health of patients.

Even if the benefits may seem evident, this research highlights the interest of so-called nature prescriptions, which could also be effective in fighting sedentary lifestyles and reducing high blood pressure.

Feeling depressed or prone to anxiety? Try taking a nature bath! More and more doctors are recommending that their patients spend time in contact with nature. And there are serious reasons behind this. In some countries, nature baths are even being prescribed by health practitioners with, as for any medicine, a precise dosage (for example 20 or 30 minutes per week). This is notably the case in Japan, Scotland and the United States.

As well as in Canada, which launched the PaRx programme in 2020. Initiated by the British Columbia Parks Foundation and then rapidly deployed in other Canadian provinces, the idea is to provide patients with free admission tickets to visit the national parks of their region.

This is an effective way of taking concrete action to get people out enjoying time in nature.

Inspired by the famous forest baths that originated in Japan in the 1980s, these nature prescriptions draw on the many proven benefits of regular contact with nature, whether on physical, mental, cardiovascular or respiratory health. A new study conducted by researchers from the Universities of New South Wales and Wollongong in Australia looks at this global trend that is becoming increasingly popular in the medical field.

The authors reviewed nearly 100 studies on the subject. The objective was to gather evidence of the effectiveness of nature prescriptions, as well as to determine the important factors of their success. The study found that, in addition to improving anxiety disorders and depressive states, this type of prescription reduced systolic blood pressure and increased the number of daily steps (900 more steps on average per day) in the patients concerned.

The places in which nature baths are most often prescribed are forests and nature reserves (35 per cent), parks (28 per cent), small community or family gardens (16 per cent) and botanical gardens (11 per cent).

"Effective nature prescription programmes can involve a range of natural settings and activities and can be implemented via social and community channels, in addition to health professionals," the researchers note.

However, the study has several limitations. For example, more than half of the research reviewed was conducted in South Korea (20 per cent), Japan (20 per cent) or the United States (11 per cent).

"There was insufficient data to determine the influence of sex or gender on the health effects of nature prescriptions," the researchers add. Further research with larger samples of participants and extended to other geographical regions may therefore be necessary to obtain more detailed information on the benefits of nature prescriptions and to encourage other countries to adopt them.

## Watch Out Humans, Artificial General Intelligence Could Be Coming to ChatGPT 5

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - The next version of ChatGPT, expected to land by the end of the year, could take artificial intelligence to a new level, with a tool that comes closer than ever to human intellectual capabilities.

While ChatGPT 4 is busy making headlines, OpenAI is already working on the next steps for its conversational AI. And the aim could be to rival human intelligence!

On social networks, several developers and journalists have been mentioning the possible appearance, by the end of the year, of a new version of ChatGPT that could achieve artificial general intelligence (AGI). This would be a real revolution since, for the very first time, an algorithm could perform in a way indistinguishable from human intelligence.

## Methane Big Part of Alarming Rise in Planet-Warming Gases



LONDON (Dispatches) - Methane in the atmosphere had its fourth-highest annual increase in 2022, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration reported, part of an overall rise in planet-warming greenhouse gases that the agency called "alarming."

Though carbon dioxide typically gets more attention for its role in climate change, scientists are particularly concerned about methane because it traps much more heat — about 87 times more than carbon dioxide on a 20-year timescale.

Methane, a gas emitted from sources including landfills, oil and natural gas systems and livestock, has increased particularly quickly since 2020. Scientists say it shows no sign of slowing despite urgent calls from scientists and policymakers who say time is running out to meet warming limits in the Paris Agreement and avoid the most destructive impacts of climate change.

"The observations collected by NOAA scientists in 2022 show that greenhouse gas emissions continue to rise at an alarming pace and will persist in the atmosphere for thousands of years," NOAA Administrator Rick Spinrad said in a statement accompanying the report. "The time is now to address greenhouse gas pollution and to lower human-caused emissions as we continue to build toward a climate-ready nation."

Methane rose by 14 parts per billion to 1,911.9 ppb in 2022. It rose slightly faster in 2020 (15.20 ppb) and 2021 (17.75 ppb).

Methane gas leaks from wells and natural gas lines and wafts from manure ponds, decomposing landfills, and directly from livestock.

"Ruminant animal herds like goats, sheep, and cows in particular are one of the largest human-driven sources of methane," said Stephen Porder, a professor of ecology and assistant provost for sustainability at Brown University.

Scientists continue to discover that methane emissions from both the fossil fuels industry and the environment are largely underestimated.

"We are confident that over half of the methane emissions are coming from human activities like oil and gas extraction, agriculture, waste management, and landfills," said Benjamin Poulter, NASA research scientist.

The exact amounts of methane that have come from human activity versus natural environments over the past few years is not currently known, but scientists say that humans have little control over ecosystems that start emitting more methane due to warming.

"If this rapid rise is wetlands and natural systems responding to climate change, then that's very frightening because we can't do much to stop it," said Drew Shindell, Duke University professor and former climate scientist at NASA. "If methane leaks from the fossil fuels sector, then we can make regulations. But we can't make regulations on what swamps do."

Scientists are also investigating how the stubborn three-year La Nina pattern could have influenced methane emissions due to higher levels of rainfall in tropical wetlands.

Shindell said methane emissions caused by humans account for about 26% of the warming caused by human activities.

Porder said transitioning away from fossil fuels and reducing the number of ruminant animals being raised are "sure-fire ways to reduce methane in the atmosphere and limit warming."

The International Energy Agency estimates that 70% of 2022's methane emissions could be reduced with existing technology.



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## China's AI Market to Top \$26b in 2026

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's artificial intelligence (AI) market value is expected to reach \$26.44 billion in 2026, an industry report showed. The spending of the country's AI market is forecast to hit US\$14.75 billion in 2023, accounting for about 10 per cent of the world total, said a report from global market research firm International Data Corporation (IDC). The report projected the compound annual growth rate of China's

AI market to surpass 20 per cent during the 2021-2026 period, reported Xinhua.

Optimistic about the long-term expansion of China's AI market, IDC emphasised the importance of innovation and upgrading of AI technology in promoting the better landing of application scenarios. Enterprises' enthusiasm for digital transformation will also stimulate diversified demand in the Chinese market, it said.



## Biden Keeps Seeing Good Economic News And Bad Approval Ratings

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The unemployment rate in the U.S. fell to 3.5% in March. More than 236,000 jobs were added. But there has been no political payoff for President Joe Biden, who keeps seeing good economic news and bad public approval ratings.

U.S. adults are skipping past the job numbers and feeling horrible about the economy. White House aides can list many reasons for the pessimism: high inflation, the hangover from the pandemic, and the political polarization that leaves Republicans automatically believing the economy is sour under a Democratic president.

In the future, an emerging challenge for Biden might be the expectation that unemployment will worsen this year.

This is the opinion of the Federal Reserve (Fed), which expects the jobless rate to hit 4.5%. And the Congressional Budget Office (5.1%). Even the proposed budget that Biden just put forth models an increase (4.3%) from the current rate.

Likewise, many Wall Street analysts are operating under the shorthand that the Fed tames inflation by raising interest rates, which in turn causes demand to tumble and joblessness to rise.

Friday's jobs report showed that the economy is cooling as wage growth slowed, but the labor market is still running much hotter than the overall economy in a way that can fuel doubts. Biden bets that the conventional economic wisdom is wrong and that 6% inflation can be beaten while keeping unemployment low.

"We continue to face economic challenges from a position of strength," Biden said in a statement about the latest jobs report.

A new independent economic analysis helps to show why the low unemployment rate has yet to resonate with people: There aren't enough workers to fill the open jobs, causing the economy to operate with speed bumps and frictions that make things seem worse they are in the data.

The analysis suggests that the economy would arguably function far more smoothly with unemployment higher at 4.6%, even though that could translate into nearly 2 million fewer people holding jobs.

The job market is what economists call "inefficiently tight," a problem the United States faced during the Vietnam War, the Korean War, and World War II. The current tightness is as severe as it was at the end of World War II. This mismatch causes companies and consumers alike to feel the economy is in a rut, said Pascal Michailat, an economist at Brown University.

"For shopkeepers, it means operating shorter hours because it's not possible to find workers to fill the extra time slots," he said. "For households, it means more time trying to hire nannies, plumbers, or construction workers and less time doing enjoyable things."

Based on his calculations on job openings and employment from a 2022 paper written with the economist Emmanuel Saez, Michailat estimates that a 4.6% unemployment rate would make the labor market efficiency. At that rate, the day-to-day transactions that shape an economy would have less friction because the worker demand would be closer to the supply. Government figures released on Tuesday show that employers have 9.9 million job openings, almost double the number of unemployed people seeking work.

This sounds like a good problem because it implies wages should increase. But economic theory suggests the only way to resolve this situation is for unemployment to rise.

## China, India Ensure Asian Oil Demand Remains Robust

LONDON (Dispatches) - Demand for oil in Asia remained robust in March thanks to strong imports by China and India, which offset weakening demand in some other Asian nations.

Asia took in a total 27.6 million barrels of crude daily last month, Reuters' Clyde Russell reported citing Refinitiv Oil Research data. This was a 4% increase over February.

During the first three months of the year, Asian oil imports beat every month of last year, Russell noted, except for November. China's crude oil imports in March hit the highest in four months at 11.65 million bpd, almost 1 million bpd higher than the February average daily. Saudi Arabia was the top supplier of China last month, overtaking Russia.

India, for its part, saw its crude oil imports hit the highest in 11 months in March, at 5.02 million bpd. Russian crude accounted for a third of this total, with deliveries running at record highs for the sixth month in a row.

Despite weaker crude oil and natural gas imports early into the year and just after the Chinese reopening after nearly three years of strict Covid measures, analysts expect China's oil imports to accelerate later this year and support global oil demand growth.



## Bank of Korea to Hold Base Rate at 3.50%

SEOUL (Dispatches) - The Bank of Korea will opt to support a rapidly slowing economy by holding its main interest rate at 3.50%, according to a Reuters poll of economists that showed a slim majority now expect a 25-basis-point cut by the end of 2023.

Policymakers at the BoK, who have raised rates by 300 basis points since August 2021, are wary of over-tightening an export-dependent economy that is on the brink of a recession, especially when global growth is also slowing.

Inflation eased to a one-year low of 4.2% in March, but it is still double the BoK's 2% target and not expected to get to that level for at least another year.

All but one of 40 economists in the April 3-6 Reuters poll expected no change to the 3.50% base rate, already the highest since late 2008, at the April 11 meeting. Only one forecast a 25-basis-point hike to 3.75%.

"The Bank of Korea has become less hawkish and is almost certain to leave interest rates unchanged," said Dave Chia, an economist at Moody's Analytics.

"Considering weak consumption and high household debt, further rate hikes would be devastating to lower-income earners and economic growth. The recent easing of inflation is good news, but volatile oil prices still present a risk."

BoK Governor Rhee Chang-yong told reporters after the February monetary policy meeting that the central bank would not resume its rate hikes if inflation continued to moderate.

## Asian Banks Luring Investors Who Think They're a Safer Bet

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The US-led banking turmoil is driving money into Asian assets, with investors betting that China and the region's emerging economies are in a better position to weather the fallout.

A Citibank analysis of global financial conditions shows Asian financial markets have tightened less than in the US and most Asian currencies have gained ground against the US dollar. An index of financial stocks in the region, excluding Japan, has risen since March 10 — the day Silicon Valley Bank collapsed — compared with an almost 10% drop in the American banking index over the same period.

"We think Asia still remains relatively well-insulated," said Johanna Chua, managing director and head of Asia-Pacific economic and market analysis at Citi. "A US-centric slowdown means the US dollar will track lower, which is more supportive of capital flows in Asia."

Economists say one factor working in favor of Asia-Pacific is a generally softer pivot in monetary policy, with central banks in Australia, South Korea, Indonesia and India among those pausing their tightening cycles. China, with its easing monetary policy and a belated re-opening from Covid, is the top attraction for investors.

That's reflected in the US\$5.5 billion of funds that flowed into emerging-market equity funds over the four weeks up to the end of March, led by Asia, according to figures from TD Securities, citing EPFR Global data. More than 70% of that money went to China. At the same time, developed-market equities suffered net outflows of US\$8.6 billion, with the US hardest hit.

"Investors are still looking at EM Asia as perhaps the most-favored region, followed by Europe and then perhaps by the US," David Chao, global markets strategist for the Asia-Pacific at Invesco Asset Management told Bloomberg Radio on April 4. "If you think that the Fed is going to hit a pause button on interest-rate hikes, that would certainly drive capital flows back to EM Asia."

An end to the cycle of Fed hikes, amid the financial stability risks and signs of cooling demand, could aid Asia by easing pressures from a strong dollar on external finances and reducing the appeal of the greenback as a safe haven.

The Asian Development Bank this week said that Asia's developing economies, led by China, are on course for faster growth and slower inflation this year and next, while advanced economies are contributing to a darker global outlook.

China's rebound is expected to percolate throughout the region, which also benefits from supply-chain diversification, booming commodities and a lack of excessive debt growth, said Frederic Neumann, chief Asia economist at HSBC Holdings Plc in Hong Kong.

## Lebanon, Argentina, Zimbabwe Countries With Highest Inflation in Feb

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The Lebanese, Zimbabwean, and Argentine economies performed the worst in February in light of an ongoing economic crisis that saw no country in the world deflate.

Lebanon, Argentina, and Zimbabwe were the countries with the highest annual inflation rates in February 2023, according to calculations made by Russian news agency Sputnik and based on data from national statistics.

Inflation in Lebanon was at a whopping 190% in February, putting it in first place by far, while Argentina ranked second with an annual inflation rate of 102.5%. The country with the highest inflation rate in January, Zimbabwe, saw its inflation cooling down to 92.3% after it was at 230%.

Joanna Wroncka, the UN's Special Coordinator for Lebanon, warned in a tweet that the Lebanese people are severely harmed by currency depreciation and inflation three years after Lebanon declared its first ever-sovereign default.

She also noted that the "Lebanese are still waiting for their leaders to act to rescue the country." Wroncka further argued that reforms agreed upon with the IMF are "crucial and inevitable."

Most of Lebanon's population is now living in poverty as a result of the country's financial crisis, and the political class, which is frequently held responsible, has done nothing to address the situation.

Sudan and Suriname completed the top five list with their inflation rates being at 63.3% and 58%, respectively.

Inflation hit Europe pretty hard, as well, as Moldova ranked highest with 25.9%, followed by Hungary at 25.4% and Ukraine at 24.9% as Switzerland and Lichtenstein had the lowest inflation rates on the continent, at 3.4%.



In the Middle East, Lebanon, Turkey, and Egypt had the worst inflation rates, with the latter two's inflation rates being 55.2% and 31.9%, respectively. Oman had the lowest inflation rate, with 1.9%.

Asia's worst-ranking countries were Sri Lanka, 53.6%, Laos, 41.4%, and Pakistan, 31.5%. China ranked lowest with a mere 1% inflation rate.

Sri Lanka defaulted on its \$46 billion foreign debt in April 2022 and was negotiating a bailout deal with the IMF to repair its shattered finances. The country witnessed months of lack of food, fuel, and medicine, extended power cuts, and inflation - which in turn has caused civil unrest and public outrage.

Months of protests during the height of the crisis pushed then-President Gotabaya Rajapaksa to depart the country and resign in July 2022 following accusations of economic mismanagement and corruption.

## Financial Inclusion in Egypt Touches 65% Of Its Adult Population in 2022



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Financial inclusion is gaining prominence in Egypt as total ownership of transactional accounts reached 64.8 percent of the total 65.4 million eligible adult population at the end of 2022, reported the Central Bank of Egypt.

According to the central bank report, financial inclusion surged 147 percent between 2016 and 2022 to 42.3 million citizens who own and use transactional accounts such as Egypt Post accounts, mobile wallets and prepaid cards.

The released indicators showed an upsurge in the number of women who own a transactional account, recording 18.3 million women by the end of 2022 — a 210 percent rise compared to 2016.

Mobile wallets and prepaid cards primarily led to the increase. Between 2020 and 2022, mobile wallets grew by 54 percent, while prepaid cards rose by 31 percent.

The total number of prepaid cards jumped to an average of 43,800 cards per 100,000 people, while mobile wallets reached 46,500 per 100 thousand citizens.

In addition, access points from branches, ATMs, points of sale and payment service providers surged 107 percent to reach 1,214 access points in the past two years.

Tracking the level and trends of financial inclusion aids in developing policies that support the economic empowerment of locals, reported the central bank in its release.

The promising indicators lie "within the framework of the efforts exerted at the state level toward achieving economic empowerment for all citizens," stated the CBE.

The bank further added that monitoring such progress will help the Egyptian government "attain sustainable growth and economic stability, in alignment to the sustainable development goals and Egypt's vision 2030."

Nevertheless, Egypt's external financing needs are standing in the way of its economic development. They may hinder its medium-term growth, according to a report published by Morgan Stanley last month.



## Iran Greco-Roman Wrestlers Crowned Asian Championships

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers won the title of the 2023 Asian Wrestling Championships in Kazakhstan on Monday. The second day of the Asian championships was held in Kazakhstan and two Iranian wrestlers made it to the finals and two others went to the ranking meeting. With the four gold medals grabbed on the first day, the Iranian national team won the Asian championship title by obtaining the necessary points before the final matches and classification. Earlier on Sunday, Iranian Greco-Roman wrestlers claimed four gold medals in the 2023 Asian Wrestling Championships.



## Are Robot Waiters the Future? Some Restaurants Think So

MADISON HEIGHTS (Dispatches) - You may have already seen them in restaurants: waist-high machines that can greet guests, lead them to their tables, deliver food and drinks and ferry dirty dishes to the kitchen. Some have cat-like faces and even purr when you scratch their heads.

But are robot waiters the future? It's a question the restaurant industry is increasingly trying to answer.

Many think robot waiters are the solution to the industry's labor shortages. Sales of them have been growing rapidly in recent years, with tens of thousands now gliding through dining rooms worldwide.

"There's no doubt in my mind that this is where the world is going," said Dennis Reynolds, dean of the Hilton College of Global Hospitality Leadership at the University of Houston. The school's restaurant began using a robot in December, and Reynolds says it has eased the workload for human staff and made service more efficient.

But others say robot waiters aren't much more than a gimmick that have a long way to go before they can replace humans. They can't take orders, and many restaurants have steps, outdoor patios and other physical challenges they can't adapt to.

"Restaurants are pretty chaotic places, so it's very hard to insert automation in a way that is really productive," said Craig Le Clair, a vice president with the consulting company Forrester who studies automation.

Still, the robots are proliferating. Redwood City, California-based Bear Robotics introduced its Servi robot in 2021 and expects to have 10,000 deployed by the end of this year in 44 U.S. states and overseas. Shenzhen, China-based Pudu Robotics, which was founded in 2016, has deployed more than 56,000 robots worldwide.

"Every restaurant chain is looking toward as much automation as possible," said Phil Zheng of Richtech Robotics, an Austin-based maker of robot servers. "People are going to see these everywhere in the next year or two."

Li Zhai was having trouble finding staff for Noodle Topia, his Madison Heights, Michigan, restaurant, in the summer of 2021, so he bought a BellaBot from Pudu Robotics. The robot was so successful he added two more; now, one robot leads diners to their seats while another delivers bowls of steaming noodles to tables. Employees pile dirty dishes onto a third robot to shuttle back to the kitchen.

Now, Zhai only needs three people to do the same volume of business that five or six people used to handle. And they save him money. A robot costs around \$15,000, he said, but a person costs \$5,000 to \$6,000 per month.

Zhai said the robots give human servers more time to mingle with customers, which increases tips. And customers often post videos of the robots on social media that entice others to visit.

"Besides saving labor, the robots generate business," he said.

Interactions with human servers can vary. Betzy Giron Reynosa, who works with a BellaBot at The Sushi Factory in West Melbourne, Florida, said the robot can be a pain. "You can't really tell it to move or anything," she said. She has also had customers who don't want to interact with it.



But overall the robot is a plus, she said. It saves her trips back and forth to the kitchen and gives her more time with customers.

Labor shortages accelerated the adoption of robots globally, Le Clair said. In the U.S., the restaurant industry employed 15 million people at the end of last year, but that was still 400,000 fewer than before the pandemic, according to the National Restaurant Association. In a recent survey, 62% of restaurant operators told the association they don't have enough employees to meet customer demand.

Pandemic-era concerns about hygiene and adoption of new technology like QR code menus also laid the ground for robots, said Karthik Namasivayam, director of The School of Hospitality Business at Michigan State University's Broad College of Business.

"Once an operator begins to understand and work with one technology, other technologies become less daunting and will be much more readily accepted as we go forward," he said.

Namasivayam notes that public acceptance of robot servers is already high in Asia. Pizza Hut has robot servers in 1,000 restaurants in China, for example.

The U.S. was slower to adopt robots, but some chains are now testing them. Chick-fil-A is trying them at multiple U.S. locations, and says it's found that the robots give human employees more time to refresh drinks, clear tables and greet guests.

Marcus Merritt was surprised to see a robot server at a Chick-fil-A in Atlanta recently. The robot didn't seem to be replacing staff, he said; he counted 13 employees in the store, and workers told him the robot helps service move a little faster. He was delighted that the robot told him to have a great day, and expects he'll see more robots when he goes out to eat.

"I think technology is part of our normal everyday now. Everybody has a cell phone, everybody uses some form of computer," said Merritt, who owns a marketing business. "It's a natural progression."

But not all chains have had success with robots.

## China Continues to Boost Gold Reserves



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China, the world's second-largest economy, increased its gold reserves in March for a fifth month in a row, as central banks globally continue to pile up reserves of gold in the face of high inflation and heightened geopolitical risks.

The People's Bank of China boosted its gold reserves by around 18 tons last month, per data from the central bank cited by Bloomberg. The officially reported Chinese reserves of gold now stand at 2,068 tons, having increased in each of the past five months.

That's the longest period in which China has been consistently buying gold for months since a ten-month period that ended in September 2019.

Central banks globally have been buying gold for months, with reported global gold reserves rising by 52 tons during February – the eleventh consecutive month of net purchases – following the 74 tons central banks added in January, according to data from the World Gold Council.

In the first two months of 2023, central banks reported net purchases of 125 tons, which was the strongest start to a year back to at least 2010 – when central banks became net buyers on an annual basis, the council said this week. The largest single purchase in February was reported by the People's Bank of China, which added 25 tons of gold in that month. Turkey, Uzbekistan, Singapore, and India also added gold reserves in February.

This week, gold prices were on track for a weekly gain as weaker U.S. economic data weighed on economic sentiment. Spot gold prices jumped to above the \$2,000 per ounce mark this week, following the surge in oil prices after the OPEC+ group announced an additional cut of 1.66 million barrels per day (bpd) between May and December 2023.

"Ahead of the nonfarm payroll report, gold got hit by profit-taking as too much of the trading world was closing up shop for the long weekend. This was a one-way gold move and bullion traders didn't want to be caught on the wrong side of this trade when the markets reopen next week," Ed Moya, Senior Market Analyst, The Americas at OANDA, said on Thursday. "The bull case remains for gold, but traders need to see how the market reset next week."

## Senegal Harvests First Experimental Homegrown Wheat

SANGALKAM (Dispatches) - With the whir of a mower, under a clear blue sky, Senegalese researchers have begun harvesting a crop of experimental homegrown wheat, the latest step in a years-long effort to reduce reliance on imports.

The second most consumed cereal after rice, wheat is an important staple in the bread-loving West African nation.

But Senegal, like many of its neighbors, depends entirely on foreign supplies.

It imports 800,000 tonnes of the grain per year. Its tropical climate is not naturally suited to wheat but domestic trials have been underway for years.

Supply chain problems, rising grain prices and inflation caused by the war in Ukraine have added urgency to the country's efforts to achieve self-sufficiency.

Since late last week, researchers from the Senegalese Institute for Agricultural Research (ISRA), a public research institute, have been harvesting four varieties of wheat on a demonstration plot in Sangalkam, 35 kilometres (22 miles) from the capital Dakar.

Three of the varieties are Egyptian and the fourth was developed by the institute.

It operates five demonstration plots in total -- two near



Dakar and three in the Senegal River Valley -- and has tested hundreds of wheat varieties, Amadou Tidiane Sall, one of the researchers, told AFP.

The Sangalkam crop, one of several successful experiments by the institute, was sown in early January and matured in three months

during Senegal's cold season.

Agriculture Minister Aly Ngouille Ndiaye visited the plot earlier this month.

He said he had requested Egyptian seeds on a visit to the North African country for the United Nations' COP27 climate conference in November.

"We have significant potential," the minister said during his visit, promising the government would work with the private sector to expand trial plots.

He acknowledged that a lack of adequate water for irrigation posed a significant challenge. Not everyone is convinced that wheat can be grown at scale in Senegal.

Amadou Gaye -- the president of the National Federation of Bakers of Senegal, who represents some 2,500 bakeries across the country -- told AFP he would prefer to see resources dedicated to producing local cereals such as millet, maize and sorghum.

## Global Climate Coalitions Need Safer Harbor From Antitrust Turbulence

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global companies that form alliances to help them to tackle climate change need clear w"safe harbor" guidelines from governments to allay fears they could be tripped up by antitrust rules, legal experts said.

Hundreds of companies have banded together into various groups with pledges to reduce carbon emissions to net zero by mid-century.

But there is limited guidance from governments and regulators on how far they can collaborate to reach that goal without overstepping antitrust boundaries.

Zurich Insurance Group said it was quitting an industry grouping of insurers focused on cutting carbon emissions. That followed Munich Re's unexpected announcement last week that it was leaving the group - the Net Zero Insurance Alliance (NZIA) - to avoid antitrust risks.

The German reinsurer on Friday quit group less than two years after co-founding the coalition, part of the Glasgow Financial Alliance for Net Zero umbrella group of sectors pushing to decarbonise.

Alec Burnside, a partner at law firm Dechert, said both Britain and the European Commission had offered

### IRGC...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great progress in indigenously developing a broad range of equipment, making the Armed Forces self-sufficient in this regard.

Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the Islamic Republic will not hesitate to build up its defense capabilities, emphasizing that such abilities are entirely meant for the purpose of defense and will be never subject to negotiations.

### Ditching Dollar...

FROM PAGE 1

He said the initiatives finalized between Iran and Russia in the sector of financial and banking exchanges aimed at funding joint projects are an "effective" paradigm for neutralizing the West's unlawful sanctions against the two countries.



In recent days, Brazil has begun to accept trade settlements and investments in yuan, with an agreement reached between central banks in February, and the appointment of a yuan clearing bank and access to the Cross-border Interbank Payment System, the China equivalent to international financial messaging service Swift, last week.

Russia after the war with Ukraine decided to cut its dependence on the dollar in its trade and it decided to trade in its national currency, rouble, and it helped the country survive the unilateral sanctions imposed by the West and predominantly the U.S.

India also decided to strengthen its currency rupee and it is now using its rupee in trade with many countries like Malaysia and Iran.

So we can see countries have realized that the era of uni-polarization has come to its end and they have realized that they should stand on their own feet and cut their dependence on the dollar which is used as a tool for the economic slavery by the U.S.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has also decided to switch to other currencies in its trade with other states especially with the neighboring countries and gradually the dollar will be fully ditched and national economy will cut its dependence on the dollar which has turned into a headache for the national economy.

Of course it will take time for fully ditching the dollar but it is an action which has been taken by Iran and many countries, and soon the countries will get rid of dollar dominance on their economies and people, and it will be also an end to the U.S. economic and political grandeur and the U.S. will be no economic and political superpower any longer in the world and countries will also get rid of the unilateral and unfair sanctions of the U.S. and then a new world order will be seen with real independence.

### Islamic Ummah Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran always emphasized the necessity of resorting to political frameworks and dialogue and avoiding controversial issues behind the podiums, he continued, adding that despite the tensions that arose, Tehran tried to resolve misunderstandings in the form of bilateral dialogues.

Dubbing the recent events from the Azeri side as rushed and unproductive, Kanaani stated that Iran assesses the recent phone call between the Iranian and Azeri top diplomats as positive.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kanaani expressed condolences over the death of 4 Pakistani border guards in a terrorist attack. He also strongly condemned the terrorist incident.

He went on to say that talks were held regarding this issue with the Pakistani side and any connection between terrorists and the use of Iranian soil to carry out this operation was questioned, adding that Iran is ready to examine any documents that exist in this connection.

### Conflict in Caucasus...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, Shamkhani said the Caucasus region is going through a sensitive period, expressing hope that Azerbaijan and Armenia would be able to overcome the existing tensions through self-restraint and prudence.

He mentioned development of cooperation and interaction with neighbors as an unchanging principle of Iran's foreign policy and a priority for the sitting Iranian administration.

"[Maintaining] good-neighborly relations and making a joint endeavor for the settlement of the regional challenges through peaceful means are among the Islamic Republic's most important pieces of advice to all [regional] parties," Shamkhani asserted.

For his part, Armenia's top security official said Iran played an "important role" in the development of relations among South Caucasus countries and also in protecting the regional security.

Grigoryan lauded Iran's "very effective" role in the realization of regional peace and stability, emphasizing that dialogue and interaction among countries constitute the only way of resolving the existing regional crises and preventing further tension and conflicts.



## Van der Poel Wins

### Paris-Roubaix Cycling Race

PARIS (Dispatches) - Mathieu van der Poel claimed one of cycling's most glittering prizes Sunday, breaking away solo on a dangerous cobbled section for a magnificent solo triumph at the Paris-Roubaix classic.

The 28-year-old Dutch rider produced a string of aggressive attacks to shake off stubborn resistance before the decisive move on the epic 256.6km race was sparked by a spectacular fall.

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## Woods Makes the Cut to Equal Masters Record

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tiger Woods enjoyed a little unintentional help from his friends as he made a record-equaling 23rd consecutive cut in the Masters.

While Jon Rahm overcame the miserable conditions on Saturday to close within two shots of leader Brooks Koepka, Woods had to battle to avoid an early exit from Augusta National for the first time as a professional.

The 15-time major winner had seven holes of his second round to complete when play resumed at 8am and followed three pars with a birdie on the 15th to get inside the projected cut mark.

# Arsenal Held by Liverpool In Blow to Premier League Title Bid

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Arsenal blew a two-goal lead in a pulsating 2-2 draw at Liverpool to give Manchester City fresh hope of retaining the Premier League title.

Mikel Arteta's men edged six points ahead of City at the top of the table, but the defending champions now have the destiny of the title in their own hands.

City have a game in hand and host the Gunners at the Etihad later this month.

Goals from Gabriel Martinelli and Gabriel Jesus appeared to have Arsenal cruising towards an eighth consecutive league win.

But Mohamed Salah pulled a goal back before half-time to spark a Liverpool fightback. Salah missed a second-half penalty before Roberto Firmino headed in the equaliser three minutes from time.

Jurgen Klopp's men then missed a series of chances to complete the comeback as Arsenal goalkeeper Aaron Ramsdale salvaged a point for his side.

But the match will also live long in the memory for a remarkable incident just after the half-time whistle when assistant referee Constantine Hatzidakis thrust an elbow into the face of Liverpool left-back Andy Robertson.

Arsenal remain without an away league win to Liverpool since 2012 as they stumbled over one of the major hurdles between them and the title despite a perfect start.

It took just eight minutes for the visitors to make the breakthrough as Bukayo Saka surged through the Liverpool defence and the ball broke kindly for Martinelli to prod past his Brazilian international teammate Alisson Becker.

Only a glaring miss from Jesus and a fine save by Alisson to deny Oleksandr Zinchenko prevented Arsenal from being out of sight within 15 minutes.

Virgil van Dijk's slump in form has played a major role in Liverpool's collapse from the team that came close to an unprecedented quadruple last season to mid-table mediocrity.



The Dutch centre-back was caught on his heels as Arsenal doubled their lead when Jesus was left unmarked to head in Martinelli's cross on 28 minutes.

But signs of a youthful side going for their first title finally showed once Salah halved the arrears three minutes before half-time.

Liverpool could even have been level by the break as Jordan Henderson blazed another big chance over.

But that was just the start of the drama as Robertson was elbowed by assistant referee Hatzidakis as the players left the field for half-time.

That incident fired Liverpool up as they came flying out the blocks in the second half and had a golden opportunity to level when Rob Holding brought down Diogo Jota, but Salah slotted the penalty wide.

Salah nearly made amends moments later as Ramsdale produced a stunning save to keep his side in front and the England goalkeeper was needed again nine minutes from time to save a one-on-one with Darwin Nunez.

Firmino finally made Liverpool's pressure count when he headed home Trent Alexander-Arnold's cross to set up a grandstand finish.

Salah blazed over a glorious chance before Ramsdale made remarkable saves from the Egyptian and Ibrahima Konate to ensure Arsenal escaped just with a point.

But Liverpool's rally may prove too little, too late both on the day and for their chances of Champions League football next season.

The Reds have failed to win any of their five games since a remarkable 7-0 win over Manchester United last month.

Liverpool remain down in eighth, 12 points adrift of the top four.

## Becker Says Life in Prison Was Brutal



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Boris Becker has said his time behind bars was "very brutal" and he had to "fight every day for survival".

The three-time Wimbledon champion was jailed for two and a half years last April for hiding £2.5 million of assets and loans to avoid paying debts, serving eight months. He said the experience had "humbled" him, but had made him a "stronger, better man".

Speaking on BBC Radio 5 Live Breakfast on Saturday he said: "Whoever says that prison life isn't hard and isn't difficult, I think is lying."

"It was a very brutal. A very, very different experience to what you see in the movies, what you've heard from stories."

"You fight every day for survival. Quickly, you have to surround yourself with the tough boys, as I would call it, because you need protection." His comments come after a two-part documentary Boom! Boom! The World vs. Boris Becker debuted globally on April 7 on Apple TV+.

Discussing the show last month, Becker said he felt the tennis world had "embraced" him since his release in December, after which he was deported from the UK.

"It is really about acceptance," he said. "Of course naturally you do look back. You look back at the judgment and you look back at the trial and you look back at the jurors and you look at some of the mistakes that I did, but it is over, it is done."

## Jabeur Books Return to Final at Rainy Charleston

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Second-seeded Ons Jabeur booked a return to the WTA final in Charleston, but she'll have to wait to learn her opponent after rain halted the second semi-final.

Jabeur, who finished runner-up to Belinda Bencic on the green clay courts of South Carolina last year, said a rain delay of more than three hours proved advantageous in her 7-5, 7-5 victory over third-seeded Daria Kasatkina.

But the second semi-final, between top-seeded American Jessica Pegula and fourth-seeded Bencic was also interrupted, and with heavy weather expected to linger, play was halted for the night with their match in a second-set tiebreaker.

Bencic had won the first set 7-5, but the second was knotted at 6-6 with Pegula up 4-2 in the tiebreaker when the match was stopped as the light rain that had fallen through several games intensified.

Jabeur, runner-up last year at Wimbledon and the US Open, reached her first final of 2023 with her victory over Kasatkina.

But the world number five, who was sidelined in February after knee surgery in the wake of the Australian Open, had to rally from two breaks down in the first set and a break down in the second.

As Jabeur struggled with her first serve Kasatkina raced to a 4-1 lead in the opening set, but Jabeur broke the Russian as she served for the set at 5-2.

Jabeur was serving to extend the set at 5-3 when rain halted play for more than three hours, and the Tunisian came out of the break strong.

She saved two set points to hold and won 12 of the next 15 points to pocket the set.

"I have to thank the rain," Jabeur said, adding it gave her time to talk to her coach and "reflect on what happened in the first set."

"My game was there, I just needed to find something small," added Jabeur, who was broken to open the second set but gained a decisive break in the final game to finish it out.

# Valverde Punches Villarreal's Baena



"I'm very sad for the attack that I suffered after the game and surprised about what they are saying about me, it's totally false that I said that," wrote Baena on Twitter. Real Madrid and Villarreal did not respond to requests for comment from AFP.

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid midfielder Fede Valverde punched Villarreal's Alex Baena in the face after the champions' 3-2 defeat in La Liga last night, according to media reports in Spain.

Baena complained on Twitter about being "attacked" and denied he had insulted Valverde's family, which some reports cite as the reason for the Uruguayan's anger.

Baena complained on Twitter about being "attacked" and denied he had insulted Valverde's family, which some reports cite as the reason for the Uruguayan's anger.

Villarreal beat Real Madrid 3-2 at the Santiago Bernabeu and after the game, Spanish reports state that Valverde waited by the visitors' team bus to confront Baena.

"Fede Valverde, thuggish and cowardly," Villarreal team delegate Xisco Nadal wrote on Twitter on Sunday, before later deleting his post.

Referee Javier Alberola Rojas did not include any reference to the incident in his report from the game.

Spanish newspaper Marca report that sources close to Valverde say Baena upset the Madrid player during the teams' Copa del Rey clash in January by speaking about his unborn child.

Valverde's partner Mina Bonino revealed in February the couple thought they had lost their baby, but the pregnancy was later found to be healthy.

Marca say Baena again referred to Valverde's child during the match yesterday, provoking the confrontation.

## Guardiola Hails Haaland as on Same Level as Messi, Ronaldo

SOUTHAMPTON (Dispatches) - Manchester City boss Pep Guardiola said Erling Haaland is at the standard of Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo when it comes to finding the net after scoring twice on his return from injury in a 4-1 win at Southampton.

Victory took City to within five points of Arsenal at the top of the Premier League. Haaland has now scored 44 times in his debut season with the English champions, including 30 in 27 Premier League appearances.

The Norwegian's second goal was special as the giant striker acrobatically volleyed home Jack Grealish's cross with an overhead kick.

"The second goal was amazing. It is not easy to pick the ball up in the sky and put it on the grass," said Guardiola, who coached Messi during four years as Barcelona coach.

"We need him. The first half was not our best level but he changed the game."

"As a top scorer we lived two incredible decades with Cristiano Ronaldo and Lionel Messi but he is on that level. He scores a lot of goals. I am very happy with 65 minutes after injury and he helped us again."

Guardiola was true to his word that he was not thinking about Tuesday's Champions League quarter-final, first leg against Bayern Munich as Haaland's return from a groin injury was the only change from the side that thrashed Liverpool 4-1 last weekend.

But the visitors failed to hit the same heights for the first 45 minutes and could have been punished against a side with more firepower than the Saints.



## Son Becomes First Asian to Score 100 Premier League Goals

LONDON (Dispatches) - Son Heung-min dedicated his historic goal in Tottenham's 2-1 win against Brighton to his late grandfather after the South Korea star became the first Asian to score 100 times in the Premier League.

Son reached his century in style with a superb curling finish to put Tottenham ahead in the first half in north London on Saturday.

After Lewis Dunk's equaliser, Harry Kane's 79th-minute winner ensured Son's goal wouldn't go to waste as fifth-placed Tottenham stayed in the hunt to qualify for the Champions League via a top-four finish.

It was a welcome boost for the 30-year-old Son, who has endured a difficult season. As well as an unusually long run of poor personal form, which including several spells on the bench, Son has had to cope with the recent death of his grandfather.

"This was something that I dreamed for. It is an amazing achievement which I wouldn't have had without my team-mates," he told the BBC.

"Scoring 100 goals in the Premier League is a massive thing. I was really emotional because I have had tough moments in the last few weeks. My grandad passed away and it was not easy. I want to send that goal to him."

Son has enjoyed a remarkable career with Tottenham since signing from Bayer Leverkusen for what now looks a bargain £22 million (\$27 million) in 2015.

His dynamic displays have established him as one of the Premier League's most feared, while his humble personality has made him a favourite with Tottenham fans.

