

Israeli Media Announced That the Zionist TV Channels Were Targeted by a Cyberattack, in Which a Short Clip of Launching Missiles Was Displayed as It Was One of the Recent Series of Cyberattacks on the Zionists

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Gained 21,117 Points to 2.275m on Sunday, As Reported, Over 21.913b Securities Worth 148.043 Trillion Rials (About \$352.4m) Were Traded

VOL. XXIX, No. 7745 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

MONDAY APRIL 17, 2023 - FARVARDIN 28, 1402

2 DOMESTIC

Iran Greatest and Most Steadfast Supporter of Resistance in World



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Tokyo Ready to Restore Economic Relation With Tehran



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

Deadly Fighting Rocks Sudan as Army Battles Paramilitaries



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Butler, Strus Lead Heat Past Bulls And Into Playoffs



> SEE PAGE 8

Tehran, Caracas Sign Agreements on Oil, Gas

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The memorandums tackle the development of oil and gas fields and the reconstruction and renovation of Venezuelan oil refineries.

Iran and Venezuela signed a number of memorandums of understanding on the development of oil and gas fields, the reconstruction of refineries and petrochemical complexes, and oil trade.

According to the news agency, the documents were signed in the presence of Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji and Venezuela's Vice President Delcy Rodríguez and Oil Minister Pedro Rafael Tellechea in Caracas.

It added that the memorandums tackled the development of oil and gas fields and the reconstruction and renovation of Venezuelan oil refineries with the aim of maximizing their capacity.

On Thursday, Owji landed in Venezuela at the head of a delegation that was welcomed by Venezuelan officials.

The Iranian minister's visit is aimed at promoting Tehran-Caracas cooperation in the downstream and upstream sectors.

See Page 7

Tehran Blasts Desecration of Holy Qur'an

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman has strongly condemned the latest instance of desecration of Muslims' holy book in Denmark, describing it as another flip side of Takfiri extremism and violence.

Nasser Kanaani made the remark after a Danish group burned a copy of the Holy Qur'an during a demonstration in the capital Copenhagen. According to media reports, the group also burned Turkey's flag during the same demonstration.

"This act of desecration, which was done by an extremist group during the holy month of Ramadan ... is an insult to the divine religion of Islam and a blatant affront to all Muslims of the world," Kan'ani said.

Noting that this insulting measure was taken on Friday, which coincided with the International Quds Day, when all free-thinking people of the world were calling for the liberation of al-Quds from the Zionist regime's occupation, the Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman added, "This is the most appalling way to demonstrate the claim that the West calls freedom of expression."

See Page 7

Enemy "Vincible" Despite Its Apparent Calculations



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says that the enemy is defeatable despite all its seemingly solid calculations and military power.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with the commanders and officials of the Iranian Armed Forces on Sunday.

He has lauded the great achievements and continuous progress in the Iranian Armed Forces over the years and described as "absolutely necessary" the readiness of the Armed Forces for deterring enemies and their vigilance against the behind-the-scenes plotters.

Describing these forces as the strong fences for the country and the nation, he emphasized, "This very big position brings heavy responsibilities that, thank God, the armed forces are busy with fulfilling their duties."

Referring to the verse of the Holy Quran, Ayatollah Khamenei described constant preparation as a command of God and a source of fear for the enemies of God and the nation, and added, "Threat will never disappear completely, so you should increase your preparations as much as you can."

The Leader of the Islamic Revolution also considered the readiness of the armed forces for deterring enemies and vigilance against the behind-the-scenes planners absolutely necessary.

Referring to the words and possible actions of the weak elements, he said, "We should not focus our minds on such actions and words, but should see the main designers behind the scenes."

Referring to the war-mongering evil international forces in different regions of the world, Ayatollah Khamenei said, "Arrogance starts a conflict from behind the scenes wherever it sees benefits."

Focusing on the enemy's long-term plans was another important point that the Leader of the Islamic Revolution stressed. "It is good and necessary to pay close attention to the enemy's five- or ten-year plans, but his mid-term and long-term plans should be considered and monitored."

Ayatollah Khamenei also referred to the two wars that the U.S started in the east and west of Iran about two decades ago and added, "The Americans had interests in Iraq and Afghanistan, but their ultimate goal was the Islamic Republic of Iran, which, due to the very strong foundations of the Islamic revolution, they failed their ultimate goal."

"Therefore, the enemy with all his seemingly solid calculations and military power can be defeated," he further pointed out.

He considered the current situation of the Zionist regime as another example of such failures and continued, "The Zionist regime's anti-Palestinian operation in the month of Ramadan last year did not have a particular reaction in the world, but this year there are demonstrations against its crimes, even in the United States and England."

Ayatollah Khamenei considered it important not to ignore the enemy, along with believing in his invincibility, and added, "At no stage should one ignore the enemy's machinations and designs."

At the end of his speech, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution urged thinkers and planners of the armed forces to constantly and innovatively design strong and rational strategies and policies.

Before the Leader's speech, Major General Bagheri, the chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces, gave a report on the plans and actions of the Armed Forces in various fields.

Ansarullah, Saudi-Backed Presidential Council Complete Prisoner Swap

SANAA (Dispatches) - Yemen's Ansarullah resistance movement and the Saudi-backed Presidential Leadership Council (PLC) have freed scores of prisoners on the last of a three-day exchange of nearly 900 detainees, raising prospects for nationwide peace in a country embroiled in a devastating Saudi-led war.

The International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), which is managing the prisoner exchange, said on Sunday that planes carrying released detainees took off at the same time from the capital city of Sana'a and the energy-rich northern city of Ma'rib.

"The first flight from Ma'rib and the first flight from Sana'a have left," ICRC media adviser Jessica Moussan told AFP news agency.

She added, "Forty-eight former detainees were on board the Ma'rib-Sana'a flight, while 42 others were on the Sana'a-Ma'rib flight." Three other flights during the day were to complete the deal, the senior official from the Geneva-based humanitarian organization noted.

Four journalists sentenced to death by the Ansarullah movement are part of the exchange, PLC negotiator Majed Fadail said. Mahdi al-Mashat, head of Yemen's Supreme Political Council, said the next round of talks with Saudi Arabia would start after the Eid al-Fitr holiday, which is expected on April 21 and marks the end of the holy Muslim fasting month of Ramadan, Yemen's official Saba news agency reported.

The last talks ended hours before 318 prisoners were transported on four flights on Friday between the southern Yemeni port city of Aden and Sana'a, reuniting detainees with their families.

See Page 7

Iran Oil Output Down Slightly In March to 2.567m bpd

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) show that Iran's oil output in March was almost unchanged from February.

The figures covered in a report by the ILNA news agency showed that Iran had produced an average of 2.567 million barrels per day of crude oil in March, down by 8,000 bpd from February.

The decreased output mirrored a month-on-month decline of 0.29% in OPEC oil production in March.

The average price of Iranian Heavy crude grade reached \$78.8 per barrel in March, down from \$81.88 per barrel reported in February, showed OPEC tables.

OPEC forecasts showed that global demand for crude oil will reach an average of 101.89 million bpd, up by 2.33% from the average demand reported last year.

Iran Inks MoU with 30 Countries In Aviation Field

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The head of Iran's Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) on Sunday announced the signing and sealing of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) in the field of aviation with 30 countries in the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

Mohammad Mohammadibakhsh said his organization has taken giant strides in the current Iranian calendar year of 1402 (started March 21, 2023) to develop air transportation fleet and to boost the flight network, which has been put atop the agenda.

He went on to say that the CAO has inked memoranda of understanding (MoUs) with 30 countries over the past one and a half years, adding that the country has launched direct flights to 60 destinations worldwide.

Given the above issue, the Civil Aviation Organization has gained salient achievements in the international arena, Mohammadibakhsh highlighted.

The CAO chief noted that his organization has made its utmost efforts to materialize most of the objectives of the aviation industry in the current year.

Indian Tea Exporters Remain Cautious Due to Iran Issue

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - According to trade insiders, the increase in shipments was on track, with exporters taking advantage of the turmoil in Sri Lanka to push more Indian teas into the global market. However, exporters are concerned about the evolving situation in Iran, one of the largest purchasers of Indian orthodox teas, and have stated that it may have an impact on shipments in the current fiscal year.

According to Anshuman Kanoria, chairman of the India Tea Exporters Association, the increase in exports was expected and was mostly due to a lower Sri Lankan yield. "The blow that Sri Lanka took created some opportunities, which we were able to capitalize on. With the Iran issue still looming, overall export prospects for this year are not as bright as they were last year," Kanoria added.

Iran accounts for more than half of India's conventional exports. "No one knows what is going on in Iran. They have not filed new contracts in over three months, and the orthodox market has opened relatively muted. Shipments have been made, but payments for them have been delayed to arrive.

According to Deepak Shah, Chairman of the South India Tea Exporters Association, Russia has been buying actively, and with the rupee exchange taking place, exports are expected to grow. However, Iran remains a source of concern because the payment problem persists and new contracts are not being signed. "The Iranian government is required to register import contracts, which they are not doing for unknown reasons," he claimed.

See Page 7

Sokhan Gostar Institute

IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

Gov't Preparing Bill To Counter Sanctions

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian government has announced that it is working on a comprehensive bill aimed at countering sanctions against the Islamic Republic.

The bill, among other things, supports Iranian nationals harmed by the sanctions and envisages a legal framework that would define reciprocal measures against behaviors violating international law, said Government Spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi.

The Islamic Republic has been targeted by numerous sanctions imposed by Western states, particularly the United States, under different excuses ranging from human rights issues to Iran's peaceful nuclear energy program.

Iranian authorities have time and again said that the sanctions, including those affecting medicine and medical equipment imports, have left a direct impact on lives of the ordinary people.

Iran Greatest and Most Steadfast Supporter of Resistance in World

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf lauded the epic turnout of Iranian people in International Quds Day rallies on the last Friday of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, saying Iran is the greatest and most steadfast supporter of the resistance in the world.

Qalibaf made the remark in an address at the onset of a plenary session in the Iranian legislature on Sunday, after millions of Iranians from various social strata thronged the streets across the country to voice their solidarity with the Palestinian cause and condemn the occupying regime's decades-long crimes against Palestinians in the occupied territories on International Quds Day.

"The epic presence of the Iranian people in the march on Friday undoubtedly marked one of the most influential and magnificent Quds Days in recent years, and the historic initiative of the great founder of the Islamic Revolution and the true model of resistance against tyranny and domination, Imam Khomeini, who was the founder of the splendid march, is a source of encouragement for all on the path of



liberating al-Quds every year," Qalibaf said.

The parliament speaker added that the Iranian people "shined in a special and historic way" in this year's event and shook the back of the Zionist enemy throughout the country from big cities to small villages.

"Islamic Iran today, with the support of this brave and wise nation and under the guidance of the wise and visionary Leader of the Islamic Revolution, is the greatest and most steadfast supporter of the resistance around the world," Qalibaf noted.

The last Friday of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan was declared as Quds Day by Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, the late founder of the Islamic Republic, more than forty years ago.

President Plans to Visit Latin America

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran's ambassador to Venezuela says President Ebrahim Raisi plans to make a visit to Latin America, including Venezuela, with the exact date yet to be determined.

Hojjatollah Soltani said based on its policy of diversifying relations on the international stage, the Raisi administration has paid a good level of attention to the expansion of ties with Venezuela.

Within the last two years, he said, relations with Venezuela have increased significantly compared to the past.

Asked if a visit by Raisi to Latin America will only include Venezuela, he said when a trip is planned to and from South America, one or more countries are normally placed on the agenda given the long distance between the two regions.

"Our relations are very good and moving forward in all fields, politically, economically, culturally, scientifically and technically. Currently, our political relations with Venezuela are at the highest level and we have many political commonalities with the government and people of this country," he added.

Iran to Dispatch 89K Pilgrims To This Year's Hajj

TEHRAN (IRNA) - As many as 89,000 Iranian pilgrims will attend this year's annual Hajj which will be sent to Saudi Arabia by Iranian flag carrier Iran Air, according to an Iran Air spokesman.

The Iranian pilgrims will go to Hajj from 21 airports across the country, Hesam Qorbanali said, adding that some 387 flights will carry the Iranian pilgrims to Saudi Arabia as of May 24, 2023.

Qorbanali added that Iran Air has allocated 387 flights to the return of the pilgrims which will take the Iranian pilgrims back home by July 25.

Tens of thousands of Muslims gather together from all across the world each year in the holy city of Mecca to perform Hajj pilgrimage.

Mashhad-Jeddah to Resume Flight Soon

MASHHAD (IRNA) - The direct flight between Mashhad and Jeddah will be resumed after updating agreements, said Head of Iran's Foreign Ministry office in Razavi Khorasan Province.

Mohammad Beheshti Monfared said that the flight will be resumed after finalizing negotiations between Iranian and Saudi officials in the aviation sector.

Earlier, a technical delegation from Saudi Arabia traveled to Mashhad to visit the Saudi Consulate General and review ways to reopen it.

The Saudi delegation visited its diplomatic places and embassy in Tehran in the past few days and traveled to Mashhad on Friday (April 14).

Nasser bin Awad Al-Ghannoum, the head of the Saudi delegation expressed hope that the revival of ties between Riyadh and Tehran would lead to further cooperation among regional countries and bring about prosperity to the region.

Meanwhile, Beheshti said that the previous premises of Saudi Arabia's Consulate General in Mashhad has not been used for seven years.

Iran Oil Sales to China on Track Despite Sanctions



TEHRAN (IFP) - The Chinese ambassador to Tehran says the sales of Iranian oil to China is on track "without any problem," despite the harsh US sanctions in place against the Islamic Republic's energy sector.

Speaking to reporters, Chang Hua said China is not like those countries that freeze Iranian assets in line with America's pressure policy against Tehran. "We are not under the domination of other countries," said the Chinese diplomat.

He said Iran and China should make efforts to remove the existing obstacles in the way of their financial transactions.

The main obstacle, he added, are the "unjust sanctions" imposed on both countries.

Iran and China have been expanding their trade ties in recent years despite all the sanctions.

China is Iran's largest oil buyer.

The two countries have signed a 25-year strategic partnership deal, under which they agreed to significantly boost ties in a variety of areas besides economy.

Tehran Calls for Restraint In Sudan to End Fighting

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has expressed its concern over the ongoing violence in Sudan, urging the opposing sides to show restraint and engage in dialogue to end the unrest in the country.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran expresses its concern over what is taking place in the Muslim and brotherly country of Sudan," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said.

He urged Sudan to overcome the current worrying situation through dialogue.

The Iranian spokesperson expressed confidence that the Sudanese-Sudanese dialogue and internal consensus on a national initiative are the sole solution to the current crisis.

Fierce exchanges of gunfire as well as massive explosions hit the Sudanese capital of Khartoum on Saturday as columns of smoke belled from various places and soldiers were deployed on the streets.

The clashes came following days of tensions between the army and the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) that threatened to turn into a full-blown battle for control of the African country.

Sudan's paramilitaries said they are in control of several key sites, including the presidential palace in central Khartoum. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates also on Saturday called for dialogue in Sudan to end the ongoing clashes.

IRIAF to Stage Aerial Parade on National Army Day

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Various fighter jets of the Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) will take part in an aerial parade over Tehran's sky on April 18 to mark the National Army Day.

A whole host of the Iranian Army forces are scheduled to attend nationwide parades on Tuesday morning to mark the country's National Army Day.

Air Force Commander Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi announced on Sunday that over 40 various fighter jets will perform aerial maneuvers during the military parades over the capital.

The aircraft in the parade will include Saeqeh (Thunderbolt), Kowsar, F-7, F-14, F-4, MiG-29 and Sukhoi fighter jets and bombers, he added.

In the capital, the ceremony will be held at the mausoleum of the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Imam Khomeini.

A host of Army units are going to put their latest achievements on display during the parades, believed by many military experts as an annual showcase for Iranian Army's latest weaponry and military progress.

The military parades will involve units from the Ground Force, Navy, Air Force and Air Defense Force displaying a broad range of advanced equipment such as missiles, tanks, armored vehicles, rifles, Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs), fighter jets, radar systems and air defense missile systems.

Tehran, Kabul Discuss Cooperation, Tax Facilities

TEHRAN (MNA) - Afghanistan's Deputy Finance Minister Mawlawi Ahmadullah Zahed met with Gholamreza Najjari, Iran's deputy ambassador in Kabul, the Ministry of Finance said.

The ministry said an agreement between Afghanistan and Iran regarding the non-receipt of additional taxes, tax facilities and the establishment of infrastructure in the customs ports of the two countries was discussed at the meeting, Ariana News reported.

The ministry added that Najjari pledged to help reduce taxes and ease transactions with Afghan businessmen in Iran.

Ahmadullah Zahed, the deputy finance minister, said Afghanistan welcomes and supports all measures and solutions that bring prosperity to both sides.

This comes after Afghanistan's Chamber of Commerce and Investment said in its latest report that the current value of trade exchanges between Tehran and Kabul was over \$1 billion.

ACCI announced that Afghanistan's trade relations with Iran are on an upward trajectory and the road has been paved for promoting joint investment in the near future.

The current annual value of trade between Tehran and Kabul has surpassed \$1 billion, it said.

IRGC Seizes Foreign Tanker Smuggling Fuel in Persian Gulf

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - A commander at the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) naval forces has announced that the force has seized a foreign tanker in the Persian Gulf loaded with 1.45 million liters of smuggled diesel.

Round-the-clock observation of the Persian Gulf through state-of-the-art equipment led to the operation, Brigadier General Ramezan Zirrahi, the commander of the IRGC second naval region, said.

Zirrahi noted that providing the security of the Persian Gulf is among the most important missions of the country's naval forces.

The smuggled fuel was destined for one of the Persian Gulf littoral states, the commander said.

He went on to say that the crew members of the vessel were arrested.

According to Zirrahi, the IRGC naval forces clutched 1.6 million liters of bootleg fuel in the Persian Gulf region last year.

Half of Inactive Industrial Units Face Lack of Liquidity

TEHRAN (MNA) - Half of the inactive industrial units in the country have the problem of lack of liquidity, based on a report released by the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

According to the managers of the stagnant economic enterprises of the country, 50 percent of inactive units have the problem of lack of liquidity, 15 percent have the problem of lack of demand and market, four percent have the problem of lack of raw materials, four percent have the problem of partner dispute, two percent have infrastructural problems, one percent have legal problems, one percent have the problem of providing machinery, and 22 percent have other problems, the ICCIMA report shows.

The head of Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) has stressed that reviving idle production units is the main approach that the government is currently following in the industry sector.

The government is seriously pursuing its programs to resolve production units' problems in collaboration with the private sector; Very good planning has been done in this regard, Ali Rasoulia said.

As announced by the ISIPO head, 1,714 idle production units were revived in the country during the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Referring to the Leader's emphasis on knowledge-based employment last year,

Rasoulia said: "We have formulated a coherent operational package to support knowledge-based companies and considered incentives and advantages for giving land to such companies."

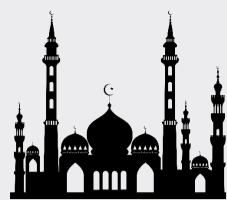
He added: "Last year, we gave land to more than a hundred knowledge-based companies, and we managed to meet 107 out of 378 technological needs of these companies, which were previously met from abroad, inside the country."

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

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

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

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



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	18:57
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:58
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:28

96. Those against whom the word of thy Lord hath been verified would not believe-
97. Even if every Sign was brought unto them,- until they see (for themselves) the penalty grievous.

Surah 10. Jonah (96 - 97)

Tokyo Ready to Restore Economic Relation With Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Ambassador of Japan to Tehran Kazutoshi Aikawa in meeting with governor of Kerman Province Mr. Mohammad Mehdi Fadakar announced readiness of his country for restoring economic relation with Iran.

In the meeting, Mr. Aikawa said that it was his first visit to Kerman Province and thanked for great hospitality of the province, adding that his visit was aimed at studying the condition of foreign nationals and immigrants living in Kerman Province.

He added that over 1000 hygienic packages were to be distributed among the immigrants, and thanked officials of the province for cooperation for implementation of their program.

Aikawa went on to say that Japan is to have some programs in three drought provinces of Iran in collaboration with the international organizations, noting that to support the health of Iranian people, Japan donates 3 MRI machines that two of them will be donated to the towns of Kahnuj and Bam in Kerman Province.

He announced readiness to cooperate and support Afghan refugees in Iran who have problems and to this end, the embassy donates one ambulance adding that Japan had good cooperation with Iran during quake in the town of Bam and it had good cooperation in reconstruction of the town.

Aikawa further said people of Japan and Iran especially people of Kerman Province



have many similarities but there is no drought in Japan and to this end, Japan is ready to help Kerman Province to fight against the drought.

He said that he saw a Chinese group of tourists in the hotel and reiterated that he would work for the presence of Japanese tourists in Kerman. He noted that he would try to correct travel information to Kerman Province and called on Iran government to give Japan the information about the security in order to clear misunderstandings.

He said that during his stay in the province he was to visit Bam Citadel and Shahzadeh Garden of Mahan and would study the condition of the sites and security of them and will report it to his government to prepare the ground for the presence of Japanese tourists and expressed hope soon Japanese tourists would visit Kerman Province.

Aikawa went on to say that although Iran is under sanctions, some of Japanese companies are active in Iran and expressed hope the talks on renewal of the JCPOA would end successfully and the trade relation between Tehran and Tokyo would be restored. He reiterated that Japan has experienced many earthquakes and Iranian people and people of Kerman have had good cooperation in aiding Japan.

Kazakh Trade Delegation To Visit Tehran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A trade delegation from Kazakhstan, headed by Kazakh Prime Minister, is to arrive in Tehran on April 27 upon the invitation of Iran's First Vice-President.



According to reports, Kazakh Prime Minister Alihan Smaiylov, leading a trade delegation, will arrive in Tehran on April 27. and during the visit, the Kazakh delegation will discuss ways for broadening economic ties with Tehran as well as accelerating the economic agreements.

The delegation is also to attend the Kazakhstan-Iran Trade Forum which will be held by Iran's Chamber of Commerce.

Caretaker for Agriculture Ministry Announced

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - President Ebrahim Raisi appoints a caretaker for the Ministry of Agriculture days after announcing a decision to reshuffle his cabinet.

In a decree, President Raisi named Seyyed Mohammad Aghamiri as the caretaker of the Agriculture Ministry, temporarily replacing Javad Sadatinejad.

Besides the agriculture minister, Raisi also replaced the vice president and head of the planning and budget department, Massoud Mirkazemi, with Davood Manzour, a former deputy at the department.

The cabinet shake-up comes amid widespread criticisms of the Raisi administration's economic performance.

The country has been grappling with a range of economic woes, including sharp inflation and a decline in the value of the national currency, rial.

The Raisi administration has attributed them to the heavy sanctions in place against the country and a recent wave of unrest and protests that gripped the country for months.

Many Countries Send Aircraft to Iran For Repairs



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's transportation minister Mehrdad Bazrpash says the country is now capable of repairing aircraft parts, in spite of long-running sanctions aimed at hampering Iran's development.

Bazrpash said that Iran was once not capable of repairing aircraft parts, but it now repairs the aircraft for many countries.

"Before, we were not capable of repairing a single part, but today, many aircraft parts are repaired inside the country," he said.

"Also, many countries send their aircraft to our country for maintenance, which is a good thing, and this [trend] should be accelerated," he added.

Earlier this month, Russia's largest air carrier sent one of its planes to Iran for repair, as part of an agreement on cooperation in civil aviation between the two countries amid Western sanctions on Russia over the war in Ukraine.

"The maintenance of the Airbus A330 aircraft (in Iran) will be implemented by a provider for a wide range of work," Russian Airlines, commonly known as Aeroflot, said in a statement on Tuesday.

Bazrpash further explained, "Russia and some other countries have come to our country for aircraft maintenance. Now an aircraft repair market has been established inside the country."

NGL 3200 Plant Launch a Big Step Toward Collecting Associated Gases

SHANA (Tehran) – The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) managing director said on Saturday the first phase of the NGL 3200 project will become operational soon, describing it as a major stride toward collecting associated gases.

Based on plans, Mohsen Khojastehmehr added, 50 percent of associated petroleum gases – 26.4 million cubic meters per day on average – would be gathered this year and the other half would be collected by the mid-March 2026.

The NGL 3200 plant is among the main projects outlined in the plans, the NIOC chief mentioned.

The two-phased large project, he continued, would help



collect and process associated gases in West Karoun fields, including Azadegan, Yadavaran, Darkhoein, South and North Yaran, Sohrab, Sepehr, Jofeir, Sousangerd, and Band-e Karkheh, having a capacity of 500 million cubic feet.

Khojastehmehr said NIOC is implementing the project by employing domestic experts and investing 1.4 billion euros with the aim of boosting economic productivity and protecting the environment.

When the plant is put into operation, 70 million cubic feet of light sweet gas and 1,200 tons of gas condensates will be produced daily, announced the NIOC head.

Production of Minerals, Mining Products Grows

TEHRAN (MNA) - The production of most of minerals and mining industries' products grew in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), the head of the Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation Organization (IMIDRO) announced.

Vajihollah Jafari reiterated that despite all existing restrictions and problems, including electricity and gas outages, growth was recorded in the production of most mineral materials and mining industries products last year.

He stated that the main factors to achieve this growth were trying to use the full capacity of factories and companies and strengthening the domestic and export markets, as well as planning for the supply of raw materials and other production needs in times of outages.

Last year, serious measures were taken in the field of exploration, the deputy industry, mining, and trade minister further stated.

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

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

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

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

Iranian Exports of Medicinal Plants Worth \$600m

TEHRAN (IFP) - More than 8,000 different types of plants grow in Iran, of which about 450 species are have medicinal usage. Plants whose export can have a high added value for the country.

Thanks to favorable weather conditions and the country's long record in the production of medicinal plants, exports of such products inject considerable profit into the Iranian economy.

Currently, about 90% of medicinal plants are produced inside the country, but Iran's share of export and sales of the plants in the world market is insufficient.

Statistics show the value of official exports of medicinal plants and herbal products has surpassed 660 million dollars in one decade.

The Science and Technology Development Staff of the Department of the Medicinal Plants and Traditional Medicine at the Iranian Vice-presidency for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy has defined various programs with the cooperation of other relevant institutions for expanding scientific and technological cooperation at the international level and providing more opportunities for exporting products to other countries.

First Plug-in Hybrid to Hit Market by March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's second largest carmaker Saipa says its first plug-in hybrid electric vehicle (PHEV) will hit the market in the calendar year to late March 2024.

Saipa's CEO Mohammad Ali Teymouri said that delivering a first batch of PHEVs to buyers in the Iranian market will enable the company to develop a hybrid version of its popular model, Arya.

Teymouri's statement comes some five years after Saipa unveiled a prototype of its first PHEV under the brand name of Saina EV. The company announced at the time that the car was a joint project between Saipa and Iran's Khajeh Nasir University of Technology.

That comes as Saipa's rival the IKCO, which is Iran's largest carmaker in terms of output, had announced plans for commercial launch of its all-electric model Tara EV this year. The company has also unveiled Electric RANA for delivering to buyers in the Iranian market.

US sanctions imposed on Iran since 2018 has led to growth in Iran's home-grown automotive industry as carmakers have benefitted from a larger share of the domestic market as well as a major increase in supply of steel and other raw materials from local plants.

Government figures show vehicle output in Iran rose by nearly 40% year on year in the calendar year to late March.

Iran Car Industry Output Witnesses 21% Hike in 1st Month

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The production of two major Iranian automakers in the first month of the current Iranian year (starting March 21, 2023), was up 21% compared to the same period last year.

The latest statistics show that the production of two major automakers of the country has reached about 30,000 cars, which shows a 21 percent increase, as compared to the same period of time last year, IRNA reported.

Earlier, the director general of Iran's Industry, Mining and Trade Ministry's Automotive Industry, Abdollah Tavakoli Lahijani had said that Iran ranked 19th in terms of car production in the world last year, which due to production growth could be promoted to 14th by the end of the current Iranian year (March 21, 2024).

Medicine Shortage Worsens

TEHRAN (ISNA) - An Iranian official has warned about shortage of antidepressants saying that even IV fluids and cold syrups are also in the list of "urgently needed supplies".

Ali Fatemi, Vice President of Iranian Pharmacists Association said that there is shortage of neuroleptics, antidepressants, and medicines for patients with special diseases.

According to him, the government still imports IV fluid from abroad and even cold syrups are on the list of imported medications.

Meanwhile, Hossein-Ali Shahriari, Head of the Health Commission of Iranian Parliament said Wednesday that if subsidies are not paid to pharmaceutical companies, "the country will face a 40-50% price rise for medicines."

Despite the warnings, Minister of Health Bahram Einollahi claims that "most medicines are available, and there will be no problem regarding the supply of pharmaceuticals this year."

Japan PM Resumes Campaigning After Blast Incident

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida resumed campaigning after being evacuated unharmed from the scene of an apparent "smoke bomb" blast.

The incident in western Japan's Wakayama came less than a year after the assassination of former prime minister Shinzo Abe, which traumatised the country and forced a security shake-up for public officials.

Kishida was in the city to deliver remarks in support of a ruling party candidate at a local port when a disturbance rippled through the crowd gathered to hear him speak. Footage from national broadcaster NHK showed the prime minister turning to look backwards as a person was detained by security and people moved away, some shrieking.



Thai PM Prayuth Lags Rivals in Opinion Polls

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thai Prime Minister Prayuth Chan-ocha is still lagging behind the main opposition party, latest opinion polls showed, ahead of the Southeast Asian country's general election next month.

The May 14 election will be a battle between parties aligned with the conservative pro-military establishment and the billionaire Shinawatra family-backed Pheu Thai party, led by Paetongtarn Shinawatra, the 36-year-old daughter and niece of two ex-premiers.

The Pheu Thai party was ahead with 38.89% in a nationwide survey by local media Matichon and Daily News conducted last week, followed by the Move Forward Party, headed by opposition politician Pita Limjaroenrat, on 32.37%. Prayuth's United Thai Nation Party was in third place with 12.84%.



Deadly Fighting Rocks Sudan as Army Battles Paramilitaries



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Three civilians died Saturday in battles between Sudanese paramilitaries and the regular army, which said it launched air strikes against them, sparking global calls for calm in a country which has seen decades of unrest. The paramilitaries said they were in control of the presidential place as well as Khartoum airport, claims denied by the army, as civilian leaders called for an immediate ceasefire to prevent Sudan's "total collapse".

The doctors' union reported the three civilian deaths, including at Khartoum airport and in North Kordofan state. At least nine others were wounded, the medics said.

Violence erupted after weeks of deepening tensions between military leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy, paramilitary commander Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, over the planned integration of Daglo's paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) into the regular army.

The integration was a key element of talks to finalise a deal that would return the country to civilian rule and end the political and economic crisis sparked by their 2021 coup in one of the world's poorest countries.

Created in 2013, the RSF emerged from the Janjaweed militia that then-president Omar al-Bashir unleashed against non-Arab ethnic minorities in the western Darfur region a decade earlier, drawing accusations of war crimes.

US Secretary of State Antony Blinken said he was "deeply concerned" and urged both sides to "stop the violence immediately", a call echoed by the United Nations, African and Arab regional blocs, and the European Union.

Russia's foreign ministry said there was "serious concern in Moscow," which called for urgent steps toward a ceasefire. The army said it carried out air strikes and destroyed two RSF bases in Khartoum.

The latest deaths, during the Muslim holy fasting month of Ramadan, came after more than 120 civilians had already been killed in a crackdown on regular pro-democracy demonstrations since the coup.

The RSF said its forces had taken control of Khartoum airport, after witnesses reported seeing truckloads of fighters entering the airport compound, as well as the presidential palace -- where Burhan is officially based -- and other key sites.

The army, however, said the airport and other bases remain under their "full control". It published a photograph of black smoke billowing from what it said was the RSF headquarters.

Saudi Arabia's flag carrier Saudia said it had suspended all flights to and from Sudan until further notice after one of its planes, with passengers and crew aboard waiting for departure, was "exposed to gunfire damage".

RSF chief Daglo vowed no letup. "We will not stop fighting until we capture all the army bases and the honourable members of the armed forces join us," he told Al Jazeera.

Haggling between Daglo and Burhan has twice forced postponement of the signing of an agreement with civilian factions setting out a roadmap for restoring the democratic transition disrupted by the 2021 coup.

On Saturday, witnesses reported clashes around the state media building in Khartoum's sister city Omdurman. Others have reported clashes in the Darfur region and elsewhere.

The BBC said the army had stopped one of its reporters, struck him in the head, and then driven him to a headquarters in Omdurman.

The two sides traded blame for starting the fighting.

The military's civilian interlocutors called on both sides "to immediately cease hostilities and spare the country slipping into the abyss of total collapse."

NATO Member Finland Breaks Ground On Russia Border Fence

IMATRA (Dispatches) - The construction of barbed-wired fence along Finland's long border with Russia - primarily meant to curb illegal migration - has broken ground near the southeastern town of Imatra less than two weeks after the Nordic country joined NATO as the 31st member of the military alliance.

The Finnish Border Guard on Friday showcased the building of the initial three kilometer (1.8 mile) stretch of the fence to be erected in Pelkola near a crossing point off Imatra, a quiet lakeside town of some 25,000 people.

Finland's 1,340 kilometer (832 mile) border with Russia is the longest of any European Union member.

Construction of the border fence is an initiative by the border guard that was approved by Prime Minister Sanna Marin's government amid wide political support last year. The main purpose of the three-meter (10-foot) high steel fence with a barbed-wire extension on top is to prevent illegal immigration from Russia and give reaction time to authorities, Finnish border officials say.

In 2015-2016, Moscow attempted to influence Finland by organizing large numbers of asylum-seekers to northern Finnish crossing points in the Arctic Lapland region. Russian authorities were seen deliberately ushering thousands of asylum-seekers



U.S. Urged to Stop Encouraging War in Ukraine

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Brazil's president said Saturday that the United States should stop "encouraging war" in Ukraine, as he wrapped a state visit to China in which he has strengthened economic ties with his country's main trading partner.

Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva used his trip to push the message that "Brazil is back" as a key player on the global stage -- and to warn that the South American country's deepening relations with China were non-negotiable.

Lula was headed on Saturday to the United Arab Emirates for a one-day official visit, and will meet his counterpart Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al-Nahyan.

During the trip to China, the left-wing leader lashed out at the power of the US dollar and the IMF, and met representatives from Chinese tech giant Huawei, which has been effectively shut out of the US market.

"The United States needs to stop encouraging war and start talking about peace. The European Union needs to start talking about peace," Lula told reporters in Beijing.

In that way, the international community will be able to "convince" Russian President Vladimir Putin and Ukrainian leader Volodymyr Zelensky that "peace is in the interest of the whole world", he said, before leaving for the United Arab Emirates.

Lula, who returned to power in January after serving two terms between 2003 and 2010, met his Chinese counterpart Xi Jinping on Friday.

The leaders called on developed countries to keep their promise to provide 100 billion dollars a year to the poorest countries to fight against the effects of climate change.

Lula is carrying out a delicate balancing act as he also seeks closer ties with Washington. His visit, which included an economic agenda in Shanghai and a more political one in Beijing, came after a meeting with US President Joe Biden in February.

Meloni Acknowledges Anomalies in Russian Escape

ROME (Dispatches) - Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni acknowledged "anomalies" in the handling of a Russian businessman who escaped from house arrest in Italy to avoid extradition to the United States and said she would speak with the justice minister to understand what happened.

During a visit to Addis Ababa, Ethiopia, Meloni termed the case of Artyom Uss "grave" and vowed to get to the bottom of it when she returned to Rome.

Uss, the 40-year-old son of a Russian regional governor, was detained in October 2022 at Milan Malpensa Airport on a U.S. warrant accusing him of violating sanctions. In November, a ruling from a Milan appeals court resulted in him being moved from jail to house arrest and outfitted with an electronic monitoring bracelet.

He escaped from Italy on March 22, a day after a Milan court recognized as legitimate the U.S. extradition request, and surfaced in Russia earlier this month.

"For sure there are anomalies," Meloni told reporters in Ethiopia. "The principal anomaly, I'm sorry to say, is the decision of the appeals court to offer him house arrest with a frankly debatable motivation, and to then maintain that decision even after there was an extradition request. Because obviously in that case, the flight risk becomes more obvious."

She welcomed the decision by Italian Justice Minister Carlo Nordio to undertake a disciplinary investigation, saying "we have to have clarity." But she also said Italy didn't have detailed intelligence information from the U.S. Justice Department "about the nature of the person."

Italian daily newspaper La Repubblica reported Saturday that U.S. authorities made clear that the Russian presented a "very high flight risk" in two notes to Nordio's office -- one from Oct. 19, two days after Uss' arrest, and the other sent after he was granted house arrest on Nov. 25.

The U.S. asked for Uss to remain jailed pending the outcome of extradition proceedings and cited six cases in the past three years in which suspects escaped from house arrest in Italy while extradition requests were pending, Repubblica quoted the notes as saying.

The newspaper said Nordio assured the U.S. in a Dec. 6 note that the electronic monitoring bracelet put on Uss and his required periodic check-ins with police were sufficient. Repubblica cited the Milan court's reply to Nordio's investigation as saying the justice minister had the authority at any time to impose tougher restrictive measures on someone in extradition proceedings.



Russian Strike Kills 11 In Eastern Ukraine

KYIV (Dispatches) - The death toll from a Russian strike on a block of flats in the eastern Ukrainian city of Sloviansk climbed to 11 as Moscow claimed advances near embattled Bakhmut.

Sloviansk lies in a part of the eastern Donetsk region that is under Ukrainian control. According to Kyiv, it was on Friday struck by seven missiles which hit five buildings, five homes, a school and an administrative building.

"The number of victims of the shelling of Sloviansk has risen to 11 people," a spokeswoman for the State Emergency Service in the region, Veronika Bakhval, said in televised remarks.

A previous toll reported nine dead, including a two-year-old boy who was rescued from the rubble but died on his way to hospital, and 21 wounded. Ukraine's First Lady Olena Zelenska sent her condolences to the child's family during this "indescribable grief".

President Volodymyr Zelensky denounced Russia for "brutally shelling" residential buildings and "killing people in broad daylight".

AFP journalists on Friday saw rescue workers digging for survivors on the top floor of the typical Soviet-era housing block, and black smoke billowing from homes on fire across the street.

The street below -- including a playground -- was covered in concrete dust and debris, including torn pages from school books and children's drawings.

In southern Ukraine, a 48-year-old woman and her 28-year-old daughter were killed Saturday in Russian shelling in the city of Kherson, the regional administration said on Telegram.

Sloviansk lies 45 kilometres (27 miles) northwest of the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut, the scene of the longest and bloodiest battle of Russia's invasion.

Russian troops have been battling since last summer to capture the town in eastern Ukraine, which has taken on huge symbolic importance even though analysts say it has little strategic value.

Kyiv has said the battle for the town is key to holding back Russian forces along the entire eastern front and Sloviansk is one of the cities that will be at risk if Kyiv loses the battle.



AI Can Evaluate Your Heart Health Easily



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Artificial intelligence is better than humans at assessing heart ultrasounds, the main test of overall cardiac health, the most rigorous trial yet conducted on the subject was found last week.

While previous research has illustrated the potential power of AI models for reading medical scans, the authors of the new US study said it is the first blinded, randomised clinical trial for heart health.

"There's a lot of excitement around AI," but rigorous evaluation remains critical, the study's senior author David Ouyang told AFP.

This successful trial "really strengthens the argument that now we're ready for primetime," added the cardiologist at the Cedars-Sinai Medical Center in Los Angeles.

Heart ultrasounds, also known as echocardiograms, are carried out on patients by sonographers, who usually give an initial assessment of the scan before handing it over to a cardiologist.

The new study, published in the journal Nature, pitted an AI model against sonographers to see who would give the most accurate initial assessment.

Both assessed the ultrasound for what is called left ventricular ejection fraction, which measures the heart's ability to pump blood out to the body in the space of a heartbeat.

The test is the main way to measure how well a heart is functioning. It is used to tell if patients have had a heart attack or if they will be able to undertake serious treatments such as implanting a defibrillator.

For the study, nearly 3,500 heart ultrasounds were randomly split between sonographers and the AI model.

Their assessments were then evaluated by cardiologists, who did not know which ones came from humans and which from the AI model.

- 'Exciting' - The cardiologists made a substantial change in more than 27 percent of the sonographer assessments, and in nearly 17 percent of those done by the AI model, the study found.

"The AI was faster, more precise, and indistinguishable by the cardiologists," Ouyang said.

There is a "tremendous shortage" of sonographers in the United States and across the world, and this would save them valuable time, he added.

The AI model, called EchoNet-Dynamic, was trained on nearly 145,000 echocardiograms and uses what is called deep learning to process large amounts of data.

The researchers are currently applying for the method to be approved by the Federal Drug Administration, and hope to do the same in the European Union and elsewhere soon, Ouyang said.

Patricia Pellikka, a cardiologist at the Mayo Clinic in the United States not involved in the research, told AFP the study was "exciting" and that the integration of AI tools will increase efficiency and standardisation.

French cardiologist Florian Zores said that the study was well conducted but the technology would not be as useful in France, where cardiologists give the initial assessments of heart ultrasounds.

Study Reveals Cancer's Infinite Ability to Evolve



LONDON (Dispatches) - An unprecedented analysis of how cancers grow has revealed an "almost infinite" ability of tumours to evolve and survive, say scientists.

The results of tracking lung cancers for nine years left the research team "surprised" and "in awe" at the formidable force they were up against.

They have concluded we need more focus on prevention, with a "universal" cure unlikely any time soon. Cancer Research UK said early detection of cancer was vitally important.

The study - entitled TracerX - provides the most in-depth analysis of how cancers evolve and what causes them to spread.

Cancers change and evolve over time - they are not fixed and immutable. They can become more aggressive: better at evading the immune system and able to spread around the body.

A tumour starts as a single, corrupted cell, but becomes a mixture of millions of cells that have all mutated in slightly different ways.

TracerX tracked that diversity and how it changes over time inside lung cancer patients and say the results would apply across different types of cancer.

"That has never been done before at this scale," said Prof Charles Swanton, from the Francis Crick Institute and University College London.

More than 400 people - treated at 13 hospitals in the UK - had biopsies taken from different parts of their lung cancer as the disease progressed.

"It has surprised me how adaptable tumours can be," Prof Swanton told me.

"I don't want to sound too depressing about this, but I think - given the almost infinite possibilities in which a tumour can evolve, and the very large number of cells in a late-stage tumour, which could be several hundred billion cells - then achieving cures in all patients with late-stage disease is a formidable task."

Prof Charles Swanton says challenge of tumours evolving inside our body means we need to focus on preventing cancer.

Prof Swanton said: "I don't think we're going to be able to come up with universal cures.

"If we want to make the biggest impact we need to focus on prevention, early detection and early detection of relapse."

Obesity, smoking, alcohol and poor diet all increase the risk of some cancers. Tackling inflammation in the body is also being seen as a way of preventing cancer. Inflammation is the likely explanation for air pollution causing lung cancers and inflammatory bowel disease increasing the risk of colon cancer.

The evolutionary analysis has been published across seven separate studies in the journals Nature and Nature Medicine.

Highly aggressive cells in the initial tumour are the ones that ultimately end up spreading around the body.

Tumours showing higher levels of genetic "chaos" were more likely to relapse after surgery to other parts of the body.

Analysing blood for fragments of tumour DNA meant signs of it returning could be spotted up to 200 days before appearing on a CT scan.

The cellular machinery that reads the instructions in our DNA can become corrupted in cancerous cells making them more aggressive. The researchers hope the findings could, in the future, help them predict how a patient's tumour will spread and to tailor treatment.



Don't Waste Your Time

Visit our website to choose your desired rental Properties

www.DeltaHOME.ir

The Most Specialized Website for Foreigners

HOME
Real Estate

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



Paris Club Aims to Start Sri Lanka Debt Negotiations

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Paris Club of creditor governments aims to start negotiations to restructure Sri Lanka's debt, the group said on Friday after a creditor committee was set up this week. The Paris Club said the Japanese and Indian finance ministers along with its president and representatives of Sri Lanka set up a creditor committee on Thursday on the sidelines of the spring meetings of the International Monetary

Fund and World Bank in Washington.

Creditor committees lead talks about the terms for a future debt relief deal.

"The Paris Club intends to keep the momentum and start the restructuring negotiations in coordination with all relevant stakeholders, to ensure fair burden sharing, transparency and comparability of treatment," it said in a statement.



China's Q1 GDP Growth Seen Rebounding to 4.0%

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's gross domestic product likely perked up in the first quarter of the year, a Reuters poll showed, as the end of strict COVID-19 curbs helped lift the world's second-largest economy out of a crippling pandemic slump.

GDP growth was seen speeding up to 4.0% in the first quarter from a year earlier, from 2.9% in the previous three months, according to the median forecast of 70 economists polled by Reuters. That would be the fastest growth since the first quarter of last year.

For 2023, growth was expected to pick up to 5.4%, the poll showed, from 3.0% last year - one of its worst performances in nearly half a century due to strict COVID-19 curbs.

Recent data shows the economy is staging a gradual but uneven recovery, led by consumption, services and infrastructure, but slowing inflation and surging bank savings raise doubts over the strength of a pick-up in domestic demand.

"We have seen dividends from COVID policy shift on consumption and investment, including stronger than expected exports," said Zhang Yiping, economist at China Merchants Securities in Shenzhen.

"Domestic demand is improving but the strength of the recovery is not sufficient."

Policymakers have pledged to step up support for the world's second-largest economy, which is rebounding after disruptions caused by a sudden lifting of COVID-19 curbs in December.

The government has set a modest target for economic growth of around 5% for this year, after badly missing the 2022 goal.

Growth is then expected to moderate to 5.0% in 2024, the Reuters poll showed.

The government is due to release first quarter GDP data, along with March activity data, at 0200 GMT on April 18.

China's exports unexpectedly surged in March, data showed this week, but analysts cautioned the improvement partly reflects suppliers catching up with unfulfilled orders after last year's COVID-19 disruptions.

New bank lending hit an all-time high in the first quarter, but consumer inflation slipped to an 18-month low and factory-gate deflation deepened in March, raising the odds for more easing to inject momentum into the economic recovery.

Households added a staggering 9.9 trillion yuan in bank deposits the first quarter alone, more than half the 17.8 trillion yuan for the whole of 2022.

On a quarterly basis, the economy is forecast to grow 2.2% in January-March, compared with no change in October-December, the poll showed.

To support the growth, policymakers will rely on a mix of modest monetary easing and infrastructure spending, alongside efforts to bolster the property sector.

The central bank has promised to make its policy "precise and forceful" this year to support the economy, keeping liquidity reasonably ample and lowering funding costs for businesses.

Analysts polled by Reuters expect the central bank to keep the benchmark lending rate - the one-year loan prime rate (LPR) and banks' reserve requirement ratio (RRR) - until the end of the 2023.

Russia Raises 2023 GDP Growth Forecast

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's economy ministry revised higher its 2023 gross domestic product (GDP) forecast to 1.2% growth from a 0.8% contraction, but lowered its forecast for 2024, mirroring a wider trend that envisages more sluggish longer term prospects.

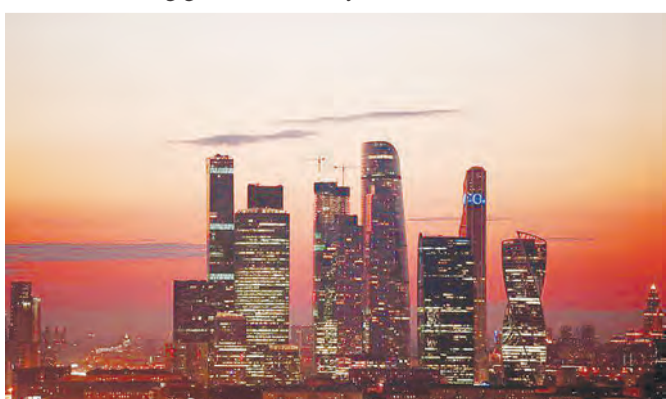
The International Monetary Fund this week also raised its forecast for Russia's 2023 economic growth, but said the country may see a sharply wider budget deficit and a smaller current account surplus this year. It said Russia's global isolation and lower energy revenues could harm its growth potential for years.

The economy ministry forecast GDP growth of 2% in 2024, down from 2.6% when it last provided macroeconomic forecasts in the autumn.

Russia's economy defied early expectations for a double-digit economic contraction in 2022, in forecasts made soon after Moscow sent troops into Ukraine in February of that year, but a return to prosperity remains a long way off as the government directs more spending towards the military.

The Russian economy shrank 2.1% in 2022. Before Moscow began what it calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine, the government had expected 3% growth.

The ministry, focused on bringing about a recovery in consumer demand, raised its forecasts for retail sales, real wages and real disposable incomes in 2023, but lowered them slightly for 2024. Unemployment is set to remain at a record low of 3.5% through 2026, the ministry estimates. "Demand will recover both as the population's propensity to save is normalised and as consumer lending grows," Economy Minister Maxim Reshetnikov said.



Hungary Quits Russian Bank

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Hungary abandoned a Budapest-based Russian bank this week because U.S. sanctions had "ruined" it, Prime Minister Viktor Orban said, adding that Hungary would comply with sanctions on Russia but continue to speak out against them.

The NATO leader with the closest ties to Russia told state radio the United States was an important ally of Hungary but there was a difference of views over the war in Ukraine.

The U.S. had "not given up on its plan to squeeze everyone into a war alliance", a step Hungary -- which is not supplying weapons to Ukraine -- would resist, Orban said.

Orban's government announced on Thursday it would quit the bank, IIB, which says it funds development projects in eastern Europe, and moved its headquarters to Budapest from Moscow in 2019.

Russia is its largest shareholder, while Hungary was second-largest and senior Hungarian officials had held roles there including board seats. Other Eastern European countries cut ties with IIB last year after Russia's invasion of Ukraine. This week, the United States imposed new sanctions on the bank, including on three of its top officials, two Russians and Hungarian. Washington called on Hungary to cut ties with what it described as an "opaque Kremlin-controlled platform".

Orban said Hungary would comply with sanctions against Russia, even though it did not support them. "We have never agreed with sanctions but we don't dispute others' rights, including the United States, to impose sanctions," he said.

OPEC+ Cuts Risk Oil Supply Deficit, Threaten Economic Recovery

LONDON (Dispatches) - Output cuts announced by OPEC+ producers risk exacerbating an oil supply deficit expected in the second half of the year and could hurt consumers and global economic recovery, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

OPEC+ and the IEA have jostled in recent months over their outlooks for global oil supply and demand.

Consumer countries represented by the IEA have argued that tightening supplies drive up

prices and could threaten a recession, while OPEC+ blames Western monetary policy for market volatility and inflation which undercuts the value of its oil.

"Oil market balances were already set to tighten in the second half of 2023, with the potential for a substantial supply deficit to emerge," the IEA said in its monthly oil report.

"The latest cuts risk exacerbating those strains, pushing both crude and product prices higher. Consumers currently under siege from inflation will suffer even more from higher prices."

The IEA saw 2023 demand at a record 101.9 million barrels per day, up 2 million barrels per day on last year and on par with its prediction last month.

OPEC+ called its surprise cut decision a "precautionary measure" and in a monthly oil report published on Thursday OPEC cited downside risks to summer oil demand from high stock levels and economic challenges.

The IEA said it expected global oil supply to fall by 400,000 bpd by the end of the year citing an expected production increase of 1 million bpd from outside of OPEC+ beginning in March versus a 1.4 million bpd decline from the producers bloc. Gains outside the producer alliance were due to be led by the United States and Brazil, with Norway and Ecuador also making significant contributions.

Rising global oil stocks may have influenced the OPEC+ decision, the IEA added, noting the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) industry stocks in January hit their highest level since July 2021 at 2.83 billion barrels.

The demand picture will be skewed between lackluster growth in OECD countries and rebounding demand led by China after the relaxation of its COVID-19 restrictions, the IEA said.

Meanwhile Russian oil exports in March hit their highest levels since April 2020 on robust oil product flows, the IEA said, despite a seaborne import ban from the European Union and a price cap sanctions policy spearheaded by the United States.

JPMorgan Sees Turkey Lira Diving Towards 30 Per Dollar After Elections

LONDON (Dispatches) - Turkey's lira is likely to drop sharply and could near 30 to the dollar following next month's elections, bankers at JPMorgan have predicted, if it looks like only modest changes will be made to its unorthodox economic policies.

Turkey's tightly contested presidential and parliamentary elections on May 14 are perhaps the most consequential in the century-long history of the republic.

They mark a fork in the road for both Turks battered by an inflation-driven cost of living crisis and for international investors, many of whom have bailed out of the country amid recurring bouts of market turmoil in recent years.

JPMorgan's analysts said that macro adjustments were expected regardless of the results but laid out two scenarios based on the degree of commitment to more orthodox policies, such as interest rate rises to cool inflation. In a "strong commitment" scenario they predicted the lira would initially fall to 24-25 to the dollar and to 26 by year end compared to around 19 currently.

Benchmark government bond yields, which drive borrowing costs in the economy, would jump to 25%.

"Initially, lira depreciates, driven by pent-up pressures of the large stimulus ahead of the elections. As financial repression is relaxed, locals increase FX portfolios, while foreigners wait for better valuation entry points."

If the shift towards more orthodox policies looks like being more modest, however, the lira could drop to close to 30 to the dollar by year end albeit with a slower initial drop while bond yields were unlikely to adjust much in this scenario.

"A tactical assessment will therefore be needed and we expect elevated volatility," JPMorgan's analysts said.

They cautioned that, even with best intentions, the path to disinflate the economy will be protracted, while it was likely that the central bank would also aim to rebuild its FX reserves.

They added that only a modest return to orthodox macroeconomic policies, including a slower pace of credit growth, some lower levels of financial repression and some path to rebuilding FX reserves, was "unlikely to inspire capital inflows" meaning the lira would "likely remain on a more protracted depreciation path".

They estimated the lira's real effective exchange rate (REER), which takes into account prices and measures its value against other currencies whose countries Turkey does a lot of trade with, was now about 32% below its "fair value".

"A scenario of a return to orthodox macroeconomic policies could set lira on a real appreciation trend back towards its fair value," JPMorgan said.

"However, initial real appreciation will be driven primarily by prices, with little scope for FX spot appreciation."

BOJ Warns of Extremely High Uncertainty Over Japan's Economy



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Bank of Japan Assistant Governor Tokiko Shimizu said there had been "extremely high" uncertainty regarding Japan's economy, as slowing global growth and recent financial market stress cloud its outlook.

"The BOJ deems it necessary to conduct monetary easing and support the economy, and provide a favorable environment for firms to raise wages," Shimizu told a seminar hosted in Washington by the Peterson Institute for International Economics.

Rapid interest rate hikes by U.S. and European central banks could eventually depress global growth, which was among risks discussed at this week's International Monetary Fund (IMF) meetings, Shimizu said.

"More recently, financial market stress is drawing attention," she said. "Taking these risks into account, it's necessary to pay due attention to developments in the financial sector" and the impact on Japan's economy and prices.

The remarks came after the IMF on Tuesday trimmed its 2023 global growth outlook and warned that a severe flare-up of financial system turmoil could slash output to near recessionary levels.

Reflecting rising raw material costs and a tightening job market, more Japanese firms are raising prices and wages in a sign of change in the public's long-held deflationary mindset, Shimizu said.

Many big firms have accepted union demands for pay increases with some smaller companies following suit, she said.

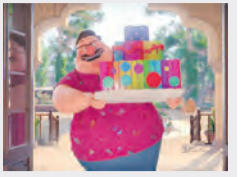
Despite such positive signs, broader wage hikes are needed for Japan to hit the BOJ's 2% inflation target in a stable, sustainable manner, Shimizu said.

Shimizu is among BOJ officials accompanying new central bank governor Kazuo Ueda on a visit to Washington for this week's IMF and G20 finance leaders' meetings.

"Lopeto" to Compete at Moscow Int'l Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) – Directed by Abbas Askari, the Iranian animation "Lopeto" is scheduled to be screened at the 45th edition of the Moscow International Film Festival. The name of the animation is inspired by the word the Kermani people of Iran use to refer to handmade toys that mothers used to make for their children in the past. "Ali's father treats his patients by teaching them how to make toys in the workshop of Lopeto. Lopeto is a creative toy workshop, which is very popular among Iranian children is closed due to vandalism by an unknown person. Ali tries to save his father,

who is disappointed, from this predicament..." the synopsis of the animation read. Moscow International Film Festival (MIFF) is one of the oldest world film forums (the second after the Venice Film Festival). The Moscow International Film Festival has been leading its history since 1935. However, in subsequent years the festival was not held regularly. Therefore, the Moscow International Film Festival has officially been counted down since 1959, when it was renewed and turned into a regular event.



Germany Closes Last Nuclear Plants

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany will pull the plug on its last three nuclear power stations by Saturday, ending a six-decade programme that spawned one of Europe's strongest protest movements but saw a brief reprieve due to the Ukraine war.

The smoking towers of Isar II, Emsland and Neckarwestheim II reactors were to shut forever by midnight on Saturday as Berlin enacts its plan for fully-renewable electricity generation by 2035.

Following years of prevaricating, Germany pledged to quit nuclear power definitively after Japan's 2011 Fukushima disaster sent radiation spewing into the air and terrifying the world.

But the final wind-down was delayed last summer to this year after Moscow's invasion of Ukraine prompted Germany to halt Russian fossil fuel imports. Prices soared and there were fears of energy shortages around the world - but now Germany is confident again about gas supplies and expansion of renewables.

Germany's commercial nuclear sector began with the commissioning of the Kahl reactor in 1961: eagerly promoted by politicians but met with scepticism by companies. Seven commercial plants joined the grid in the early years, with the 1970s oil crisis helping public acceptance.

Expansion, however, was throttled to avoid harming the coal sector, said Nicolas Wendler, a spokesperson for Germany's nuclear technology industry group KernD.

But by the 1990s more than a third of electricity in the newly-reunited Germany came from 17 reactors.

The next decade, a coalition government including the Greens - who grew out of the 1970s anti-nuclear movement - introduced a law that would have led to a phase out of all reactors by about 2021.

Former Chancellor Angela Merkel's conservative-led governments went back-and-forth on that - until Fukushima.

Arnold Vaatz, a former lawmaker for Merkel's Christian Democrats (SPD), said the decision was also intended to sway a state election in Baden Wuerttemberg where the issue was playing into the hands of the Greens.

"I called it the biggest economic stupidity by the party since (it was first in government it) 1949 and I'm sticking to that," Vaatz, one of only five conservative lawmakers who opposed the exit bill, told Reuters.

The last three plants contributed only around 5% of electricity production in Germany in the first three months of the year, according to the economy ministry.

And nuclear power made up just 6% of Germany's energy production last year, compared to 44% from renewables, data by the federal statistics office showed.

Still, two thirds of Germans favour extending the lifespan of reactors or connecting old plants back to the grid, with only 28% backing the phase-out, a survey by the



Forsa institute showed earlier this week.

"I think this is certainly fed to a large extent by the fear that the supply situation is simply not secure," Forsa analyst Peter Matuschek told Reuters.

The government says supply is guaranteed after the nuclear phase-out and that Germany will still export electricity, citing high gas storage levels, new liquid gas terminals on the north coast and renewable energies expansion.

However, nuclear power proponents say Germany will have to go back to nuclear eventually if it wants to phase out fossil fuels and reach its goal of becoming greenhouse gas-neutral across all sectors by 2045 as wind and solar energy will not fully cover demand.

"By phasing out nuclear power, Germany is committing itself to coal and gas because there is not always enough wind blowing or sun shining," said Rainer Klute, head of pro-nuclear non-profit association Nuklearia.

With the end of the atomic power era, Germany has to find a permanent repository for around 1,900 highly radioactive casks of nuclear waste by 2031.

"There are still at least another 60 years ahead of us, which we will need for the dismantling and the long-term safe storage of the remnants," said Wolfram Koenig, head of the Federal Office for the Safety of Nuclear Waste Management.

The government also acknowledges that safety issues remain given that neighbours France and Switzerland still depend heavily on nuclear power.

"Radioactivity does not stop at borders," said Inge Paulini, head of Germany's Radiation Protection Office, noting that seven plants in neighbouring countries were less than 100 km (62.14 miles) from Germany.

Tehran, Caracas...

FROM PAGE 1

It is noteworthy that relations between Iran and Venezuela have recently grown within the framework of the two countries' 20-year development roadmap.

Defying US sanctions, Iran has consistently sent fuel tankers to Venezuela in the past few years and helped in refinery repairs.

PDVSA, the Venezuelan state-owned oil and natural gas company, relies on Iranian South Pars condensate to convert its heavy oil to exportable grades. Iranian crude oil is also refined into motor fuel in South America. Historically, the two countries have had friendly and strong relations, especially during the era of the late socialist leader Hugo Chavez (1999-2013), which were further strengthened during the era of his successor, Nicolas Maduro.

Tehran Blasts...

FROM PAGE 1

"Being free to insult sanctities of Muslims is another flip side of Takfiri extremism and violence, and deserves the same degree of global condemnation and inhibitory reaction," he added.

Kanaani also asked the government of Denmark to take categorical steps to prevent repetition of such hateful measures. Since last year, the frequency of insults against Islam and its holy book has been on the rise in Europe. Several European countries have been playing host to such despicable acts on their soils over the past months, drawing far-and-wide condemnation from the world's Muslim countries.

In January, dual Danish and Swedish citizen Rasmus Paludan burned a copy of the Holy Qur'an in front of the Turkish embassy in Stockholm, and later again in front of a mosque. Days later in the Netherlands, far-right extremist, Edwin Wagensveld, who leads the anti-Muslim PEGIDA party, tore a copy of the Qur'an apart before setting it on fire.

Indian Tea...

FROM PAGE 1

According to N Lakshmanan of Golden Hill Estates, an exporter of orthodox teas, the year has been quite good. "The government must assist exporters in their marketing efforts and assist in establishing India's presence even in non-traditional markets."

"New markets must be explored, and an Indian brand, similar to the Sri Lankan brand Dilmah, must be established," Lakshmanan said.

Ansarullah, Saudi-Backed...

FROM PAGE 1

On Saturday, 357 detainees took flights between the Saudi city of Abha and Sana'a. Saudis were among the prisoners freed. It is not known how many prisoners each side still has.

All parties to the conflict in Yemen agreed at negotiations in Switzerland last month to free 887 detainees and to meet again in May to discuss further releases. The deal was overseen by the United Nations envoy for Yemen, Hans Grundberg, and the ICRC. Riyadh and Tehran last month agreed to restore diplomatic ties severed in 2016, raising hopes Yemen's peace process will see progress.

A Saudi delegation on Thursday concluded peace talks in Sana'a with officials from the Ansarullah movement. The Yemeni officials cited progress and said further discussions were needed to iron out remaining differences.

Saudi Arabia launched the bloody war against Yemen in March 2015 in collaboration with a number of its allies and with arms and logistics support from the US and several Western states to reinstall Hadi, who resigned from the presidency in late 2014 and later fled to Riyadh amid a political conflict with the popular Ansarullah movement. The war objective was also to crush the Ansarullah movement, which has been running state affairs in the absence of an effective government in Yemen.

However, it has stopped well shy of all of its goals, despite killing tens of thousands of Yemenis and turning the entire country into the scene of the world's worst humanitarian crisis.

Asia Rushes to Buy Spot Oil Cargoes After OPEC+ Cuts



LONDON (Dispatches) - The biggest oil importers in Asia have been busy buying June-loading spot crude cargoes from the Middle East since top OPEC+ producers announced additional cuts beginning in May and after Saudi Arabia hiked again the price of its term cargoes going to Asia.

Customers from China, Japan, and Thailand have been snapping spot cargoes from Middle Eastern producers such as the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Qatar, traders told Bloomberg on Thursday.

The higher demand for spot Middle Eastern supply has pushed up the regional Dubai benchmark, according to the traders.

Russia's crude is also a favorite with some Asian refiners, with spot offers for the ESPO grade also on the rise, the traders told Bloomberg.

The biggest OPEC producers in the Middle East and several other members of the OPEC+ pact announced early this month a total of 1.16 million bpd of fresh production cuts. Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de facto leader and top global crude exporter, will cut 500,000 bpd and said that the move was "a precautionary measure aimed at supporting the stability of the oil market."

The voluntary production reductions include big cuts, beginning in May and lasting through the end of 2023, from the top Middle Eastern producers who typically export sour and more heavier varieties of crude.

Saudi Arabia has signaled that it will keep supplying at least several refiners in North Asia with full contractual volumes of crude in May despite the Saudi production reduction.

Saudi Arabia, however, supplies its crude under long-term contracts.

After the latest cuts were announced, Saudi oil giant Aramco also raised its official selling prices (OSPs) for its crude going to Asia in May. The higher prices could increase the upward momentum for Middle East medium and sour grades while the cuts tighten the market for those grades just as demand in Asia is set to rebound.

Biden Administration Greenlights LNG Exports From Alaska Project

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The Biden administration approved exports of liquefied natural gas from the Alaska LNG project that one day could help the United States compete with Russia to ship natural gas from the Arctic to Asia.

The Department of Energy approved Alaska Gasline Development Corp's (AGDC) exports of LNG from the project to countries with which the United States does not have a free trade agreement.

Backers of the roughly \$39 billion project hope it will be operational by 2030 if it gets investments and all required permits. The LNG would be exported mainly to countries in Asia.

Frank Richards, president of Alaska-owned AGDC, said the company will review the 51-page decision as it develops the project, which will "provide Alaskans and U.S. allies with a significant source of low-emissions, responsibly produced energy consistent with international environmental priorities."

AGDC has not yet reached a final investment decision on the project.

The Department of Energy did not evaluate the long-term viability of the project, and only approved only its exports, a spokesperson said.

Alaska LNG includes a liquefaction facility on the Kenai Peninsula in southern Alaska and a proposed 807-mile (1,300-km) pipeline to move gas stranded in northern Alaska across the state.

The project, for which exports were first approved by the administration of Donald Trump, has been opposed by environmental groups. The Biden administration undertook an environmental review of Alaska LNG, concluding it has



economic and international security benefits and that opponents had failed to show the exports were not in the "public interest."

The Biden administration modified the previous approval to prohibit venting of the greenhouse gas carbon dioxide associated with the project into the atmosphere.

Still, the decision was derided by environmental groups as a "carbon bomb."

"Joe Biden's climate presidency is flying off the rails," said Lukas Ross at Friends of the Earth. Ross said it was the second U.S. approval of a "fossil fuel mega-project" in as many months.

Earthjustice, an environmental law firm, said the decision cleared the way for additional lawsuits seeking to stop the project.

The Biden administration last month approved the ConocoPhillips (COP.N) \$7 billion Willow oil and gas drilling project on Alaska's North Slope.

Russia plans to start at end-2023 the first of three lines at its Arctic LNG-2 project, which is among the world's largest LNG facilities.

The Biden administration is trying to approve more U.S. LNG exports as it competes with Russia, traditionally one of the world's largest energy exporters.

Russia is under pressure from Western sanctions for its invasion of Ukraine, and the U.S. has boosted LNG exports to Europe after Moscow cut gas pipeline shipments to the continent.

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC), an independent agency, has regulatory oversight of Alaska LNG's siting, construction and operation. FERC approved construction in 2020.

Asian Refiners to Raise Gasoline Output

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Several Asian refiners are likely to maximize gasoline output from May and reduce gasoil output, cashing in on higher profits for the motor fuel ahead of the peak summer driving season, industry sources and analysts say.

The adjustments come after margins for gasoil and jet fuel slumped on rising supplies as China boosted exports, while the arbitrage window to Europe has been shut since early 2023 due to ample supplies on the continent. Meanwhile, gasoline profits have rebounded as traders build supplies ahead of a seasonal travel demand boost from April through September.

By adjusting production, the oversupplied gasoil market in Asia could tighten again and support prices.

At Taiwan's Formosa Petrochemical Corp, one of Asia's largest oil products exporters, the company plans to cut gasoil output from some units, such as the delayed coking unit, and ramp up gasoline production from its residue fluid catalytic cracker, spokesman KY Lin told Reuters. "Our gasoil production volumes will be

down around 5%, with gasoline production yield up 2-3% for May compared with the original production plan," said Lin.

Refiners who can switch have been slowly making adjustments in the past few weeks, said a person working for a southeast Asia refinery who declined to be named due to company policy.

If the cracks continue to converge, there is a possibility of a production switch, a source at an Indian refinery said.

Complex refinery margins in Singapore, the bellwether for Asian refining margins, have more than halved to \$3.17 a barrel - the lowest since October 2022 - from an average of \$7.56 in March.

The extent to which Asian refiners can change production yields between light distillates - gasoline and naphtha - and middle distillates - gasoil and jet fuel - is limited on feedstock and catalyst reasons, estimated at between 3% and 5% on average, according to industry sources.

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

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

Sung Leads at LPGA Lotte Championship

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - South Korea's Sung Yu-jin will take a slender one-shot advantage into the final round of the LPGA Tour's Lotte Championship in Hawaii after carding a one-under-par 71.

Sung, who is only playing in this week's tournament after receiving a sponsor's invite, posted two birdies, a bogey and 15 pars in a solid but unspectacular round at Hoakalei Country Club outside Honolulu.

Bridges Suspended 30 Games For Domestic Violence

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The National Basketball Association (NBA) has suspended former Charlotte Hornets forward Miles Bridges 30 games without pay as a result of a domestic violence incident involving the mother of his children, the league said.

The incident occurred last June in Los Angeles, after which Bridges was arrested and charged with multiple offenses. Bridges entered a plea of no contest to a felony domestic violence charge and the remaining counts against him were dismissed.

Butler, Strus Lead Heat Past Bulls And Into Playoffs

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Jimmy Butler and the Miami Heat caught fire down the stretch to beat the Chicago Bulls 102-91 and reach the NBA playoffs, as the Minnesota Timberwolves dominated the Oklahoma City Thunder to book their postseason berth.

Miami, smarting from a loss to the Atlanta Hawks on Tuesday, clinched the Eastern Conference's eighth and final seed to set up a meeting with the top seeded Milwaukee Bucks starting on Sunday.

Minnesota meanwhile will face Western Conference top seeds Denver in the first round of the playoffs after a comprehensive 120-95 blowout of Oklahoma City.

While Minnesota romped into the postseason, Miami's clash with Chicago went down to the wire before Butler, helped by the three-pointers of Max Strus, secured victory for Erik Spoelstra's team.

Butler put up 31 points, a tally matched by Strus who shot 7-12 on three pointers, including a crucial 26-foot jumper with 1:14 left that put Miami 96-91 up.

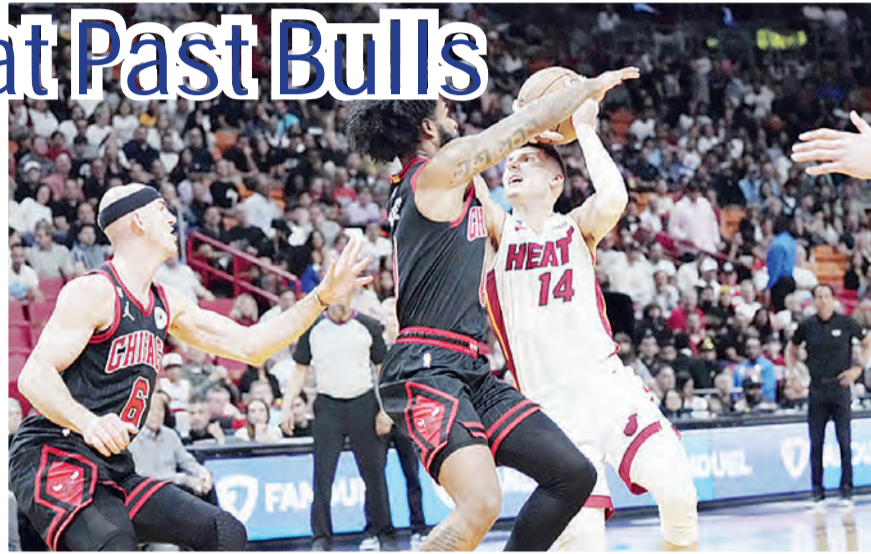
For Strus, who grew up as a Bulls fan in the suburbs of Chicago and was released by them before joining Miami, it was a sweet night.

"It's huge. It doesn't really matter who we're playing - we had to win this one, no matter what. It was win or go home and we're not done yet.

"So we want to keep playing and it's good to get that one. But it does feel a little bit better against them, I'm not gonna lie," he said.

Strus secured the win with three free throws after he was fouled by Alex Caruso as he tried to make a throw from the corner. The Heat had been 14 points up in the first quarter but a 12-2 run from the Bulls in the third levelled the game up at 56-56.

A Zach LaVine dunk then put Chicago up for the first time since the opening basket of the game and three three-pointers early in the fourth from Coby White ensured the Bulls were 90-87 with three minutes to go.



But then Butler and Strus took control.

Butler was fouled while making a lay-up and then Bam Adebayo, who grabbed 17 rebounds, sank two free throws after he was fouled by Nikola Vucevic to make it 93-90. Butler set up Strus for a three pointer before he then made sure of the victory from the free-throw line.

The Heat had found themselves in the elimination game after losing their opening play-in game to the Atlanta Hawks and faced the prospect of being the first divisional winner not to make the playoffs.

"I don't think any of us felt any type of pressure. We went out, we competed, we played the right way, corrected some things, and did what we were supposed to do," said Butler. DeMar DeRozan top scored for the Bulls with 26 points and nine assists.

There is little time for Miami to savor the victory however as their playoff series against the Bucks begins in Milwaukee on Sunday.

Martinez out For Rest of Season With Foot Injury



LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United defender Lisandro Martinez will miss the remainder of the season due to a fractured metatarsal bone in his foot, the Premier League club said.

Martinez was carried off during United's 2-2 draw with Sevilla in the Europa League on Thursday after he fell to the ground clutching his right foot with no opponents nearby.

Fellow centre-back Raphael Varane, who was also injured and substituted at halftime during the quarter-final, first leg at Old Trafford, is expected to be out for a few weeks.

United said Argentine World Cup winner Martinez would make a full recovery in time for the start of next season.

"Everyone at Manchester United sends Lisandro and Rapha our best wishes for a speedy recovery," the club said in a statement.

Rybakina Sends Kazakhstan Into BJK Cup Finals

PARIS (Dispatches) - Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina beat Poland's Magda Linette to send Kazakhstan into the Billie Jean King Cup Finals, with France, Spain and the Czech Republic also qualifying.

Rybakina won 6-4, 6-2 in the third rubber in Astana having also won Friday against Weronika Falkowska when teammate Yulia Putintseva defeated Linette.

"I'm delighted that Kazakhstan will be able to fly our flag on this big stage once again," said Rybakina after the tie against a Polish side missing injured world number one Iga Swiatek.

World number five Caroline Garcia gave France the winning point with a 6-1, 6-7 (10/12), 6-1 win over Britain's Harriet Dart in Coventry.

Britain, who reached the semi-finals last year, were missing Emma Raducanu, leaving 117th-ranked Dart as their top singles player.

Meanwhile, Garcia and Alize Cornet had to play almost six hours between them to edge out Katie Boulter 6-7 (2/7), 7-6 (7/4), 7-6 (7/2) and Dart 7-6 (8/6), 7-6 (7/3) respectively.

"She (Garcia) knew the job was not done yet, yesterday evening she told me 'I'm ready to go tomorrow,'" said France captain Julien Benneteau.

Despite dropping serve once, Garcia broke four times in the first set.

Dart fought back in the second with two double faults costing Garcia on two match points.

But she got back on track in the third set, breaking at the start and then again in the sixth game to win.

On clay in Marbella, Nuria Parrizas Diaz, ranked 80, sealed victory for hosts Spain 6-3, 6-0 against 196th-ranked Marcela Zacarias.

Parrizas Diaz also won her singles tie in straight sets on Friday, along with Sara Sorribes Tormo, to ensure Spain's presence in the finals in November at a venue to be decided.

The Czech Republic saw off Ukraine, with Marketa Vondrousova sealing the winning point against Katarina Zavatska 6-3, 6-4, after former French Open champion Barbora Krejickova lost 3-6, 6-1, 6-4 to 38th-ranked Marta Kostyuk.



Konstantinos Mavropanos received a second yellow card, but the hosts hauled themselves level in a dramatic finish.

Gio Reyna fired Dortmund back in front three minutes into injury time only for Stuttgart

Bayern Held to a 1-1 Draw by Hoffenheim

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund failed to take advantage of Bayern Munich's 1-1 home draw against Hoffenheim, blowing a two-goal lead against 10-man Stuttgart before conceding a last-gasp equalizer.

Bundesliga leaders Bayern led through a first-half goal from Benjamin Pavard, but had to settle for a point as Hoffenheim equalised in the second half through an Andrej Kramaric free-kick.

Dortmund were 2-0 ahead in Stuttgart when

to snatch a 3-3 draw courtesy of Silas, who scored with virtually the last kick of the game. The results left Bayern still two points clear of Dortmund at the top with six games to play.

Bayern came into their match after a tumultuous week, forward Leroy Sane sporting a visible mark on his upper lip after a confrontation with Sadio Mane, which saw the latter suspended.

With Mane out and striker Eric Maxim Choupo-Moting missing due to a knee complaint, Bayern defender Pavard gave his side an early lead, tapping in from close range after 17 minutes.

With Bayern in cruise control, coach Thomas Tuchel took off Sane, Leon Goretzka and Kingsley Coman, with Wednesday's return leg against Manchester City in mind.

Hoffenheim took the initiative and equalised after 71 minutes, Kramaric curling a perfect free-kick from well outside the box and past Yann Sommer.

Pavard looked to have scored a second just two minutes later to regain the lead for the home side, but the goal was disallowed for offside.

Gavi Would Be Happiest Staying At Barca

GETAFE (Dispatches) - Xavi Hernandez believes young Barcelona midfielder Gavi would be happiest staying at the club, amid speculation he could leave in the summer, the Catalan coach said.

Gavi signed a contract renewal with Barcelona until 2026 in September but because of the club's financial difficulties, they have not been able to register it with La Liga.

That means Gavi remains on his previous deal, which is set to expire in June, allowing him to sign for free for any other side.

Chelsea and Bayern Munich have been linked to Gavi in recent weeks, but Xavi said the 18-year-old should stay at Barcelona.

"I don't know what other people are thinking, but I think that Gavi would not be as happy at any other team than he is at Barca," Xavi told a news conference.

"He has everything here, we value him, he's a starter at 18, he's decisive for the team.

"He's a very important player and he's a player that excites me. He's a marvellous footballer, and I think his future lies at Barca -- he would not be as happy elsewhere."

Gavi has established himself as an important figure both for Barcelona and the Spanish national team over the past two years, after coming through his club's La Masia youth academy.

The team will travel by high-speed train to Madrid for the match instead of flying, which Xavi said was an effort to reduce pollution.

"We hadn't done it before because it's a bit longer," added the coach.

"It's about pollution and we think it's the ideal time to do it because the game is at four in the afternoon.

"It won't affect us, it's something we're open to."



Rublev Reaches Monte Carlo Masters Final

MONTE CARLO (Dispatches) - Andrey Rublev moved into his third Masters final after fighting back from a set down in Monte Carlo to beat American Taylor Fritz 5-7 6-1 6-3 at the picturesque Court Rainier III.

The pair have met regularly in Masters tournaments and Fritz had the upper hand with a three-match win streak against Rublev, but it was the Russian who prevailed in an encounter that was suspended for nearly two hours in the final set due to rain.

"It was really tough against Taylor to whom I lost three times. Very tough for me mentally to play against him," fifth seed Rublev told reporters.

"But I started to feel I will have chances. And then we had a great match and I was able to win."

Fritz started poorly and was broken in the first service game as the American stared quizzically at the surface he seemed to have mastered when knocking out defending champion Stefanos Tsitsipas, who was in the stands to watch the semi-final.

Fritz quickly found himself 2-0 down and even smashed his racquet in frustration, but he turned things around by engaging Rublev in long rallies to set up searing winners to level the set at 3-3 and then again at 5-5 as the pair traded breaks.

Rublev had the opportunity to serve for the set but Fritz converted his fourth consecutive break point to take the opener as his rattled Russian opponent requested a bathroom break before the second set.

But as the sky grew overcast, Rublev was unstoppable in the second set as he fired 11 winners while Fritz lost his range and failed to convert any break points, making 17 unforced errors as the Russian forced the match into a decider.

It was Rublev who broke in the first game after they returned to hold the advantage while a frustrated Fritz's unforced error count only rose after the restart.

