

Iran's Navy Commander Said the Navy's Fateh (Conqueror) Submarine Has Issued a Stern Warning to a Nuclear-Powered U.S. Submarine in the Strait of Hormuz, Forcing It to Surface

IRAN NEWS

The 10-Year Comprehensive Document on Food and Nutrition Security Was Signed Into Law by The Government During a Thursday Session of Iran's High Council of Health and Food Security

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Iran Army Drones Capable of Striking Distant Targets

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian commander says the Army has boosted its drone power and is currently capable of conducting defensive operations to easily hit distant targets.

Speaking in a televised interview on Friday, Iran's Army Deputy Commander for Operations Rear Admiral Mahmood Mousavi said the Army is in possession of full domestically-manufactured drones and missile systems which can destroy the enemy's "strategic and distant" targets.

He added that an unmanned flying object can also be used against the predetermined targets both alone or in a group form in combination with missile systems from different areas and points.

Mousavi made the remarks a day after Iran's Army received more than 200 long-range strategic sea-based and vertical launch drones which have been designed and manufactured by the country's Defense Ministry in cooperation with the Army.

The new anti-radar drones have various missions of reconnaissance, destruction, combat reconnaissance, aerial interception, and hitting mobile and fixed targets with a low radar cross-section.

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No Limits to Development of Tehran-Abu Dhabi Relations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Highlighting the close interactions between officials from Iran and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says the Islamic Republic sees no limits to the promotion of relations with the neighboring Persian Gulf country in various fields.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a telephone conversation with his Emirati counterpart Sheikh Abdullah bin Zayed Al Nahyan on Saturday.

He said Tehran-Abu Dhabi ties are progressing, noting that "Active meetings and consultations are underway between officials from the two countries."

"Iran considers no limits for the development of cooperation" with the UAE, Amir-Abdollahian pointed out.

The Emirati foreign minister, for his part, underscored the importance of promotion of bilateral ties in pursuit of common interests, stressing that there exist ample opportunities for joint cooperation between the two neighboring countries.

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Leader: Decline of Israel Accelerating

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei said the focus of the Muslim world should be on strengthening Palestinian combatants at a time when Israel is fast approaching its end.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with the ambassadors of the Islamic countries in the capital Tehran on Saturday on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan.

"Today, we are witnessing the gradual decline of the usurping Zionist regime; its speed is even increasing day by day," the Leader said. "The strategy of the Islamic world should be focused on strengthening the combatant elements inside Palestine."

Pointing to the increasing waves of support for the Palestinian people around the world, the Leader said the participation of the Europeans in rallies to support the Palestinian people is "very important, that too in the countries that are dependent on the Zionists".

"The more this resistance increases, the weaker the Zionist regime will be, the more apparent its atrocities will become. The truly miserable situation that the Zionist regime is facing today is the result of the Palestinian youth's resistance."

Elsewhere in his address to the meeting, the Leader said the entire factors during the holy fasting month of Ramadan help to bring the hearts of people closer to one another, either within a country or in the whole Islamic Ummah.

"The authorities of Islamic countries should use this opportunity to create unity and togetherness among the members of the Islamic Ummah. Today, our problem is division, even though the Qur'an forbids division," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

If the Islamic Ummah, which is close to two billion today and is spread in the most significant and sensitive geographical areas of the world, were united, the Islamic countries would achieve much more blessings, the Leader said.

Stressing that Palestine is not only an Islamic issue but also a human one, the Leader referred to the Quds Day rallies and marches in Muslim as well as non-Muslim countries, and said, "Anti-Zionist gatherings on the Quds Day in the US and European countries are the result of the increasing revelation of the crimes of the usurping Zionists."

Ayatollah Khamenei said the deterrence power of the Zionist regime was coming to an end, adding, "Several decades ago, Ben-Gurion, one of the founders of the fake regime, said that whenever our deterrence power ends, we will be destroyed, and now the world is witnessing this fact, and if nothing happens, the end of the usurping regime is near, which is also one of the blessings of the self-effacing Palestinian youth in the West Bank and other occupied areas."

The Leader described the proclivity towards Islam as the main factor behind the strengthening of Palestinian groups' fight and added that such achievements did not exist in the periods when Islamic inclinations were of no significance.

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Iran, India, Armenia Form Trilateral Grouping to Deepen Ties

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Armenia has hosted the first trilateral consultations with India and Iran, two increasingly significant partners for Yerevan as it plays the geopolitical field during a rocky patch in its relationship with Moscow.

The April 20 meeting involved various deputies and assistants in the foreign ministries of the three countries, and focused primarily on "economic issues and regional communication channels," according to a readout by the Armenian foreign ministry. "The sides agreed to continue consultations in a trilateral format."

While the focus of the Yerevan meeting was trade, there was a strategic backdrop: Iran and India have been at the forefront of Armenia's search for new sources of security as Armenians feel they have been let down by their traditional security guarantor, Russia.

As Azerbaijan has sought to push its advantage following its 2020 victory over Armenia in the Second Karabakh War, Iran has implied that it would provide a sort of security guarantee for Armenia. Iranian officials have repeatedly stated that Tehran would consider "changing borders in the Caucasus" to be a "red line" for it. This seems to be an implicit warning to Azerbaijan, that if it were to forcibly take land in southern Armenia for its mooted "Zangezur Corridor" - as Baku occasionally threatens - that Tehran would somehow intervene. Iran also set up a consulate in the southern Armenian city of Kapan last year.

India, meanwhile, has been sought as a potential arms supplier in the wake of apparent interruptions in deliveries from Armenia's traditional armorer, Russia. Reports since 2020 in the Indian press have suggested a wide variety of arms supplies from India to Armenia including artillery, drones, and missiles. None of those have been confirmed (other than an order of artillery-locating radar), though Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has coyly declined to deny the reports.

"I've said earlier that the acquisition of armaments and weapons isn't the subject which I'd like to publicly discuss, but I have to say that these media reports have not been denied by Armenia and I wouldn't want to say anything more than that," Pashinyan said last September when asked about reports of imports from India. "But I also want our public to know that we are taking active steps to expand our cooperation in the military-technical sector."

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Iran Seeks More Russian, Indian Funding for Transport Projects

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian government official says the country may tap more funding from Russia and India for transport projects that could facilitate international cargo transit through the Iranian territory.

Davoud Danesh Jafari, who chairs Iran's newly-launched Transportation Development Fund, said on Saturday that Russian and Indian financing can be used for key railway projects in north and southeastern Iran.

"It is possible to tap foreign resources of other partners like Russia and India for joint financing of these projects," said Danesh Jafari.

The comments came after the official paid a visit to Moscow earlier this week to sign a trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) with Russia-based regional entities to boost cargo transit through the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC).

The INSTC connects ports in southern Iran to major trade hubs located to the north of Iran via three main routes.

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IRGC's Strategic Capabilities Fueling Fear In Enemy Camp

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Chief of General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces has lauded the readiness of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps in the face of threats, saying the IRGC's capabilities instill fear in the enemy's camp.

Major General Mohammad Baqeri made the comments in a message that he wrote to Major General Hossein Salami, chief commander of the IRGC, on anniversary of the establishment of the force.

"The IRGC has been an essential pillar in protecting the Islamic Revolution and establishment," Baqeri wrote.

"Its comprehensive strategic authority, readiness, and capabilities not only create security and peace for the great Iranian nation and boost the country's deterrence power but also instill fear and anger in the camp of this land's enemy," he added.

The top commander also noted that the Iranian armed forces, especially the IRGC have become "more determined" in following up the policy of "building up power" and giving a firm response to any threat made by the enemy.

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China's Refineries Increase Purchase of Iran, Russia Oil

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chinese state oil giants and major private refiners are sweeping up more Russian crude, supporting prices and forcing smaller independents to seek out cheap alternatives such as Iranian oil, media reported.

The demand from China's biggest buyers, which had shied away from Russian crude in the immediate aftermath of Western sanctions on Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine, shows growing confidence in the trade after state refiners PetroChina and Sinopec resumed imports in February, Reuters reported.

Large private oil refiners Hengli Petrochemical and Jiangsu Eastern Shenghong Co started receiving Russian crude from March, attracted by wide discounts from Refinitiv, Kpler and Vortexa.

Four cargoes of about 740,000 barrels each of low-sulphur ESPO crude discharged at Hengli's Dalian berth in March while another two arrived in April, the Kpler data showed. Shenghong imported a Urals crude cargo of about 720,000 barrels in March and 1 million barrels in April, Kpler showed.

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Iran, Saudi Arabia FMs Exchange Eid al-Fitr Blessings

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Iran and his Saudi Arabian counterpart Prince Faisal bin Farhan exchanged Eid al-Fitr blessings.

During a phone call, Prince Faisal also discussed with Amirabdollahian several issues of mutual concern, as well as the next steps following the recent agreement.

In a deal brokered by China, Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to reestablish diplomatic relations in March. Under the new deal, the two countries have committed to reopening their embassies and missions in June and implementing security and economic cooperation agreements signed over 20 years ago.

President Calls on European Countries to Stop Sheltering Terrorist Groups

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



relations between the two countries.

The two senior diplomats discussed issues of mutual interest in the phone call.

They also expressed optimism that the bilateral ties between Tehran and Brussels would develop in light of joint efforts and cooperation.

President Raisi held a separate phone conversation with Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani about the recent crimes committed by Israeli troops in al-Aqsa Mosque against fasting Palestinian worshippers, IRNA reported.

The Iranian president emphasized the need for unity and coordination of Islamic countries to prevent the Israeli regime and support the oppressed Palestinian people, it said.

Over the past few weeks, Saudi Arabia and Iran have agreed to re-establish diplomatic relations after years of tensions, while the kingdom has signaled a willingness to end its military involvement in the war on Yemen.

Raisi also said expanding and strengthening relations with neighbors is the priority of the foreign policy of Iran.

Sheikh Tamim touched on strong relations between Qatar and Iran, saying his country is ready to develop relations with the Islamic Republic in all areas.

The Emir of Qatar also strongly condemned the recent aggression of the Israeli regime against the Palestinians.

He said Qatar's consistent position has been to support the oppressed people of Palestine and condemn the Israeli aggression.

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has stressed the need for efforts to promote cooperation between the Islamic Republic and Belgium in various areas of agriculture, technology and industry.

Raisi made the remarks during a telephone conversation with Belgian Prime Minister Alexander De Croo on Thursday evening.

During the phone call, the two sides discussed the latest state of judicial interactions and cooperation between Tehran and Brussels, and ways to expedite implementation of bilateral agreements.

The Iranian president pointed to the 130-year-old historical relations between the two countries, and underlined the need for enhancement of mutual cooperation in various fields of science and technology, industry and agriculture.

Raisi also called upon European governments to stop supporting and sheltering terrorist and separatist groups in their respective countries.

For his part, De Croo expressed his satisfaction with the agreements reached between the two states, and emphasized on the development of mutual ties in different spheres.

On Monday, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Belgian counterpart Hadja Lahbib in a telephone conversation hoped for the expansion of

Leader Pardons, Commutes Sentences of 1,760 Inmates

TEHRAN (PressTV) – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei pardoned or commuted the sentences of over 1,700 prisoners, as Iranians, along with other Muslims around the globe, get ready to celebrate Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the fasting month of Ramadan.

Ayatollah Khamenei on Thursday agreed to pardon or reduce the sentences of 1,760 prisoners, including those found guilty in courts of common pleas and Islamic Revolution tribunals, the Judicial Organization of the Armed Forces and the State Discretionary Punishment Organization.

The Leader's decision came in response to a letter from Iran's Judiciary Chief Gholamhossein Mohseni-Ejei regarding prisoners found eligible for receiving the clemency by the relevant judicial authority.

Eid al-Fitr is an important religious holiday celebrated by Muslims around the world. It marks the conclusion of the 29 or 30 days of dawn-to-sunset fasting during the entire month of Ramadan.

The occasion falls on the first day of the 10th lunar calendar month of Shawwal, the start of which varies based on the sighting of the new moon by local religious authorities. This year, the Eid falls on April 22 in Iran.

Article 110 of Iran's Constitution grants the Leader the right to pardon or reduce the sentences of inmates upon a recommendation from the head of the Judiciary.

U.S. Godfather Of Daesh

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry's spokesman has slammed the United States as the "godfather of Daesh" after the newest entrant to the US 2024 presidential race, Robert F. Kennedy, Jr. reconfirmed the fact while announcing his candidacy.

"Those who deliberately closed their eyes to the truth" should listen to what Robert F. Kennedy Jr. has said about Daesh, Nasser Kanaani stated on Friday in a post on his Twitter account.

"There was no doubt the US is the creator of #ISIS, but for those who deliberately closed their eyes to the truth, the statement of Robert F. Kennedy, the nephew of John F. Kennedy saying "WE created ISIS" reaffirms the fact that the American regime is the godfather of Daesh/ISIS," Kan'ani wrote.

During a campaign event to launch his 2024 presidential bid in Boston on Wednesday, Kennedy lashed out at the foreign policy of the US and the role of the CIA in shaping it, referring to the infamous American spy agency.

Kennedy is the first candidate from the ruling Democrat Party to challenge fellow party member and 80-year-old US President Joe Biden, who has declared his intent to run again in 2024, although not officially yet.

"When my uncle came into office, two months later he was fighting his intelligence apparatus and his military," he said.

He further pointed to CIA's key role in the military invasion of Iraq, saying: "And so the neocons and CIA got to go into Iraq and do regime-change. We spent \$8 trillion and what did we get for it? Nothing... Iraq is now much worse off than it was when we went in there. We killed more Iraqis than Saddam Hussein ever did."

"We created ISIS. We drove two million refugees up into Europe," he then underlined.

Iran Signs Agreement in Russia to Facilitate Trade Via INSTC

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Iran has signed a trilateral memorandum of understanding (MoU) in Russia to facilitate cargo transit through its territory, especially via the International North-South Transportation Corridor (INSTC).

The MoU was signed in Russian capital Moscow on Thursday between the Iranian National Transportation Development Fund, the International Coordinating Council on Trans-Eurasian Transportation, and the Business Center for Economic Development of the Commonwealth of



Independent States (CIS).

The document was signed in the presence of Russia's Deputy Transport Minister Dmitry Zverev and Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali.

The three parties to the MoU will cooperate to increase trade, transit and storage of goods on international corridor routes, especially through the INSTC.

To achieve those goals, the parties will exchange information and expert delegations and will conduct joint ventures in the future.

Tehran, Islamabad Vow to Enhance Bilateral Collaboration in Diverse Fields

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Iran and Pakistan reiterated to explore more areas of bilateral cooperation and economic connectivity.

The resolve was expressed during a meeting between Minister for Human Rights Mian Riaz Hussain Pirzada and Ambassador of Iran to Pakistan Seyyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, who paid a farewell call on the Minister in Islamabad on Wednesday.

The Minister expressed his appreciation for the dedicated services of the ambassador for strengthening the bilateral ties in multiple areas between Pakistan and Iran.

About recent move of normalization of diplomatic relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Riaz Pirzada

termed it welcoming and positive.

He said rapprochement will be a major step towards peace and stability in Persian Gulf and will also bring the whole Muslim community on the same page.

He also lauded Iranian unwavering support for the people of Indian Illegally Occupied Jammu & Kashmir and Palestine, who are the victims of severe human rights violations.

On this occasion, the Iranian ambassador appreciated the warm hospitality and support he had received during his tenure in Pakistan.

He said Iran opened two new crossing points in Balochistan and volume of bilateral trade have exceeded to two billion dollars.

IRGC Disbands Terror Cells

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force has managed to dismantle two foreign-backed terror cells and arrest as many terrorists during a string of operations in the country's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan close to the border with Pakistan.

The Quds Base of the IRGC Ground Force announced in a statement on Thursday that its forces had smashed a terror cell following a series of surveillance measures over the past few days.

The statement added that Iranian forces detained two main members of the cell, and seized 154 rifles as well as a considerable amount of munitions as a result.

The IRGC Ground Force dismantled another terrorist team during a separate operation in the same province, confiscating 70 assault rifles and arresting two people in connection with the case.

Moreover, the Iranian forces captured two members of the so-called Jaish al-Adl terrorist group as they were trying to sneak through the border. They were handed over to judicial authorities.

The Pakistan-based Jaish al-Adl has conducted several bomb attacks and kidnappings in southeastern Iran in a bid to disrupt the country's security.

The terrorist group enjoys all-out backing of the United States and some Arab countries in the West Asia region.

Sistan and Baluchestan province, which borders Pakistan, has witnessed several terror attacks targeting both civilians and security forces over the past years.

Iran to Continue Supporting Yemeni People

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iranian president told Yemen's Chairman of the Supreme Political Council that Tehran will continue to support the Yemeni people as it did in the past.

"As in the past, the Islamic Republic of Iran supports the rights of the dear people of Yemen and the dialogue to determine the fate of the people by themselves, and we hope to see more cooperation between the two countries with the establishment of peace and stability," the Iranian president said in a telephone conversation with the Yemen's Chairman of the Supreme Political Council Mahdi al-Mashat on Friday.

Expressing his happiness with the results of the recent talks which have been held with the aim of resolving Yemen's issues, the president said, "We are concerned about the humanitarian situation in Yemen, but we hope that with the continuation of political talks, we will see the complete release of prisoners, the lifting of the blockade on the people of the country, and the establishment of a permanent ceasefire."

The chairman of the Supreme Political Council of Yemen, for his part, conveyed the greetings of the members of the political council of Yemen to the Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and expressed his appreciation for the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the people of Yemen. Al-Mashat also expressed hope that "God will bring the best to the Islamic Ummah in the shadow of the sympathy of the Islamic world."

He also congratulated the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran on its successes in various fields in the last year and a half, and called for the continuation of the active role of the Islamic Republic in resolving the Yemen issue.

Gov't Guaranteed Purchase Price for Wheat by 15%

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has raised its guaranteed purchase price for domestically-grown wheat by 15% for the April-July harvest season.

Government spokesman Ali Bahadori said in a tweet that the Cabinet had approved a proposal by the Ministry of Agriculture Jihad (MAJ) to raise this year's domestic purchase price for wheat to 150,000 rials (\$0.3) per kilogram.

The price is 7% higher than current average international prices for wheat (\$7.6027 per bushel). It comes amid government plans to increase its domestic purchase of grains and amid a continued crunch in global markets because of the ongoing war between Russia and Ukraine.

MAJ and its subsidiary the Government Trading Corporation (GTC) expect Iran's domestic wheat purchases could increase by 13% to 8.5 million metric tons (mt) this year.

Some Neighbors Made Iran Borders Unsafe

TEHRAN (IFP) - The commander of the southeastern headquarters of the Iranian Army says more than 80 percent of Iran's borders are unsafe and some governments threaten the Islamic establishment now and then under the influence of the policies of arrogant powers.

Brigadier General Amir Gholamalian said the Army is a factor in affecting regional equations.

He said Iran never takes the Zionist regime's threats seriously because it does not consider this regime powerful enough to pose a threat to the Islamic Republic.

General Gholamalian added that Iran is preparing itself to deal with the US's threats and that officials have worked out a strategy for this purpose.

He said the US is aware that if it makes a miscalculation like it did in 1980 and covets Iran's borders, the Army will come down on the enemy like a ton of bricks and will deal a heavy blow to them.

Gholamalian stressed that Iran's strategic depth has gone farther compared to several years ago.

He warned that in terms of missile and drone might, Iran cannot be compared with what it was in the past and it is capable of hitting the farthest bases of the enemy using its homegrown weapons.

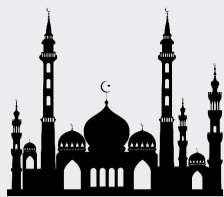
Iran-China Trade Exceeds \$4b In March Quarter

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Trade exchanges between Iran and China surged past \$4 billion in the first quarter of 2023, rising by 5% compared to the same quarter last year, according to latest figures by China's General Administration of Customs.

The customs figures cited in a report by IRNA showed that Iran-China trade exchanges had reached \$4.045 billion in the January-March, up from \$3.855 billion reported in the same period in 2022.

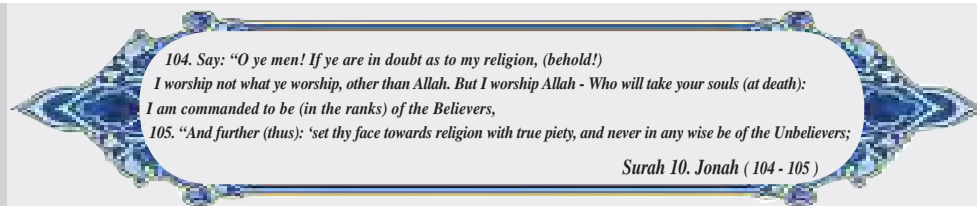
China imported \$1.135 billion worth of goods from Iran during the mentioned period, a decline of 41% year on year. The IRNA blamed a 20% drop in oil prices over the March quarter for the drop in the value of Iranian exports to China over the period.

Meanwhile, China's exports to Iran grew 51% in the first quarter of 2023 as the East Asian country exported \$2.910 billion worth of goods to the Islamic Republic over that period.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:03
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:48
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:19



Finland Seeking Economic Opportunities in Southern Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



China-brokered agreement that restored diplomatic relations between the Islamic Republic and Saudi Arabia after seven years.

The deal set in motion a new dynamic in the region, with a number of other Arab states voicing a willingness to mend fences with Iran.

"We know that relations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, Qatar, Iraq and recently with Saudi Arabia have improved," Kahiluoto said.

"Given that Finland is also a trading partner of many of these countries... we can also find more economic opportunities," he added.

Bushehr is home to some of the most important commercial ports in southern Iran and features a number of major oil and gas facilities and industrial projects.

Considering that Finland is located at the northern end of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), Kahiluoto said, "Anything related to transportation and ports is important for this country."

TEHRAN - Finnish Ambassador to Iran Kari Kahiluoto said Finland is looking for new economic opportunities in southern Iran in the wake of a normalization of diplomatic ties between the Islamic Republic and its Persian Gulf Arab neighbors.

During a Wednesday visit to Bushehr province in southwestern Iran, where he met with businesspeople in the region, Kahiluoto said Finland is determined to revive its old economic relations with Iran.

"Given the 90-year history of economic ties between Finland and the Islamic Republic of Iran, we are seeking to restore these good relations," he was quoted as saying by IRNA's Persian service.

Finland's expression of eagerness for closer ties with Iran comes after a recent

Creating Interactive Objects For Post-Pandemic Life

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Polish Design Summer School 22 was jointly organized by Embassy of Poland in Tehran, University of Tehran, and Safavi House Cultural Centre in Isfahan.

Workshops led by Polish and Iranian researchers and designers Dr. Joanna Jurga and Fater Saadat Niaki focused on addressing post-pandemic challenges such as anxiety and loneliness.

In response, Tehrani and Isfahani students brought forward many practical ideas on how to physically bring people together. Readers are cordially invited to have a look at these designs.



Production to Officially Start From Sepehr, Jufair Oil Fields

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran officially started production from 7 wells at Sepehr and Jufair oil fields in the Khuzestan Province (south-western Iran), as of April 22 through April 28, CEO of Iran's Pasargad Energy Development Company (PEDC), Saeed Shad said.

According to him, final tests were carried out at the fields on April 18, prior to production. In total, 12 wells at the mentioned two fields are ready for production.

"Currently, it is possible to produce a total of 21,000 barrels of crude oil from both fields," Shad said.

The CEO also added that more than \$330 million has been spent on the development of the mentioned fields. Another \$440 million is expected to be spent to complete the first stage of development.

In general, it is expected that more than \$2.8 billion will be spent for the full production of the fields, he noted.

On April 27-28, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will pay visit to Khuzestan Province. During the visit, he will participate in the opening of a number of facilities.

As reported, the development of Iran's Sepehr and Jufair oil fields has been entrusted to Iran's Pasargad Energy Development Company.

Sepehr field's reserves are estimated at 5.4 billion barrels of oil, of which 450 million barrels are extractable.

Jufair oil field's reserves are estimated at 4.4 billion barrels of oil. Its potential production reaches 390 million barrels, of which 390 million barrels are extractable.

Armed Forces Always Pioneer in Implementing Affairs

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Vice President of Science and Technology Mr. Ruhollah Dehghani during his visit of the second exhibition on capabilities of Etko Organization said that the armed forces have always had this property that they have been both pioneer and taken action fast with the best quality.

Dehghani further said that for the food security issue, the world is moving towards new technologies using technologies which boost productivity and quality.

He noted that the issue of food and food health is a totally security issue and companies of Etko Organization have played their roles very well in the market.

He expressed hope for close cooperation which has been formed between production ecosystem and consumption unit of Etko and the vice-presidency of Science and Technology. He stated that the knowledge-based economy in the Etko Organization can promise cooperation opportunity for the youths, knowledge-based companies, producers and attracting popular investment.

Dehghani emphasized that all facilities of the vice-presidency like its human forces will be offered to the Etko Organization based on the legal authorities.





Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company
شرکت سنگ آهن گهر زمین

In the Ordinary and Extraordinary General Assembly of Gohar Zamin Co. Happened

Distribution of 4000 Rials Dividend Per Share

Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Co. Shareholders Return Home With Their Hands Full



Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company
شرکت سنگ آهن گهر زمین



The ordinary and extraordinary annual general assembly of Gohar Zamin Ore Company for the financial year ending on Azar 30, 1401 (December 22, 2022) held on Monday, April 28, with the attendance of more than 94% of shareholders at Tehran's Olympic Hotel.

The ordinary and extraordinary general assembly of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company (Co. Gohar) was held with the presence of the CEO, members of the board of directors, special auditor and representative of the stock exchange organization and more than 94% of the shareholders, and it was approved that 4000 Rials per share will be allocated to the shareholders. Also in the extraordinary assembly of the company, decisions were made about the conformity of the company's articles of association with the model of the stock exchange organization's articles of association and at the end, the issues were approved by the attendees. Among other decisions that were approved by the participants in this assembly was that the increase of capital in the first step hinges on the approval of the developmental plans of the company and in the next step it depends on the provision of payment resources.

CO.GOHAR's Net Profit of 11,700b Last Year

At the beginning of this meeting, the CEO of Gohar Zamin appreciated and thanked the shareholders for supporting the company during the past year, especially the major

shareholders and the company's board of directors. He further pointed to the company's net profit of 11,700 billion tomans last year and said: "According to statistics and figures presented in the stock exchange, last year, the company had a net profit of 11,700 billion tomans. Of course, the company's expectation was more than this figure, but the materialization of this amount is remarkable and exemplary at the level of the country and among mining and industrial companies. Good measures have been taken in this regard; In particular, the company has exported one million and 700 thousand tons of pellets, which has had a better average price among other exporters. While we did not expect such an increase at all." He added that rise in the share right and usufruct of IMIDRO is very important point which has increased considerably while nobody expected such an increase." He also stated: "Dewatering from the wastes that come out of the factories is another important issue, and we have made good progress in this field, and I think that it will enter the production circuit in the next year that due to it, an important part of the water required by the factory, which is about 3 million cubic meters per year, is returned to the factories and considering this point that water that water is transferred from the Persian Gulf to the region costs very high, it will bring good profitability for the company. On the other hand, in addition to reducing costs, it also prevents the waste of water."The CEO of Gohar Zamin Company also noted: "In order that the company can launch other sites in the future and have Gohar Zamin 2, 3 and 4, very good projects have been started in the town of Bardsir."The CEO of Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company pointed out the other development plans of this company to Janja Mine, Jabal Barz area, Makran area, etc., and at the end, he made some suggestions. The assembly wrapped up with a question and answer session by the shareholders and participants.



Japan Prepares to Shoot Down North Korea Satellite



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's Defense Minister Yasukazu Hamada ordered the country's military to prepare to shoot down a North Korean spy satellite should it fall within Japan's territory.

Hamada ordered the Self-Defense Forces to make necessary preparations as he could potentially "order the destruction of ballistic missiles", the Defense Ministry said in a statement. Preparations included making arrangements to deploy troops to the southern prefecture of Okinawa to "minimise damage should a ballistic missile fall."

North Korean leader Kim Jong Un said preparations for the planned launch of the country's first spy satellite should proceed to counter perceived threats from the United States and South Korea, state media reported on Wednesday.

Fighting in Sudan Enters a Second Week as Truce Breaks



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Fighting in Sudan's capital entered a second week as crackling gunfire shattered a temporary truce, the latest battles between forces of rival generals that have already left hundreds dead and thousands wounded.

Overnight, the heavy explosions that had previously rocked the city in recent days had subsided, but on Saturday morning, fighting resumed.

Heavy gunfire, loud explosions, and fighter jets roared in many parts of the capital Saturday morning, according to witnesses. Violence broke out on April 15 between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the powerful paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The former allies seized power in a 2021 coup but later fell out in a bitter power struggle. The army announced Friday that it had "agreed to a ceasefire for three days" for the Eid al-Fitr holiday that marks the end of the Muslim holy month of Ramadan, which UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken had called for a day earlier.

Daglo said in a statement he had "discussed the current crisis" with Guterres, and was "focused on the humanitarian truce, safe passages, and protecting humanitarian workers".

Two previous 24-hour ceasefires announced earlier in the week were also ignored.

The fighting has seen the RSF -- a force tens of thousands strong, formed from members of the Janjaweed militia that led years of violence in the western Darfur region -- take on the regular army, with neither side seemingly having seized the advantage.

In Khartoum, a city of five million people, the conflict upended the lives of civilians, who have sheltered in terror inside their homes without electricity in baking heat for days.

Many civilians have ventured out only to get urgent food supplies or to flee the city.

Eid is meant to be spent "with sweets and pastries, with happy children, and people greeting relatives", resident Sami al-Nour told AFP. Instead, there has been "gunfire and the stench of blood all around us".

While Khartoum has seen some of the fiercest battles, violence also exploded across the country.

Late Friday, the army accused the RSF of attacks in the capital's twin city of Omdurman where they released "a large number of inmates" from a prison, accusations the group denies.

Battles have also raged in Darfur, where Doctors Without Borders (MSF) in the city of El Fasher said their medics had been "overwhelmed" by the number of patients with gunshot wounds, many of them children.

Plans are being made to evacuate foreign nationals, with the United States, South Korea and Japan deploying forces to nearby countries and the European Union weighing a similar move.

On Friday, the US said the situation was still too risky for an evacuation of embassy personnel.

Later, the RSF said it was ready to "partially" open "all airports" in Sudan to evacuate foreign citizens.

Though it is not possible to verify which airports the RSF controls, Burhan on Saturday told Al-Arabiya TV that the army was in control of "all airports, except for Khartoum airport" and one in Nyala, the capital of South Darfur.

In an earlier statement, Sudan's army said Burhan had received calls from leaders of multiple countries to "facilitate and guarantee safety for evacuating citizens and diplomatic missions".

It noted that the evacuations are expected to begin "in the coming hours", adding that the US, Britain, France, and China are planning to airlift their nationals out of Khartoum using military jets.

Argentina President Fernandez Not to Seek Reelection



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina's President Alberto Fernández announced he won't seek reelection for a second term this year, a decision that follows months of infighting among the ruling coalition as it grapples with a fragile economy and galloping inflation.

The center-left president's unexpected announcement, which he made through a video posted on social media titled "my decision," came as he was faced increasing pressure from coalition members not to run and polls showing declining approval ratings. The decision immediately shook up Argentina's political landscape months away from August primaries and the October presidential election.

Philippines, China Commit to Working On Resolving Differences



MANILA (Dispatches) - The Philippines and China pledged to work together to resolve their maritime differences in the South China Sea, where the two have competing claims, and to deepen bilateral ties.

Talks between the countries' foreign ministers mark the latest in a series of high-level meetings of the Philippines with leaders of the United States and China as the two superpowers battle for strategic advantage in the Indo-Pacific.

Manila's relations with Beijing are more than just their differences over the South China Sea, Philippine Foreign Affairs Secretary Enrique Manalo said as he began talks with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang in Manila.

"These differences should not prevent us from seeking ways of managing them effectively, especially with respect to enjoyment of rights of Filipinos, especially fishermen," Manalo said, adding that their livelihoods are undermined by incidents and actions in the waterway.

Since Philippine President Ferdinand Marcos Jr took office in June, the Philippines has filed dozens of diplomatic protests at the presence of Chinese fishing vessels and what it calls China's "aggressive actions" in the strategic waterway.

The two neighbours need to work together to continue a tradition of friendship, deepen cooperation and properly resolve differences, Qin said in his opening remarks.

Working together would help promote peace and stability of the region and the world, Qin said.

His visit comes just weeks after the Philippines announced the location of four additional U.S. military bases, two of which are facing north towards Taiwan.

Qin is to meet Marcos later on Saturday, ahead of the president's meeting with U.S. President Joe Biden in Washington in May.

More than 17,000 Philippine and U.S. soldiers are conducting their largest ever joint military drills in the Southeast Asian country, drawing criticism from Beijing, Manila's rival in the South China Sea.

A landmark ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration in 2016 invalidated China's claims of sovereignty over almost all of the South China Sea, which sees the passage of about \$3 trillion worth of ship-borne goods annually and is believed to be rich in minerals and oil-and-gas deposits.

Guantanamo Bay Prisoners Show Signs of Accelerated Ageing

LONDON (Dispatches) - Prisoners who have been held for years by the United States at the Guantanamo Bay detention facility are showing signs of "accelerated ageing", a senior official of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) has said.

Patrick Hamilton, the ICRC's head of delegation for the US and Canada, said on Friday that the "physical and mental health needs are growing and becoming increasingly challenging" for those still imprisoned at Guantanamo Bay.

"We're calling on the US administration and Congress to work together to find adequate and sustainable solutions to address these issues," Hamilton said in a statement.

"Action should be taken as a matter of priority."

The Guantanamo prison camp in Cuba was established by US Republican Party President George W Bush in 2002 to house foreign suspects following the 2001 plane attacks on New York and the Pentagon, which killed some 3,000 people.

The camp came to symbolise the brutality of the US's so-called "war on terror" because of harsh interrogation methods that critics have said amounted to torture.

Hamilton's comments on the health of the prisoners came after a visit to the facility in March following a 20-year hiatus. He said he was "struck by how those who are still detained today are experiencing the symptoms of accelerated ageing, worsened by the cumulative effects of their experiences and years spent in detention".

He called for detainees to receive adequate mental and physical healthcare as well as more frequent family contact.

The US defence department "is currently reviewing the report", a Pentagon spokesperson told the Reuters news agency.

There were 40 detainees at Guantanamo when US President Joe Biden, a Democrat, took office in 2021. The Biden administration has said it wants to close the facility but has not presented a plan for doing so. About 30 detainees remain at the prison.

U.S. to Begin Training Ukrainian Troops on Abrams Tank

RAMSTEIN AIR BASE (Dispatches) - The United States will begin training Ukrainian forces on how to use and maintain Abrams tanks in the coming weeks, as it continues to speed up its effort to get them onto the battlefield as quickly as possible, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin said.

The decision comes as defense leaders from around Europe and the world are meeting at Ramstein Air Base, in the effort to coordinate the delivery of weapons and other equipment to Ukraine.

According to the officials, 31 tanks will arrive at Grafenwoehr Training Area in Germany at the end of May, and the troops will begin training a couple weeks later. Officials said the troop training will last about 10 weeks. The training tanks will not be the ones given to Ukraine for use in the war against Russia. Instead, 31 M1A1 battle tanks are being refurbished in the United States, and those will go to the frontlines when they are ready.

Germany, meanwhile, has signed a memorandum of understanding with Poland and Ukraine to set up a maintenance hub for Kyiv's Leopard 2 tank fleet in Poland, near the Ukrainian border. Germany's defense minister, Boris Pistorius, told reporters he expects the hub to cost 150-200 million euros (\$165-220 million) per year, which "we will split fairly, like everything else." He said he expects it to start work around the end of next month.

The announcement came as ministers and representatives from about 50 nations gathered for the U.S.-led meeting

of what's called the Ukraine Defense Contact Group.

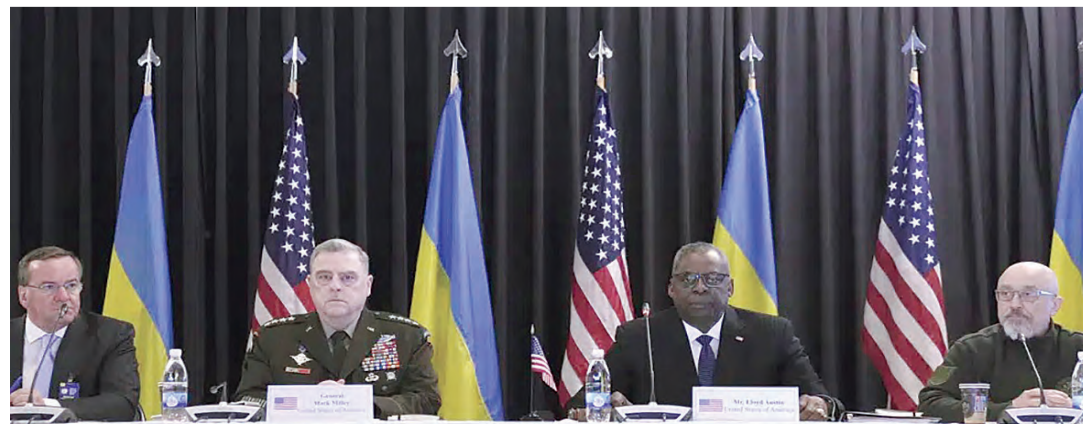
Austin, speaking to reporters at the close of the meeting, said the delivery of training tanks in the next few weeks represents "huge progress." He added, "I'm confident this equipment — and the training that accompanied it — will put Ukraine's forces in a position to continue to succeed on the battlefield."

The U.S. goal has been to have the Ukrainian troops trained by the time the refurbished Abrams tanks are ready so they can then immediately move to combat. The tanks are being refitted to meet Ukraine's needs.

Gen. Mark Milley, chairman of the U.S. Joint Chiefs of Staff, added that he believes the American tanks will be very effective on the battlefield. "I do think the M1 tank will make a difference," he said, while cautioning "there is no silver bullet in war."

According to officials, about 250 Ukrainian troops will be trained — with some learning to operate the tanks and others learning to repair and maintain them. Additional training on how to fight and maneuver with the tanks could also be provided after the initial 10 weeks.

So far, the U.S. has trained 8,800 Ukrainian troops who have already returned to the battlefield, and an additional roughly 2,500 are in training now. Their training has included everything from basic weapons instruction to how to conduct combat operations and maintain and repair equipment.



Peru Ex-leader Toledo Surrenders To Be Extradited From U.S.



SAN JOSE (Dispatches) - Former Peruvian President Alejandro Toledo Manrique surrendered to U.S. federal agents to be extradited to Peru, where he faces charges of accepting millions of dollars in bribes as part of a mammoth corruption scandal in which four of Peru's ex-presidents have been implicated.

Toledo's surrender ends a yearlong legal battle against his extradition, which started in 2019 when he was arrested at his home in Menlo Park, California. Federal prosecutors have said Peruvian officials will travel to Northern California to pick up Toledo and fly him back to Peru. It's not immediately known when that will happen.

Toledo, who was Peru's president from 2001 to 2006, is accused of taking at least \$20 million in bribes from Odebrecht, a giant Brazilian construction company that has admitted to U.S. authorities that it bribed officials to win contracts throughout Latin America for decades. He has denied the charges.

He had sought a stay on his extradition, pending a legal challenge to the U.S. State Department's decision to send him back to Peru, but a court of appeals denied his latest motion this week and a federal judge ordered him to surrender.

After his arrest, Toledo was initially held in solitary confinement at the Santa Rita Jail about 40 miles (60 kilometers) east of San Francisco, but was released in 2020 because of the COVID-19 pandemic and his deteriorating mental health. He was held under house arrest after that.

Toledo has been living in California since 2016 when he returned to Stanford University, his alma mater, as a visiting scholar to study education in Latin America. His ties to the San Francisco Bay Area go back to the 1970s when he was an undergraduate student at the University of San Francisco and then a graduate student at Stanford University.

Toledo, 77, is one of four ex-presidents linked to the Odebrecht corruption scandal that has shaken Peru's politics, with nearly every living former president now on trial or under investigation.

Former President Ollanta Humala is standing trial on charges that he and his wife received over \$3 million from Odebrecht for his presidential campaigns in 2006 and 2011. Both have denied any wrongdoing.

Ex-leader Pedro Pablo Kuczynski, who left office in 2018, is under house arrest for similar charges.

67m Children Missed out on Vaccines Because of Covid



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Some 67 million children partially or fully missed routine vaccines globally between 2019 and 2021 because of lockdowns and health care disruptions caused by the Covid-19 pandemic, the United Nations said.

"More than a decade of hard-earned gains in routine childhood immunization have been eroded," read a new report from the UN's children's agency, UNICEF, adding that getting back on track "will be challenging."

Of the 67 million children whose vaccinations were "severely disrupted," 48 million missed out on routine vaccines entirely, UNICEF said, flagging concerns about potential polio and measles outbreaks.

Vaccine coverage among children declined in 112 countries and the percent of children vaccinated worldwide slipped 5 points to 81 percent -- a low not seen since 2008. Africa and South Asia were particularly hard hit.

"Worryingly, the backsliding during the pandemic came at the end of a decade when, in broad terms, growth in childhood immunization had stagnated," the report said.

Vaccines save 4.4 million lives each year, a number the United Nations figures could jump to 5.8 million by 2030 if its ambitious targets to leave "no one behind" are met.

"Vaccines have played a really important role in allowing more children to live healthy, long lives," Brian Keeley, the report's editor in chief, told AFP. "Any decline at all in vaccination rates is worrying."

Before the introduction of a vaccine in 1963, measles killed approximately 2.6 million people each year, mostly children. By 2021, that number had fallen to 128,000.

But between 2019 and 2021, the percentage of children vaccinated against measles fell from 86 percent to 81 percent, and the number of cases in 2022 doubled compared to 2021.

The slide in vaccination rates could be compounded by other crises, Keeley warned, from climate change to food insecurity.

"You've got increasing number of conflicts, economic stagnation in a lot of countries, climate emergencies, and so on," he said. "This all sort of makes it harder and harder for health systems and countries to meet vaccination needs."

UNICEF called on governments "to double-down on their commitment to increase financing for immunization" with special attention on accelerating "catch-up" vaccination efforts for those who missed their shots.

The report also raised concerns about a drop in people's confidence in vaccines, seen in 52 out of 55 countries surveyed.

"We cannot allow confidence in routine immunizations to become another victim of the pandemic," Catherine Russell, UNICEF's executive director, said in a statement. "Otherwise, the next wave of deaths could be of more children with measles, diphtheria or other preventable diseases."

Vaccine confidence can be "volatile and time specific," the report said, noting that "further analysis will be required to determine if the findings are indicative of a longer-term trend" beyond the pandemic.

Overall, it said that support for vaccines "remains relatively strong."

In about half of the 55 countries surveyed, more than 80 percent of respondents "perceived vaccines as important for children."

"There is reason to be somewhat hopeful that services are recovering in quite a few countries," said Keeley, who added that preliminary vaccination data from 2022 showed encouraging signs.

Climate Pledges of World's Top Carbon Emitters



PARIS (Dispatches) - Despite their 2015 pledge to limit global warming by slashing carbon emissions, big countries' commitments so far still fall short of meeting the targets of the Paris Agreement, monitors say.

After EU lawmakers adopted sweeping climate measures, here is a roundup of where it and other major carbon emitters stand. Many countries have committed to achieving carbon neutrality -- where any remaining emissions will be sequestered or offset -- by the second half of this century. But monitoring site Carbon Action Tracker (CAT) rates many of these plans as lacking in detail.

The 2015 Paris accord requires "nationally determined contributions" (NDCs) from countries to meet the global aim of limiting global warming to less than two degrees Celsius compared to pre-industrial levels -- a target since tightened to 1.5C.

China

China is by far the largest emitter, responsible for roughly a quarter of all carbon pollution currently and 14 percent since the start of industrial times.

In the medium term, it has promised to reduce the intensity of its emissions by as much as 65 percent by 2030 and peak emissions at the end of this decade. More than half China's energy comes from coal, the dirtiest fossil fuel. But it is also a leading producer of solar panels and electric vehicles.

Beijing says it has already halved its carbon intensity (emissions as a proportion of GDP) since 2005. Aiming for carbon neutrality by 2060, its targets are judged insufficient by CAT.

United States

The US is the world's second-largest polluter currently but the biggest historically, responsible for 25 percent of emissions during the industrial era, according to the Global Carbon Project.

President Joe Biden rejoined the Paris accord after his predecessor Donald Trump's decision to pull the US out of it. Biden has set a net-zero date for 2050 and in 2022 passed the \$370 billion "Inflation Reduction Act", containing a host of measures to promote low-carbon energy.

In the medium term, Biden aims to halve US emissions by 2030 compared to 2005 levels.

Monitoring site Paris Equity Check said that would still lead to warming of 3.4C if all countries reduced emissions at a comparable rate. The US is still heavily invested in fossil fuels. Despite Biden's reform, he approved a new oil-drilling project in Alaska, outraging environmentalists.

Europe

The 27-nation European Union is collectively the third biggest global emitter of carbon dioxide. It aims to cut carbon emissions by at least 55 percent by 2030 compared to 1990 levels.

That corresponds to 2.5C of warming at a global rate, says Paris Equity Check. CAT judges the commitments "almost sufficient".

On April 18, 2023 the EU adopted emissions measures including a carbon border tax on imports. Under the legislation, European Union carbon emissions are to be cut 62 percent by 2030 compared to 2005 levels -- up from a previous target of 43 percent.

Germany, the EU's largest economy, has more ambitious targets, pledging to slash emissions 65 percent by 2030 from 1990 levels.

New CO2 Tech Taps Oceans To Tackle Global Warming



SAN PEDRO (Dispatches) - Floating in the port of Los Angeles, a strange-looking barge covered with pipes and tanks contains a concept that scientists hope to make waves: a new way to use the ocean as a vast carbon dioxide sponge to tackle global warming.

Scientists from University of California Los Angeles (UCLA) have been working for two years on SeaChange — an ambitious project that could one day boost the amount of CO₂, a major greenhouse gas, that can be absorbed by our seas.

Their goal is "to use the ocean as a big sponge," according to Gaurav Sant, director of the university's Institute for Carbon Management (ICM).

The oceans, covering most of the Earth, are already the planet's main carbon sinks, acting as a critical buffer in the climate crisis.

They absorb a quarter of all CO₂ emissions, as well as 90 per cent of the warming that has occurred in recent decades due to increasing greenhouse gases.

But they are feeling the strain. The ocean is acidifying, and rising temperatures are reducing its absorption capacity.

The UCLA team wants to increase that capacity by using an electrochemical process to remove vast quantities of CO₂ already in seawater — rather like wringing out a sponge to help recover its absorptive power.

"If you can take out the carbon dioxide that is in the oceans, you're essentially renewing their capacity to take additional carbon dioxide from the atmosphere," Sant told AFP.

World Could Face Record Temperatures in 2023

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The world could breach a new average temperature record in 2023 or 2024, fuelled by climate change and the anticipated return of the El Nino weather phenomenon, climate scientists say.

Climate models suggest that after three years of the La Nina weather pattern in the Pacific Ocean, which generally lowers global temperatures slightly, the world will experience a return to El Nino, the warmer counterpart, later this year.

During El Nino, winds blowing west along the equator slow down, and warm water is pushed east, creating warmer surface ocean temperatures.

"El Nino is normally associated with record breaking temperatures at the global level. Whether this will happen in 2023 or 2024 is yet known, but it is, I think, more likely than not," said Carlo Buontempo, director of the EU's Copernicus Climate Change Service.

Climate models suggest a return to El Nino conditions in the late boreal summer, and the possibility of a strong El Nino developing towards the end of the year, Buontempo said.

The world's hottest year on record so far was 2016, coinciding with a strong El Nino - although climate change has fuelled extreme temperatures even in years without the phenomenon.

The last eight years were the world's eight hottest on record - reflecting the longer-term warming trend driven by greenhouse gas emissions.

Friederike Otto, senior lecturer at Imperial College London's Grantham Institute, said El Nino-fuelled temperatures could worsen the climate change impacts countries are already experiencing - including severe heatwaves, drought and wildfires.

"If El Niño does develop, there is a good chance 2023 will be even hotter than 2016 – considering the world has continued to warm as humans continue to burn fossil fuels," Otto said.

EU Copernicus scientists published a report on Thursday assessing the climate extremes the world experienced last year, its fifth-warmest year on record.

Europe experienced its hottest summer on record in 2022, while climate change-fuelled extreme rain caused disastrous flooding in Pakistan, and in February, Antarctic sea ice levels hit a record low.

The world's average global temperature is now 1.2C higher than in pre-industrial times, Copernicus said.

Despite most of the world's major emitters pledging to eventually slash their net emissions to zero, global CO₂ emissions last year continued to rise.



Study Provides New Insights Into Impact of Food Waste on Environment



PARIS (Dispatches) - With Earth Day on April 22 reminding us to take more effective actions to protect the natural resources that are so essential to our lives, a recent scientific study highlights the significant impact of food waste on the environment.

Back in July 2021, a study by WWF and Tesco revealed that 40 per cent of the world's food was wasted; now a comparative analysis conducted by researchers at Nanjing Forestry University in China, in conjunction with the National University of Singapore, is putting into stark relief the environmental disaster that this vast waste represents.

One should keep in mind that the global food system is responsible for about one-third of total annual greenhouse gas emissions. In total, in 2017, scientists estimated that food waste generated 9.3 billion tonnes of CO₂ (expressed in GtCO₂e in the study published in the journal Nature Food).

By comparison, this sum is almost equal to the combined total emissions of the United States and the European Union. And this is not without consequences for the planet: food waste is indeed responsible for half of the carbon emissions generated by the food industry.

By analysing food supply data, this study provides new insights into the extent of the impact of food waste.

It should be noted that in terms of supply, we are talking about harvesting as well as production, storage, transport, processing and sale.

Turkish Consumer Sentiment Jumps 9.2% in April

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Consumer confidence in Turkey rose 9.2% to 87.5 points in April, official data showed.

The reading thus resumed an upward trend after a dip to 80.1 points in March and marked a 56-month high, the Anadolu Agency (AA) said, citing Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) data. The jump in April has been the most robust hike since November 2015.

The data showed a marked improvement in expectations for the general economy and households in the following 12-month period, which rose 14.7% and 12.8%, respectively. The financial situation index of households at present rose 4.6% from a month earlier, while the assessment on spending money on durable goods over the next 12 months was up 4.5%.



China's Economy Rebounds After Zero-Covid Scrapped

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy grew much better than expected in the first three months of the year as the country reopened after the end of zero-Covid measures, official data showed.

The figures were the first snapshot since 2019 of the world's second-largest economy unencumbered by the strict health controls that helped keep the coronavirus in check but battered businesses and supply chains.

After years of travel restrictions and quarantines, Chinese people in recent months have finally returned to restaurants and started to move around more freely, giving much-needed stimulus to services.

According to data published by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS), the official growth figure for January to March was 4.5 percent -- significantly higher than the 3.8 percent predicted by analysts in an AFP poll.

A key driver of the standout reading was a bounce in retail sales, the main indicator of household consumption, as shoppers and diners once again hit high streets and malls.

NBS report said in the first three months of the year China had faced a "grave and complex international environment as well as arduous tasks to advance reform, development and ensure stability at home", but that economic stability was Beijing's "top priority".

"As a result, a smooth transition in Covid-19 prevention and control to the new phase was secured in a relatively short time," the report said, adding "the production and demand registered a stable recovery, employment and prices".

Beijing's virus-containment policy -- an unrelenting regime of strict curbs on the population -- strongly constrained normal economic activity before it was abruptly ditched in December.

The Chinese economy is also beset by a series of other crises, from a debt-laden property sector to flagging consumer confidence, global inflation, the threat of recession elsewhere, and geopolitical tensions with the United States.

Retail sales surged 10.6 percent on-year in March, the biggest increase since June 2021, though industrial production climbed 3.9 percent last month, an improvement from January-February but below analysts' expectations of 4.4 percent.

"Consumption saw a recovery during the first quarter partly because of pent-up demand but is not yet back on pre-pandemic levels," Teeuwe Mevissen, an analyst at RaboBank, said.

"Loss in household wealth due to the real estate crisis and loss of household income during the pandemic are factors why consumers have not spent more."

Iris Pang, the chief economist for Greater China at ING, said the primary reason for the faster-than-expected growth was the much stronger growth in retail sales, which were "mainly boosted by catering".

And according to Ting Lu, Chief China Economist at Nomura, there was more growth expected in April to June as China heads into "another quarter in the sweet spot".

Pakistan Buys Its First Cargo of Discounted Russian Crude Oil

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan has placed its first order for discounted Russian crude oil under a new deal struck between Islamabad and Moscow, the country's petroleum minister said, with one cargo to dock at Karachi port in May.

Pakistan's purchase gives Russia a new outlet for its crude, adding to Moscow's growing sales to India and China, as it redirects volumes from western markets where its oil has been banned in the wake of the Ukraine conflict.

Discounted crude offers much needed respite to cash-strapped Pakistan in the face of a balance of payments crisis and critically low foreign exchange reserves. Energy imports make up the majority of the country's external payments.

The deal will see Pakistan buy only crude oil, not refined fuels, with imports expected to reach 100,000 barrels per day if the first transaction goes through smoothly, Minister Musadik Malik told Reuters on Wednesday night.

"Our orders are in, we have placed that already," he said, confirming source-based information that the country would only be buying crude, not refined products.

Pakistan imported 154,000 barrels per day of oil in 2022, relatively flat from the previous year, data from analytics firm Kpler showed. Most of the crude was supplied by the world's top exporter Saudi Arabia followed by the United Arab Emirates.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE are Pakistan's top crude suppliers

If Russian crude supplies were to reach 100,000 barrels per day, it would mean a potentially big drop for Middle East suppliers to Pakistan. Malik declined to say whether Chinese yuan and the UAE dirham would be used as currencies for transactions, with Pakistan short of dollars. He did not comment on the rate of imports either.



UK Inflation, Highest in Western Europe, Falls Only Little in March

LONDON (Dispatches)- Britain now has Western Europe's highest consumer price inflation rate after falling by less than expected in March to 10.1% from February's 10.4%, official data suggested.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast that the annual CPI rate would drop to 9.8% in March, moving further away from October's 41-year high of 11.1% but still eating into the spending power of workers whose pay is rising by less.

Despite falling in March, Britain's inflation rate was the highest in Western Europe and the only country in the region to post a double-digit number for last month after Austria recorded a higher inflation rate in February.

The data likely bolsters bets that the Bank of England will again raise interest rates next month after core inflation -- which strips out volatile energy and food prices -- failed to fall as expected in March and instead held at 6.2%.

"These figures reaffirm exactly why we must continue our efforts to drive down inflation so we can ease pressure on families and businesses," Finance Minister Jeremy Hunt said.

The Office for National Statistics said the price of food and non-alcoholic drinks rose by 19.1% annually in March -- the biggest increase since August 1977.

Last month the BoE said it expected inflation to "fall significantly" in the second quarter. In February, the BoE had forecast March inflation of 9.2%.

"Another 25 basis point rate hike appears highly likely in May, and the Bank must stand ready to take further action unless economic data shows more definitive signs of cooling," said Hugh Gimber, global market strategist at J.P. Morgan Asset Management.

India Economic Growth Seen Stuck in Low Gear

BENGALURU (Dispatches) - India's economy will slow considerably this fiscal year as the global economic slowdown impedes domestic growth prospects, according to a Reuters poll, which showed inflation will remain elevated despite recent interest rate hikes.

While the expected expansion would be faster than other major economies, it will be below the long-term average.

Growth in Asia's third-largest economy was

expected to slow to 6.0% in the fiscal year to end-March 2024, unchanged from a March survey, after likely growing 6.9% last fiscal year, according to an April 10-19 Reuters poll of 45 economists.

The Reserve Bank of India's projection was 6.5% for this fiscal year. The range of forecasts in the poll had widened from last month.

All respondents in the latest poll predicted a notable deceleration in economic growth this fiscal year, with the most optimistic forecast 6.6% and the weakest 4.4%.

"With the pent-up demand induced technical rebound over, following the deep pandemic-led contraction, India's real GDP is expected to slow down substantially...in FY24," said Kunal Kundu, India economist at Societe Generale.

"We believe domestic demand will barely support economic activity but not drive growth. We expect public capex-led infrastructure investment to be the major growth driver, while private business capex would still likely remain quite subdued."

Rate hikes from the RBI since last May are also likely to have an impact on growth this year. The central bank has increased rates by 250 basis points and is now expected to remain on an extended pause at least until year-end.

This is despite inflation remaining well above the RBI's 4.0% medium-term target.

The poll median showed inflation at 5.3% this fiscal year, slightly higher than the central bank's projection of 5.2%, and at 5.0% next.

Almost all respondents who answered an additional question, 18 of 19, said the risks to their inflation forecast this year was that it would be higher than they currently expected.

"We suspect that oil prices are likely to average higher than the RBI's forecast (\$85 per barrel) and could put some upward pressure on inflation," noted Sakshi Gupta, principal economist at HDFC Bank.

UN Predicts Afghan Economy Would Contract If Aid Drops 30%

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's economy will contract, inflation will rise and liquidity will fall if there is a 30% drop in international aid as feared, according to an analysis by the United Nations' development agency released.

International officials say aid to Afghanistan, the recipient of the world's largest humanitarian program, will drop sharply this year as donors assess global crises and because of restrictions on female aid workers imposed by the Taliban administration.

The United Nations' Development Programme (UNDP) analysed the impact of a 30% drop in aid and found gross domestic product for the already struggling economy would shrink 0.4% this year.

"This will cause an exchange rate devaluation, another contraction in liquidity, banks and informal credit will face more problems ... inflation will go up and domestic demands will go down, leading to more poverty and less growth," Abdallah Al Dardari, UNDP's Resident Representative for Afghanistan, told Reuters. "The country finds itself in a poverty trap."

Per capita annual incomes could fall to \$306 in 2024 - representing a 40% drop since 2020 and placing the country among the poorest in the world.

Afghanistan's humanitarian aid plan is only 5% funded for 2023, with \$251 million committed out of \$4.6 billion requested.

"We may find ourselves in a larger drop in aid than 30%," said Al Dardari.

If aid continued at \$3.7 billion, received last year, the economy was projected to grow 1.3%, making up some ground after plummeting since the Taliban came to power and foreign forces and development aid withdrew in 2021, but still failing to keep pace with more than 2% population growth.

The Taliban administration's order banning most female NGO workers in December followed by a decision to restrict Afghan women from working at the United Nations this month have exacerbated fears that donors would turn away from Afghanistan. The U.N. has told Afghan staff not to come to the office while it reviews its operations.

Taliban officials have said their decisions on female aid workers are an "internal issue" and that foreign governments should reduce restrictions and unfreeze central bank assets to alleviate the economic crisis.

Mitsui Buys 92% Stake In Texas Natural Gas Field



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's Mitsui has bought a 92% stake in a shale gas field in Texas, from which it eyes production of over 200 million cubic feet daily, Reuters has reported, citing the company.

The size of the deal was not disclosed but the Japanese company said the acquisition was a "pragmatic solution" for the transition away from fossil fuels.

Japan is one of the most heavily import-dependent nations in the world when it comes to energy, and natural gas is one of its biggest imports.

Last year, the country regained the top spot of LNG importers globally, overtaking China after it imported 71.99 million cubic meters of the superchilled fuel, while China imported 63.44 million tons.

According to Mitsui, one of Japan's biggest natural gas traders, natural gas and LNG will have a major role to play in the energy transition and the company was set to "continue to contribute to stable energy supply ... by further promoting our global natural gas and LNG businesses".

Last year, with fellow trader Itochu and JERA, Japan's biggest power utility, Mitsui sealed a long-term LNG deal with Oman as part of that natural gas strategy.

The Japanese company was also allowed by the Japanese government to retain its stake in the Sakhalin-2 project in Russia despite G7 sanctions on Moscow. The stake will ensure continued deliveries of LNG over the long term.

Energy Intelligence reported earlier this year that Japanese commodity traders were on the lookout for longer-term LNG supply deals amid the heightened uncertainty on energy markets sparked by the war in Ukraine.

Mitsui's acquisition deal in Texas may well be one version of securing long-term gas supply. The company said the field has a connection to LNG export plants on the Gulf Coast as well as ammonia production facilities.

Annual Tea Imports Hit Record High at \$665m

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's annual tea imports hit an all-time record in the calendar year to late March, according to figures by the country's customs administration (IRICA).
IRICA figures cited in Saturday report by the IRIB News showed that tea imports into Iran had topped \$665 million in the year to March 20, up 45.9% from the previous year.

IRICA said Iran had received tea supplies from 10 countries around the world, without naming them.
That comes as the country had signed a \$250 million agreement with Sri Lanka in December 2021 to import tea from the Indian Ocean state in return for arrears it was owed for supply of energy products in the previous year.



Twitter's Musk Amplifies Misinformation

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Elon Musk promised to make Twitter the "most accurate source of information about the world," but he has repeatedly used his own account to amplify false claims from some of the most notorious disinformers on the internet, according to an AFP analysis of his online activity.

The posts show Musk drawing attention to misinformation about everything from the war in Ukraine to the attack on US Congresswoman Nancy Pelosi's husband. Last week, the billionaire boosted a tweet that wrongly suggested doctors misdiagnosed flu cases as Covid-19 deaths.

"One of the greatest mysteries of Covid-19: Where did the flu go in 2020 and 2021?" an account called "KanekoaTheGreat" said, to which Musk replied: "Good question."

It was one of at least 40 times the billionaire replied to the profile, which has promoted the QAnon conspiracy theory, since purchasing Twitter for US\$44 billion (RM195 billion) nearly six months ago. He has only replied to a handful of accounts more in that time.

Using data from PolitiTweet, a website that tracked public figures' posts until Twitter cut off its access, AFP reviewed thousands of replies Musk published between late October and March.

He shared a fabricated CNN segment, called a made-up quote "wise words" and falsely claimed police escorted a rioter through the US Capitol on January 6, 2021. He amplified a post blaming mass shootings on LGBTQ individuals and endorsed a fake casualty count from Ukraine. Musk has also downplayed Covid-19 and promoted spurious claims about vaccines causing blood clots, miscarriages and heart problems. "We are running out of 'conspiracies' that turned out to be true!" the Twitter owner said in March, replying to a tweet that listed Covid-19 and vaccine safety among the "biggest media lies."

Days later, he tweeted that the "best way to fight misinformation is to respond with accurate information."

Experts say Musk's activity is concerning — and not just because of his online influence. "Musk has almost 135 million Twitter followers and forced his engineers to increase the reach of his tweets, so we should worry when he spreads misinformation," Brendan Nyhan, a Dartmouth College professor who studies misperceptions in politics, told AFP.

"I'm most worried, though, about what these tweets reveal about the judgment of the person who determines the policies of a major social media platform."

Researchers have tied Twitter's recent policy changes — including Musk's reinstatement of suspended accounts and its overhaul of verification practices — to spikes in misinformation.

NewsGuard, a company that assesses websites' credibility, found accounts paying for Twitter's subscription service are inundating the site with false claims.

Musk is driving attention to some of these accounts. "Got the Elon Musk stamp of approval," said "KanekoaTheGreat" on Telegram after one such reply. A January study from the Institute for Strategic Dialogue, a London-based think tank, recorded a "staggering" increase in Musk's interactions



with right-wing accounts since acquiring Twitter, including several profiles other research identified as spreaders of US election misinformation.

Musk has repeatedly amplified posts from sources such as the pro-Donald Trump page "Catturd," the anti-LGBTQ account "Libs of TikTok" and the conspiratorial website ZeroHedge.

Ian Miles Cheong, a far-right blogger, has received at least 60 replies from Musk — topping all but a few other profiles, according to AFP's analysis. In one instance, Musk amplified a tweet blaming Joe Biden for an immigration program that started under Trump. "Musk is elevating some of the worst voices on Twitter," Nyhan told AFP. "These interactions are likely to increase the reach and prominence of the accounts."

In some cases, the Twitter boss has helped mainstream false narratives. After an intruder broke into Pelosi's California residence and struck the lawmaker's husband with a hammer in October, Musk tweeted a link to an article claiming he was drunk and quarreling with a male prostitute. #Pelosigaylover trended on Twitter.

Court filings and footage of the incident disproved the claims, which stemmed from a site that had previously published misinformation. But the damage was done. "It's really sad for the country that people of that high visibility would separate themselves from the facts and the truth in such a blatant way," Nancy Pelosi said at the time. "It is traumatising to those affected by it. They don't care about that, obviously."

Twitter responded to AFP's requests for comment with the poop emoji, an auto-reply Musk launched in March.

Seaplanes and Tech Gods: Spain's Drive to Dish Out \$84b of EU Cash

MADRID (Dispatches) - A request for seaplanes needed to fight forest fires is red-flagged because it could harm the environment. Companies seeking aid after being hammered by COVID are asked to show proof of a healthy balance sheet in recent years.

They are among the discordant calls made by Spanish and EU bureaucrats as Spain's drive to hand out 77 billion euros (\$84 billion) in grants from EU pandemic recovery funds becomes mired in complexity, according to interviews with business associations, government officials, companies and consultants.

Spain is the EU pilot project for disbursing grants from the largest stimulus package in the bloc's history, an overall pot of 724 billion euros, including loans. The country was fastest out of the blocks in meeting Brussels' policy requirements and in receiving its funds, making it

a test-case for what Europe can achieve.

"We are the guinea pigs. Everything that is tested in Spain will then be applied to the other countries," Economy Minister Nadia Calvino said in February. "But it is in our interest that these funds are used to the maximum."

Leader...

FROM PAGE 1

Ayatollah Khamenei said the enemies' anti-Islamism was the result of perceiving the power of Islam in strengthening the Palestinian nation and other nations, adding, "Of course, by the grace of God and the vigilance of Muslim nations, this strategy will end up nowhere."

The Leader, referring to the pioneering of Imam Khomeini and the Islamic Republic in supporting the Palestinian issue, said, "This movement will continue and we hope that the beloved people of Iran will witness a day when Muslims of all Islamic countries will pray freely in al-Quds."

Meanwhile earlier addressing worshippers after the Eid al-Fitr Prayer, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution called on all walks of Iranian society to maintain and preserve unity and urged state officials to closely work hand in hand to resolve the existing problems and shortcomings.

He described this year's holy month of Ramadan as more passionate and vivacious than ever, especially as a large number of Iranian youths kept vigil across the country to mark Laylat al-Qadr, or the Nights of Destiny when the Holy Quran was revealed to Prophet Mohammad (PBUH).

"One of the characteristics of Ramadan is strengthening the willpower. Among the great and important features of fasting is the reinforcement of human will. Willpower is a trait that God has incorporated in human beings in order to move ahead and progress. State officials should take up the available opportunity. It is through strengthening of the willpower that the country's major problems can be resolved," Ayatollah Khamenei pointed out.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Ayatollah Khamenei termed full cooperation among the heads of Iran's three branches of power as an important and fundamental strategy, emphasizing that authorities must never get in each other's way but would rather facilitate the implementation of their plans.

"The three branches of power should work to enhance empathy and synergy within each other. If they cooperate with one another, things would then not get entangled. The branches should not hamper each other, and would rather pave the way for each other," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader also urged Iranian officials not to get distracted by trivial matters, and to focus mainly on how to overcome critical issues.

He called on the Iranian nation to preserve national unity, saying, "Enemy does not want such a unity to exist. Nowadays, the enemy's strategy is anchored in deception, falsehood, lure, distortion of facts as well as humiliation of nations. The enemy is trying to make nations pessimistic about each other and mask their capabilities."

Iran, India, Armenia...

FROM PAGE 1

In trilateral terms, the Iran-India-Armenia would-be axis is focused on trade, in particular a Persian Gulf-Black Sea trade route that would allow Indian goods to be shipped West.

"The Persian Gulf-Black Sea corridor fits well into India's plans as it looks for additional routes to reach Europe, circumventing the Suez Canal and avoiding the negative impact of Russia-West confrontation," the Indian newspaper Economic Times wrote on the occasion of a March 2023 trip by Armenian Foreign Minister Ararat Mirzoyan to New Delhi to drum up support for the idea. (Of course reaching the Black Sea would require another

leg beyond Armenia, presumably Georgia, though Tbilisi has evinced little interest in such a project thus far.)

"We are interested in advancing cooperation within the framework of North-South connectivity, as well as the Persian Gulf-Black Sea international transport corridor," Mirzoyan said in a January speech. "Armenia considers India's potential and prospective role for these projects as quite significant." Armenia "has sought Indian investments for the corridor in the Armenian territory," Economic Times reported, citing unnamed sources in the Armenian government.

EU Cut Winter Gas Use 18%, Surpassing Energy Crisis Goal

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - European Union countries slashed their gas consumption this winter, beating a target to cut gas use 15% in the coldest months as they attempted to tame Europe's energy crisis.

Overall gas use in the 27-country EU dropped by 17.7% from August to March, compared with the five-year average for the same period, according to data published by EU statistics office Eurostat.

EU countries set a voluntary target last year to cut their gas consumption 15% from August to March. The goal was one of numerous emergency EU measures passed after Russia slashed gas deliveries following its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine - triggering a European energy crisis of scarce supplies and record-high prices.

Most EU countries met the 15% target, and all but one - Malta - reduced their gas use in the period. Finland had the biggest reduction, with demand down by 56%, while Spain cut gas use 11% and in Malta, an island country and Europe's smallest gas user, consumption increased by 13%.

Europe experienced unusually warm winter weather, including spells of record-breaking temperatures that helped curb demand for gas in home heating.

Analysts have said Europe's lower winter gas use was driven by a combination of weather, policies to tackle the energy crisis, and industries curbing production in response to high gas costs.

Lower gas consumption has helped EU countries end winter with their storage caverns unusually full. Europe's gas caverns are currently filled to 57% of capacity, more than double the level at the same time last year, according to industry body Gas Infrastructure Europe.

European gas prices have tumbled since December amid relatively full storage, mild weather and reduced demand, and in recent weeks prices have retreated to levels not seen since before Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Iran Army...

FROM PAGE 1

The delivery of the new drones to the Army is part of an agreement reached with the Defense Ministry last year to boost the armed forces' drone power. Under the first phase of the agreement, the ministry has undertaken to equip the Army with 1,000 UAVs.

Meanwhile, head of Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) Brigadier General Afshin Khajeh Fard said on Friday that the country's Defense Ministry has achieved complete success to manufacture drone sub-systems and gain various drone products with different functions in a bid to provide the Army with a range of equipment.

Pointing to the mass delivery of new strategic drones to the Army, he said all the UAVs have been designed and manufactured by the knowledge-based companies affiliated with the Defense Ministry and their designers can make all the necessary changes to their details after receiving reactions.

No Limits to...

FROM PAGE 1

Al Nahyan then hailed the increase in the level of cooperation among regional countries in recent weeks, including the reconciliation between Tehran and Riyadh and new developments in Syria.

The two foreign ministers also extended their best wishes to one another on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, and exchanged viewpoints on bilateral, regional and international matters.

Earlier this month, Iran appointed Reza Ameri as its new envoy to the United Arab Emirates, ending a seven-year absence of an ambassador in the country.

Iran Seeks...

FROM PAGE 1

Danesh Jafari said Iran will seek to attract more investment from domestic and international investors to finish the construction of missing rail links on the INSTC, including a key railway project that connects the northern metropolis of Rasht to Astara on Iran's border with Azerbaijan.

That comes as Russia has already pledged financial support for a number of transport projects in Iran while India has also provided limited funding and equipment for a port development project in southeastern Iranian region of Chabahar.

It also comes after a senior aide to Russian President Vladimir Putin traveled to Iran in mid-January to monitor progress of works on Rasht-Astara railway, a project to which Russia has committed funds.

IRGC's Strategic...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's Revolution Guard Corps, also known as the 'Sepah', was established on April 22, 1979, by the founder of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khomeini as a paramilitary organization charged with protecting the newborn Islamic Republic. The force closely cooperates with the Iranian Army in the face of foreign threats as it was manifested during the 8-year war that was imposed by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein to Iran in the 1980s.

China's Refineries...

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In April, PetroChina received a Urals crude cargo of 1 million barrels via Myanmar's Made Island port, which is linked by pipeline to its Yunnan refinery, the Kpler data showed.

PetroChina, Hengli and Shenghong did not reply to requests for comment.

China's overall Russian crude imports, including pipeline and ships, rose to a record 9.61 million tons, or 2.26 million barrels per day (bpd) in March, customs data showed on Friday.

Around 700,000 bpd of Urals may reach China in April, up from 600,000 bpd in March, she said.

Russia's oil exports from western ports will rise to the highest since 2019, despite Moscow's pledge to cut output.

Discounts for Urals crude arriving to China in July have narrowed to about \$9-\$10 a barrel to ICE Brent futures on a delivered ex-ship (DES) basis, from around \$14 a barrel for March arrivals, traders said.

According to Reuters, similarly, ESPO for June delivery has traded at discounts of about \$5.50 a barrel to ICE Brent futures, they added, up from discounts of \$6 and \$8.50 a barrel for cargoes arriving in May and March, respectively.

Smaller Chinese independent refineries, known as teapots, snapped up almost all of the ESPO supplies between November and January when others steered clear of Russian oil around the start of the European Union ban on Dec. 5.

Kim A-lim Leads LPGA Chevron Championship

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - South Korea's Kim A-lim closed with back-to-back birdies to grab the lead in the weather-hit second round of the LPGA Chevron Championship, the first women's golf major of the year. Kim had eight birdies in her seven-under par 65 on the Jack Nicklaus Signature course at The Woodlands near Houston, Texas. She capped her round with birdies at the eighth and ninth holes, rolling in a putt from off the green at the eighth then sticking her approach shot at the ninth inches from the cup for a tap-in and the outright lead on eight-under par 136.

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Cantlay and Schauffele Set Records

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Reigning Olympic champion Xander Schauffele and Patrick Cantlay set records but the U.S. duo of Wyndham Clark and Beau Hossler held the lead at the PGA Zurich Classic. Defending champions Cantlay and Schauffele, ranked fourth and fifth in the world respectively, combined to shoot a tournament-record foursomes round of nine-under par 63 in the second round of the only PGA pairs event.

Nuggets Take 3-0 Lead Over Timberwolves, Knicks Dominate Cavs

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Denver Nuggets, fueled by a Nikola Jokic triple-double, beat Minnesota 120-111 to take a 3-0 stranglehold on their NBA Western Conference playoff series as the New York Knicks and Atlanta Hawks notched big home wins.

The Knicks had Madison Square Garden rocking with a dominant 99-79 victory over the Cleveland Cavaliers that put New York up 2-1.

The Hawks clawed back to 2-1 after dropping the first two games against the Celtics in Boston with a 130-122 triumph.

Atlanta crucially avoided falling into a 3-0 hole -- a deficit no NBA team has ever recovered from to win a best-of-seven series.

And that's exactly where Western Conference top seeds Denver have the Timberwolves after two-time reigning NBA Most Valuable Player Jokic's seventh career playoff triple-double.

Jokic scored 20 points with 11 rebounds and 12 assists, and when he was limited by foul trouble in the third quarter his teammates kept the pressure on.

Michael Porter Jr scored 25 points to lead six Nuggets players in double figures and Denver's reserves out-scored the Timberwolves bench 29-10.

They kept the Timberwolves at bay despite a sparkling 36 points from Anthony Edwards, whose three-pointer early in the third pulled Minnesota within three points.

They were down by five with less than five minutes remaining, but couldn't break through. Jokic, who led the league with 29 triple-doubles in the regular season, said he knows they'll be even more determined on Sunday to prevent a sweep on their home floor.

In New York, Jalen Brunson scored 21 points and RJ Barrett added 19 for the Knicks, who rebounded from a humbling game two defeat in Cleveland.

The Knicks' suffocating defense contributed to a dismal night for Cleveland's Darius Garland, who missed 17 of his 21 shot attempts on the way to 10 points.

Donovan Mitchell scored 22 to lead the Cavs, who became the first team this season to be held under 80 points in an NBA game.



To top it off, Garland -- who scored 32 points in the Cavs' win on Tuesday -- needed treatment on his left ankle in the second half after stepping on a courtside photographer's foot.

The game was the first playoff contest at Madison Square Garden in two years and the "chaos" that New York native and Cavs star Mitchell predicted materialized.

Both teams made sloppy starts in the raucous atmosphere, but the Knicks steadied to take a 13-point halftime lead that they pushed to as many as 27.

In Atlanta, Trae Young scored 32 points and Dejounte Murray added 25 as the hot-shooting Hawks clawed back into their series against the Celtics.

Young shook off two sub-par performances with a stellar display, connecting on 12 of 22 shots from the field with six rebounds and nine assists.

"Our whole team was making plays all night and it was up to me to go make the right one," Young said. "It's not only to score, sometimes it's to get everybody involved."

He also produced a pair of blocks as the Hawks out-hustled the second-seeded Celtics -- who fell to Golden State in the NBA Finals last year.

Jayson Tatum scored 29 points and grabbed 10 rebounds for Boston. Marcus Smart added 24 and Jaylen Brown had 15 for the Celtics, who drained 21 three-pointers but were out-rebounded 48-29.

Smart said there was no secret to the Hawks' advantage on the boards, which led to their 23-9 edge in second-chance points.

Tatum still had a chance to tie it with 58.1 seconds left but his three-point attempt bounced off the rim and the Hawks pulled away.

James Brushes Off Brooks Trash Talk

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Los Angeles Lakers star LeBron James declined to be drawn into a war of words with Memphis Grizzlies forward Dillon Brooks on Friday as he prepared for game three of the teams' NBA playoff series.

"The game is won in between the four lines," James said at a media availability on Friday when asked about Brooks's brash remarks after the Grizzlies tied the series at 1-1 with a game-two win.

"Always has (been), always will be."

Brooks, 27, drew James into a verbal back and fourth during game two in Memphis on Wednesday, and was unrepentant afterward at taking on the 38-year-old four-time champion.

"I don't care -- he's old," Brooks said of the NBA's all-time scoring leader. "I poke bears."

James briskly deflected several questions about Brooks's comments before ending his media session at the team's training facility.

"I don't want to talk much more," he said. "I'm not here for the bullshit. I'm ready to play."

James and the Lakers grabbed the first game of the series on the second-seeded Grizzlies' home floor before a disappointing game-two defeat against a Memphis team missing injured star Ja Morant.

NBA Raptors Fire Nurse as Coach

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - Nick Nurse, who masterminded Toronto's run to the 2019 NBA title, was fired as head coach of the Raptors after the club missed the 2023 NBA playoffs.

Raptors president Masai Ujiri announced the move, saying the team needed a "reset" after a 41-41 campaign and a loss to Chicago in a play-in game.

"The decision to make a change like this is never arrived at easily or taken lightly, especially when it comes to a person who has been an integral part of this franchise's most historic accomplishments, and who has been a steady leader through some of our team's most challenging times," Ujiri said.

"This is an opportunity for us to reset, to refocus, to put into place the personnel and the players who will help us reach our goal of winning our next championship."

Nurse, a 55-year-old American, spent 11 seasons coaching in Europe, guiding Birmingham and Manchester to British league crowns. He joined the Raptors in 2013 as an assistant coach under Dwane Casey and replaced Casey in the top job after the Raptors were swept in the second round of the 2018 playoffs.

Nurse directed the Raptors to the 2019 NBA crown, defeating the two-time defending champion Golden State Warriors in the finals. In 2020, Nurse was named the NBA Coach of the Year.

But Toronto missed the playoffs in 2021, lost to Philadelphia in the first round last year and squandered a 19-point lead in losing to Chicago in a play-in home game earlier this month.

Top Seed Rune Rolls Into Munich Semis

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Defending champion Holger Rune coasted into the semi-finals of the ATP tournament in Munich with a 6-2, 6-4 win over Chilean Cristian Garin.

The 19-year-old Rune is through to his fourth semi-final appearance of the year and will face Australian outsider Christopher O'Connell for a shot at the title. "Today was tricky, especially in the second set," Rune said.

Alcaraz Keeps Title Defense on Track in Barcelona



The teenager broke in the first game of the match but Davidovich Fokina hit back for 3-all before Alcaraz soon regained the upper hand. However, he failed to close out the first set when serving at 5-4 and Davidovich Fokina

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz stayed on course to defend his Barcelona Open title as he defeated Alejandro Davidovich Fokina 7-6 (7/5), 6-4 to move into the semi-finals.

Alcaraz's build-up to the French Open next month has been slowed by hand and back problems which forced him to pull out of Monte Carlo, and the top seed was made to work hard by Davidovich Fokina.

Alcaraz will face Dan Evans for a place in the final after the 26th-ranked Briton defeated Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

fought his way to within two points of taking the opener in the tie-break.

Alcaraz though held his nerve as the 38th-ranked Spaniard faltered, with Davidovich Fokina belting a forehand long to eventually surrender the set.

The US Open champion saved six break points in the third game of the second set and then broke immediately after for a 3-1 advantage.

Davidovich Fokina again responded to get back on serve, and it stayed that way until Alcaraz broke in the final game to seal victory.

"It was really tough for me," said Alcaraz. "I started playing pretty well, serving for the first set. I was not able to win that game. I was going really fast, a lot of things on my mind."

"After the first set I was talking to myself, positive things, trying to play long rallies, trying to be there through the points, trying to feel more comfortable with myself."

Alcaraz will face Dan Evans for a place in the final after the 26th-ranked Briton defeated Francisco Cerundolo of Argentina 2-6, 7-5, 6-3.

Arsenal's Title Hopes On Rocks

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal staged an incredible late fightback to rescue a 3-3 draw against Southampton, but the Premier League leaders were still left frustrated by a damaging result that put their title challenge in jeopardy.

Mikel Arteta's side escaped with a point despite trailing 3-1 with just two minutes of normal time left at the Emirates Stadium.

Martin Odegaard's goal sparked Arsenal's revival and Bukayo Saka snatched the equaliser in stoppage-time.

But, despite the thrilling escape, Arteta finished with his head in hands because the Gunners will travel to second placed Manchester City on Wednesday knowing it is Pep Guardiola's team who control the destiny of the title.

Arsenal are five points clear of City, but the champions have two games in hand due to their involvement in the FA Cup semi-finals against Sheffield United on Saturday.

If City win or draw against Arsenal and then win their remaining matches, they will be crowned champions no matter what the north Londoners do.

After blowing successive two-goal leads in damaging 2-2 draws against West Ham and Liverpool in their previous two matches, Arsenal at least showed tremendous spirit to reverse the trend.

"Obviously unhappy with the result. We made it very difficult again for ourselves," Arteta said.



Djokovic Searching for Clay Upswing

BANJA LUKA (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic admitted he needs to raise his game considerably ahead of the French Open next month after suffering a shock quarter-final defeat by Dusan Lajovic in Banja Luka.

The world number one was far from his best as he lost 6-4, 7-6 (8/6) to the 70th-ranked Lajovic, having previously dropped just four games across two previous meetings with his Serbian compatriot.

"I was many levels below what I want," said Djokovic, who converted only one of 16 break points and let three set points slip in the second-set tie-break.

"Playing like that, I can't win against opponents who are so solid on this surface. But what can I do? It's simply sport. I was trying but it wasn't working."

"I didn't feel very good physically on court. My legs were slow, I missed a lot of balls. I played well at times, but generally well below standard."

With Rafael Nadal's status for Roland Garros uncertain and Carlos Alcaraz also working his way back from injury, Djokovic is targeting a record 23rd men's Grand Slam title at the French Open.

But his form since returning to action after missing tournaments at Indian Wells and Miami last month over his refusal to get a Covid-19 vaccination is cause for concern.

He has also alluded to a problem with his elbow, which hampered him during his last-16 loss in Monte Carlo last week and was "not in ideal condition" in Banja Luka.

