

Defense and Intelligence Chiefs From Turkey, Russia, Syria and Iran Will Meet in Moscow Today to Find a Solution to the Existing Issues, Turkish Defense Minister Hulusi Akar Said on Monday

Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei Expressed Condolences Over the Passing of the Iranian Poet Abbas Baratipour Who Passed Away on Friday at the Age of 80

2

DOMESTIC

Iran to Continue Support For Palestinian People, Resistance Groups



> SEE PAGE 2

3

DOMESTIC

Bulgaria Explores Ways to Broaden Trade With Iran



> SEE PAGE 3

4

INTERNATIONAL

Foreign States Rush to Evacuate From Sudan



> SEE PAGE 4

8

SPORTS

Sixers Sweep Nets to Advance, Suns on Brink



> SEE PAGE 8

Iran Hacks Two Spy Planes Simultaneously Near Borders

TEHRAN (MNA) – CEO of the Iranian Defense Ministry's Electronics Industries Rear Admiral Amir Rastegari announced the hacking of two spy planes by electronic warfare systems near the air borders of the country.

"Some time ago an enemy aircraft moved within our FIR [Flight information region] borders and started emitting waves to gather intelligence, we disrupted the activity of the aircraft. The pilot of the aircraft thought that the system had a problem, so he called the base that the aircraft system had a problem and I will return; we have their conversations," said Rastegari in an interview with Tasnim news agency.

"The next day, two more planes flew and started spying, this time we disrupted both of them because we have achieved the capability in that bandwidth," he added.

Rastegari went on to say, "We have been engaged in electronic warfare for many years to protect the country's space and air border, and every attacker who has tested it has realized our power."

Afghanistan Rulers Confirm Iran Right of Hirmand Water

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has said that the Taliban government of Afghanistan, unlike the former Afghan administrations have confirmed Iran's right to Hirmand River, and emphasized the need to direct it towards Iran as soon as possible.

Amirabdollahian said that during the past 18 months upon an order issued by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi, the foreign ministry got involved in serious talks with the caretaker and the interim rulers of Afghanistan, and the President's Special Envoy in Afghanistan Affairs Kazemi Qomi, too pursued the matter incessantly, while Iran's Energy Minister has pursued the matter as well seriously side by side of the foreign ministry's concerned officials.

"In my recent negotiations with the caretaker of Afghanistan Foreign Ministry, too, I pursued the issue of Iran's right of the Hirmand River," added Amirabdollahian.

He said that those collective efforts will continue till achieving the desired result.

"Iranian citizens of Sistan are quite right in their protests about this issue, and the esteemed president, too, has repeatedly emphasized on the great importance of this issue and the need to resolve the problem through diplomatic efforts," Amirabdollahian said.

Iran Defense Equipment Entering Global Market



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Iran Aviation Industries Organization (IAIO) has highlighted the country's self-reliance in manufacturing military equipment, including drones, saying many countries want to purchase the Iranian defense products.

Speaking at AJA University of Command and Staff on Monday, Brigadier General Afshin Khajeh Fard hailed the achievements made in the field of producing unmanned aerial vehicles (UAVs) and manned drones with fixed and moving wings.

"At first, we tried to purchase [military] equipment, but we did not succeed due to Western sanctions. Today, however, we have reached a [level of] capability to receive numerous requests from different countries for purchase [of our defense equipment] and cooperation," he said.

"Unfortunately, the trust in domestic products is still low in our society, but the numerous requests for the purchase of equipment, as well as unmanned and manned drones, indicate the high status of this capability. Therefore, we should increase the domestic power and upgrade our beliefs."

The general also noted that the IAIO has managed to keep the country's helicopter, commercial and fighter fleets ready for use despite wholesale sanctions targeting the defense sector.

"Many countries meet their [military] needs by purchasing the most advanced equipment and fighter jets, but we face extensive restrictions in procuring the equipment due to sanctions and pressure," he added.

"As a result, we moved towards overhauling, maintaining and reconstructing our equipment that was damaged during the [1980s Iraqi imposed] war. After the reconstruction of all damaged choppers, we focused on producing indigenous helicopters and fighter jets."

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made substantial headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities, hitting back at the enemies for disputing the country's missile program.

OIC, Arab League Decry Israeli Assaults on Muslim, Christian Sanctities in al-Quds

CAIRO (Dispatches) - The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) and the Arab League strongly condemned the Israeli regime's escalations and repeated assaults on sacred Muslim and Christian sites in the occupied Old City of al-Quds, particularly the recent incursion into a prayer area at the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The general secretariat of 57-member OIC, in a statement on Sunday, deplored such attacks as a flagrant violation of international law, Geneva Conventions, and international resolutions, saying the attacks amount to incitement and a serious provocation to the feelings of some two billion Muslims worldwide.

The organization held Israeli authorities fully responsible for the dire repercussions of daily assaults on sacred places in al-Quds, calling on the international community to assume its responsibilities and put an end to repeated Israeli violations, which would fuel religious conflict and extremism and lead to instability throughout the region.

Assistant Secretary-General for Palestine and the Occupied Arab Territories in the Arab League, Saeed Abu Ali, also censured Israeli assaults on Muslim and Christian sanctities as an act of deliberate desecration and vandalism, warning against the adverse consequences of such measures.

Abu Ali noted that Israeli troops resumed their assaults on al-Aqsa Mosque on the second day of the Eid al-Fitr holiday, which marks the end of the holy fasting month of Ramadan, by breaking into the Bab al-Rahma (The Gate of Mercy) prayer area.

He said that the sacrilegious move and deliberate act of sabotage resulted in serious damage to the electrical wiring, doors and stuff inside the quarter, which is an integral part of al-Aqsa Mosque.

According to Palestinian news outlets, Israeli forces stormed the Bab al-Rahma prayer area on Saturday and inflicted great damage inside, as Muslim worshippers were celebrating the Eid al-Fitr holiday.

The Israeli troops also assaulted Palestinian youths, who were on their way to perform the Eid prayers, beating them with sticks near the Lions' Gate in occupied al-Quds.

Palestinian resistance groups Hamas and the Islamic Jihad have condemned the Israeli acts of violence and vowed to defend their sanctities in the face of the regime's assaults.

During the holy month of Ramadan, Israeli authorities imposed strict restrictions on the entry and exit of Palestinians to and from the gates of al-Aqsa Mosque. Amid heightened tensions with Palestinian worshippers, Israeli settlers also pressed ahead with their frequent incursions and provocative rituals at the holy site.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



Ramadan Brings Hope for Palestinian Struggle for Freedom

Muslims worldwide ended the holy month of Ramadan with celebrating Eid al-Fitr and this year's Ramadan injected new life into Palestinian struggle for freedom and Muslims across the world this year showed more support for Palestinians and it is a sign of hope for liberation of Palestine and decline of the fake Israel.

This year's Eid al-Fitr was held worldwide with more support for Palestine and its freedom and this is an alarm for the Zionist regime which uses force to stop Palestinians.

A senior Iranian diplomat praised Palestinians for their significant presence at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound as they performed Eid al-Fitr prayers, stating that the holy fasting month of Ramadan breathes new life into the Palestinian struggle for freedom, and pushes it closer to final liberation from the Israeli occupation.

"Every year in the holy month of Ramadan, the cause for the liberation of Palestine gets a new life and the sacred city of al-Quds moves closer to freedom," Spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry Nasser Kanaani wrote in a post published on his Twitter page on Saturday.

He added, "Palestine, as always, shone brightly during this year's Ramadan, both in the struggle for liberation and mass [Eid] prayers at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound."

Kanaani wrote in a separate Twitter post that the state of affairs across the occupied Palestinian lands is now in greater disarray.

He said while extremist Jewish settlers are more desperate than ever before, Palestinians espouse stronger beliefs and are more determined about complete liberation of Palestine and destruction of "the cancerous tumor of Israel".

On Friday, a total of 120,000 Palestinian worshippers performed the Eid al-Fitr prayers at the sacred al-Aqsa Mosque compound despite strict measures taken by Israel.

The official Palestinian news agency Wafa said Israeli forces assaulted Palestinian youths, beating them with sticks near the Lions' Gate in occupied al-Quds, as they were on their way to perform the Eid prayers. **See Page 7**

EU States Importing Iranian Oil Despite U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Three European Union (EU) countries imported oil from Iran in 2022 despite US sanctions that impose penalties on governments and entities involved in energy trade with Iran.

Figures by EU's statistics agency Eurostat covered in a Sunday report by the IRNA news agency showed that the bloc's imports of crude oil from Iran had reached 4,181 metric tons (mt) last year.

EU importers of Iranian oil shipments were Romania, Poland and Bulgaria, according to the Eurostat figures which indicated that over 4,000 mt of the shipments ended up in Romania.

The figures showed that Bulgaria was the latest EU country to start oil imports from Iran since 2018 when the United States imposed its sanctions on Tehran.

Bulgaria took delivery of a 168 mt of oil from Iran in December and continued imports in January this year by receiving an 83-mt shipment.

The IRNA said in its report that EU's imports of Iranian oil, although very small in amount, is a sign that European countries tend to ignore the US sanctions on Iran amid a crunch in global energy markets that has been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

The report said the fact that an EU agency has mentioned Iranian oil imports in its official figures shows that the bloc wants to signal its dissatisfaction with US policy of keeping sanctions on Iran.

Washington imposed sanctions on Iran in early 2018 after a former US administration decided to unilaterally withdraw from an international deal on Iran's nuclear program.

Sokhan Gostar Institute
IRAN NEWS
PRIVATE ENGLISH
NEWSPAPER IN IRAN

Advertisement Department
021-4425335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

Iran Has First Female Sea Captain

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian woman, who previously grabbed the attention of media and state officials as the first female seafarer of Iran, has made history for this time around after being promoted to the rank of naval captain.

Raheleh Tahmasbi started her seafaring career in 2010 with a sailor certificate in Bandar Lengeh port city, southern Iran.

After 7 years of relentless efforts and seafaring activity, she was promoted to the rank of a lieutenant officer. The same year, Tahmasbi was chosen as Iran's exemplary seafarer and the first female one.

Iran to Continue Support For Palestinian People, Resistance Groups

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has reaffirmed its commitment to the cause of Palestine, saying it will continue to support the Palestinian resistance against the Zionist regime's acts of aggression.

Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remark in an early Monday phone call with Ismail Haniyeh, head of the political bureau of the Gaza Strip-based Hamas resistance movement.

Referring to the remarks made by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei in a meeting with the ambassadors of the Islamic countries on the occasion of Eid al-Fitr, Iran's top diplomat stressed that the Islamic Republic will continue its spiritual and political support for Palestinian people and resistance groups.

During the Saturday meeting with Muslim diplomats in Tehran, Ayatollah Khamenei said the focus of the Muslim world should be on strengthening Palestinian combatants at a time when Israel is rapidly approaching its end.

The head of Hamas' political bureau, for his part, reaffirmed the serious resolve of



Palestinian people and resistance groups to continue resistance against the Zionist regime's acts of aggression.

Haniyeh also hailed a recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations, saying the agreement will benefit both countries and the entire region.

He added that the Zionist regime is quite angry about the agreement.

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

President to Visit Several African States

TEHRAN (MNA) - Director General of the Africa Department at Iran's Foreign Ministry says that Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi will visit several African countries in the first half of the current Iranian year.

Valiollah Mohammadi Nasrabadi in an interview with the ISNA news agency said that according to the plans, President will visit several African countries in the first half of the Iranian calendar (starting on March 21).

The presidents of several African countries have been also invited to visit Tehran, he added, saying that some high-ranking officials from some of the countries of the African continent have expressed their interest in visiting Tehran.

"According to the measures that have been taken, we predict that Iran's trade with the countries of the African continent will increase to more than two billion dollars this year," Nasrabadi noted.

Iraq President To Visit Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iraqi Foreign Minister Fuad Hussein once has hailed the resumption of Tehran-Riyadh relations while announcing that Iraq's President Abdul Latif Rashid will pay an official visit to Iran in the near future.

Hussein made the announcement in a phone conversation with his Iranian counterpart Hossein Amirabdollahian.

During the phone talk, the Iranian foreign minister felicitated the blessed Fitr Eid to him and the Iraqi nation, and exchanged views with him on issues of mutual interest, including the upcoming visit of the president of Iraq to Iran, and some regional and international developments.

Hussain and Amirabdollahian in their phone talk also reviewed ways for comprehensive expansion of strategic cooperation and stressed the need for continuous consultations on various issues of mutual interest.

Gas Shortage Affecting Iran Export of Petrochemicals

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian official says the export of some petrochemical products has considerably fallen due to natural gas shortage since the beginning of new Iranian year.

Secretary General of the Petrochemical Industry Employers Association, Ahmad Mahdavi Abhari, told ILNA news agency that the export of urea and methanol has decreased by 2.5 million tons since March 21, due to lack of natural gas needed at plants.

He said this will lead to a \$700 million drop in exports because compared to last year the figure has decreased by 20-25%.

Iran has been facing a serious gas shortage since last year, and even the volume of country's gas shortage reached 300 million cubic meters per day in winter.

The Islamic Republic's petrochemical sector needs natural gas to operate, and producers sustain losses because of shortages.

The other export-oriented sector, the steel industry, needs a lot of electricity generated by gas-based power plants and some plants have been intermittently idle in the past months.

Russian Envoy Says Dedollarization Process To Be Continued



TEHRAN (IP) - The Russian ambassador in Tehran emphasized that the process of dedollarization will continue.

The visits and talks between the officials of Iran and Russia, in bilateral or multilateral formats, have increased proportionately and taken a more serious form.

Dedollarization refers to countries reducing reliance on the U.S. dollar as a reserve currency, medium of exchange or as a unit of account.

The relations between Iran and Russia have expanded both in bilateral dimensions and in the shadow of regional and international developments.

Russian ambassador to Tehran, Alexey Dedov, talking about the increase in the use of national currencies in regional and international exchanges, said that the process of dedollarization will continue and expand.

The Russian ambassador to Tehran added: "The dynamics of relations and cooperation between Russia and Iran is very high, and it is developing in different directions."

Alexey Dedov, referring to the preparation of the long-term cooperation document between the two sides, said that this document is a very strong agreement that covers almost all aspects of cooperation between Iran and Russia.

The Russian ambassador to Tehran welcomed the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume bilateral relations and said that this will greatly improve the entire regional situation in West Asia and beyond.

Dedov also talked about the war in Ukraine: "We offered to negotiate, but the West and Ukraine did not want to pay any attention."

Tehran Thanks Ankara for Helping Open Interest Section in Albania

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian announced on Saturday that his ministry had agreed to the opening of the Iranian interest section in Albania through Turkey, and thanked the Turkish government for its good offices.

Amirabdollahian made the announcement as he talked to his Turkish counterpart Mevlut Cavusoglu on the phone on the occasion of the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr.

The top Iranian diplomat congratulated the Turkish government and people on the occasion, and thanked Ankara for its good offices regarding the opening of the Iranian interest section in Albania.

The Turkish diplomat congratulated the Iranian people on Eid al-Fitr as well, and stressed the importance of the further development of ties between the two countries.

U.S. Seeks to Sell More Weapons Through Fueling Iranophobia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has dismissed hostile remarks by the US secretary of state against its military program, saying the country's defense power is merely intended for deterrence and defense purposes and is not against any country.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a press release on Thursday that the US is "firmly committed to disrupting Iran's military procurement activities," adding that Washington was designating entities from Iran and China for what he called involvement in destabilizing behavior.

In a statement, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani repudiated those "provocative comments," arguing that they were made with the sole purpose of marketing US-built ammunition through "the failed project of Iranophobia and creating divisions among regional countries."

"In contrast to the ill-advised remarks by the US regime's secretary of state, the Islamic Republic of Iran has always placed emphasis on regional dialogue, collaboration and cooperation in order to ensure the security and common interests of regional countries without foreign interference," he said.

Iran to Increase Oil Production From Resalat Oilfield

TEHRAN (IRNA) - A contractor at the Resalat Oil Field from the Iranian Offshore Oil Company (IOOC) says oil production from the field would increase with the installation of a new drilling rig in the vicinity of the DP-R1 platform in the oilfield, which is located in the Lavan region in the Persian Gulf.

Pouya Maarefi said that a first phase of the development project at Resalat oilfield will include the construction of a new platform, cable and pipe laying operations, as well as repair works and upgrade on an existing platform. Maarefi added that the project would lead to an increase in oil production from the field by 11,000 barrels per day.

He said the construction of a new platform for Resalat oilfield had started in March 2023 in Khorramshahr, in southwest Iran.

WHO Has Confirmed Eradication of Measles and Rubella in Iran

TEHRAN (IFP) - Health Minister Bahram Einollahi says the World Health Organization has confirmed Iran's successful eradicating of measles and rubella.

Einollahi added that WHO wrote Iran a letter to this effect.

He noted that the country has already effectively eradicated a number of other diseases.

The health minister further reiterated that the accomplishment was made by the Iranian scientists despite anti-Iran sanctions by the US and some of its allies. Einollahi noted that Iran's achievement comes at a time when many European countries have yet to receive a letter from WHO approving their elimination of measles and rubella.

The health minister expressed hope that with the joint efforts of people and the healthcare system of Iran, other contagious diseases will be stamped out in the near future. Einollahi made those comments in Shiraz, the provincial capital of Far Province, where he has visited the Health Ministry's development projects in recent days. According to the WHO health profile, Iran has done a better job than many countries including the US in terms of controlling many contagious diseases like leprosy, dengue fever, tularemia and hepatitis B.

E-Commerce Accounts for 70% of Postal Traffic in Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Electronic commerce accounts for more than 70 percent of postal traffic in Iran, an Iranian official has said.

Mohammad-Reza Ghaderi, a senior official involved in organization of Iran's POSTEXPO, said on Monday that postal services in Iran are no longer limited to letter delivery and similar services.

Ghaderi said that postal services are currently regarded as the infrastructure for expansion of e-commerce services in the world. He said that a significant section of Iran's POSTEXPO exhibition will be dedicated to logistic services related to e-commerce.

Water Supply to Villages of Fereydoonshahr Priority of ABFA of Isfahan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN - The CEO of Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company (ABFA of Isfahan) during the meeting for reviewing the allocated credits for projects in Fereydoonshahr district said that the timely implementation trend of the jihadi water supply project to the villages of Fereydoonshahr is one of the priorities of the company this year.

Hossein Akbarian said that there are 84 villages with total population of 16,700 in Fereydoonshahr area, adding that in the form of jihadi water supply project in cooperation with Basij and the IRGC, drinking water will be supplied to 23 villages in Fereydoonshahr and this project is strongly underway in the first half of the year and it will be accelerated.

He added that currently only 37 villages of Fereydoonshahr are under coverage of ABFA of Isfahan services but the company gives services to under covered villages but villagers need to come under full coverage of the company for favorable and continuous.

Akbarian noted that so far 8,024 subscriptions have been given to the applicants in the towns of Fereydoonshahr and Anbar and the company is determined to expand its services for more people in Fereydoonshahr.

He then pointed to the earmarked credits for the projects of this year in Fereydoonshahr and reiterated that timely water supply to the villages of Fereydoonshahr is the priority of the company this year.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:02
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:04
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:46
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:18

106. "Nor call on any, other than Allah.- Such will neither profit thee nor hurt thee: if thou dost, behold! thou shalt certainly be of those who do wrong."

107. If Allah do touch thee with hurt, there is none can remove it but He: if He do design some benefit for thee, there is none can keep back His favour: He causeth it to reach whomsoever of His servants He pleaseth. And He is the Oft-Forgiving, Most Merciful.

Surah 10. Jonah (106 - 107)

Bulgaria Explores Ways to Broaden Trade With Iran

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Bulgaria Embassy's Counsellor on Economic Affairs Stoil Zlatarski in meeting with the caretaker of the international affairs of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Ms. Niloofer Asadi explored ways for broadening trade between the two states and reiterated that signing agreement on rail cooperation can be a solution for bilateral trade.

Zlatarski met Asadi at Iran Chamber of Commerce while Head of Iran-Bulgaria Joint Commercial Committee and Head of Europe desk of ICCIMA were present.

In the meeting, Ms. Asadi said that talks with embassies and chambers of commerce of target countries for broadening economic cooperation is on the agenda of the ICCIMA and Bulgaria is one of the target countries.

She added that despite sanctions and existing problems, the relation between Tehran and Sofia has enjoyed an upward growth and in the past two years and with cooperation of the Iran-Bulgaria Joint Economic Committee and the foreign ministry, several trade delegations have been exchanged between the two states.

She noted that ICCIMA believes exchange of delegation has a brilliant role in broadening bilateral relation between Iran and Bulgaria.

Asadi further said that the 20th joint economic commission of Iran and Bulgaria will be held in Tehran this year and called on Bulgaria's chamber of commerce to send a delegation to Tehran and in return ICCIMA can hold a webinar in collaboration with Bulgaria's Chamber of Commerce for acquaintance of Iranian traders and companies with existing trade potentials in both countries.

She also pointed to the problems of visas and transit and also transportation in Europe and said that signing agreements on rail cooperation between the two states will be a solution for bilateral trade and in between, the role of chambers of commerce of both countries as well as the joint committee is very bold.

She termed agriculture, tourism, energy and modern irrigation methods as the prioritized fields for broadening bilateral relation.



Asadi also urged Bulgaria's Embassy to accept the recommendation letters of ICCIMA for easing visa process for traders.

Then Zlatarski, for his part, said that last year the trade exchange between the two countries grew by 40% and there are suitable potentials for multiplying the trade volume between the two states.

He added that he was present in the meeting for coordinating the 20th joint economic commission but due to changes of governments there was no time for reviewing the outcome of the meetings and expressed hope in the upcoming weeks and with deployment of the new government in Bulgaria it can have required readiness for holding the joint commission.

He added that in case Bulgarian companies apply for talks with their Iranian counterpart, the embassy will inform the ICCIMA and connect the both sides together for preparing the ground for travel and cooperation.

Zlatarski also announced readiness of Bulgaria for pursuing agreements on rail cooperation between the two countries and holding the 20th joint commission.

Reacting to Ms. Asadi's proposal for introducing reputed and trustable parties by chambers of commerce for accelerating trade exchanges, the Bulgarian diplomat welcomed it and said that he as the representative of Bulgaria's Chamber of Commerce announces the readiness for cooperation in this regard.

Meanwhile in the meeting Iranian side announced readiness of Iranian startups and knowledge-based companies for activities in Bulgaria.

The 19th joint summit of economic cooperation between Iran and Bulgaria was held in 2018. The 20th round of this summit was scheduled to be held in 2022 but it was postponed due to the domestic developments in Bulgaria.

Gohar Zamin Co. Sets First Records of Year

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – In line with materializing the slogan of the year, Gohar Zamin Iron Ore Company set its first monthly production of the year.

According to the public relations of the company, Gohar Zamin set records for monthly production of concentrate, pellets and ore fine.

As per report, the company in the first month of the new year produced 989,251 tons of ore fine, 614,313 tons of concentrate and 512,947 tons of pellet which are the new records for monthly production in the company and it reveals the strong determination of the company for marching towards materializing its macro targets.

This big mining company in its strategic plans for the New Year has focused on reforming consumption model, reducing extra costs for minimizing the final cost of products based on all environmental standards with reliance on the knowledge-based companies' capacities.



All Projects in EORC Have Economic Justification

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – The ceremony for marking the national day for human resources was held at Esfahan Oil Refining Company (EORC) and during the ceremony the CEO of the company reiterated all projects in the company have economic justification.

Addressing the ceremony, the CEO of the company Dr. Mohsen Ghadiri hailed the efforts of the staff of the company in the human resources sector and said that rationality, spirituality and economy are three indicators of progress in any country and the company intends to reinforce these three factors among its staff to reach its goals.

He reiterated that implementing justice regarding the human forces should be taken into consideration in all organs and expressed that the company has exerted its power to look at all of its staff from the top to the bottom equally and to offer equal services.

Mr. Ghadiri further said that all should put on their agenda of their working and personal life justice-orientation and spreading justice.

He further said that team work and consultation are on the agenda for implementing the works in all sectors and think-tanks are held for all projects and sometimes for an issue and strategy they had 100 meetings.

Ghadiri reiterated that using capacities of the elites has been always under emphasis in the recent year, reiterating that in the mentioned period 650 elites have been hired and this figure will hit 10,000 by 2026.

He further said that all projects and programs of the company on the agenda have economic justification, adding that 400 projects are on the agenda to prevent crude sales and reaching high profitability.

Ghadiri noted that the company is to import new technology composite blanket. He reiterated they are doomed to reach success in the company and will not spare any effort to achieve their goals.



Iran Exports to China Decrease

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Official Chinese customs data show imports from Iran were \$2.9 billion in the first quarter of 2023, which is a decline of more than 41% compared to the first quarter of 2022.

However, according to the Chinese Customs Office, China exported more than four billion dollars of goods to Iran in the mentioned period which is 52% more compared to the same period last year.

The reasons for the significant drop in Iran's exports to China are not clear, but during the past months, Iranian economic experts and businessmen had said that the Russian products are winning the Chinese market.

Earlier, Amin Ebrahimi, CEO of Iran's Khuzestan Steel Company, stated in an interview that by supplying steel below world prices, Russia has captured the markets that Iran had created for itself during four decades of sanctions.

Iran to Launch Regular Weekly Flights to Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran is planning to launch regular weekly flights to Saudi Arabia based on an official request from Riyadh and amid an improvement in bilateral relations between the two countries.

Iran's transportation minister Mehrdad Bazrpash said on Sunday that Saudi authorities had asked Iran to launch three regular flights per week to the Arab country.

Bazrpash said the flights will be launched regardless of arrangements existing between the two countries about flights carrying Iranian pilgrims to hajj ceremony in Saudi Arabia.

"Launching flights between Iran and Saudi Arabia, in addition to hajj flights, has been taken into consideration in order to expand collaborations," said the minister, adding that Iran will do its best to launch the flights.

The announcement comes amid plans by Iran and Saudi Arabia to reopen embassies and to restore diplomatic relations some seven years after the two countries cut their official ties.

The plan is based on an agreement brokered by China in early March which stipulated that the two Muslim countries should reopen their embassies by May 9.

Experts say the rapprochement between Iran and Saudi Arabia can pave the way for a major expansion of economic and trade ties between the two countries.

Call for Launch of Iran-Saudi Arabia Joint Chamber

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Investment and Consultancy Center of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) in an interview explained the capacities for economic cooperation between Iran and Saudi Arabia and called for the launch of the Iran-Saudi Arabia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

Ferial Mostofi first pointed to the progress in talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia in recent years and said that Saudi Arabia's annual GDP was \$824b in 2021 which was almost 2.3 times of Iran's GDP which both countries GDP was very close in 2009. She added other international economic statistics show that Saudi Arabia has acted much better comparing to Iran in macro economy in recent decade.

She then pointed to the UNCTAD's report and said that Saudi Arabia has attracted \$19.3b of direct foreign investment in 2021 while according to this report Iran attracted only \$1.4b while Saudi Arabia had \$23.9b of direct investment in other countries in 2021.

Mostofi went on to say that Riyadh has planned its 2023 Outlook and has mobilized its resources and policies to materialize it. She reiterated that Saudis for their ambitious plans seek direct foreign investment in growing fields like infrastructures, tourism, entertainments. And renewable energies and the country wants to turn into the transportation and logistics hub for connecting Asia, Europe and Africa.

She emphasized that Iranian companies have good



capabilities in some fields and massive cooperation of Iranians in those projects can be taken into consideration and for this reason she proposes the launch of the Iran-Saudi Arabia Joint Chamber of Commerce.

She reiterated that Saudi Arabia may face some hurdles in materializing the 2023 Outlook plan as this country faces shortage of required human capital in developing modern technology and industrial education.

Mostofi then pointed to the progress in talks between Iran and Saudi Arabia and also the general agreement between the two countries for economic, technical, scientific, cultural and sport co-operations which was signed in 1979 between the two states and called it a good ground for broadening economic cooperation.

She added that both countries can put on agenda the talks for deepening investment cooperation and bilateral investment treaty.

She then pointed to the vast cooperation between China and Saudi Arabia in different fields like economic and reiterated that Iran should take advantage of these international capacity for its development immediately after removal of sanctions.

Mostofi also emphasized using Saudi Arabia's capacity in the field of investment as well as the launch of a think-tank in this field, adding that Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) is working on it and it will soon announce the result.

Massive Investment of IRISL in Caspian Sea

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy head on developing market of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) Group Mr. Amir Bayat says that developing shipping in the Caspian Sea is not the mere action for consideration as implementing programs regarding reducing the time of load and unload of ships in the ports of the sea is on the agenda of IRISL that with development of Port of Solyanka of Russia this will be possible.

On the sidelines of TransRussia Exhibition in Moscow, Bayat touched upon Iran's share of transit of Russian goods as well as South and East Asian countries and the actions taken for developing this market, and said that in line with the policies of the government for reinforcing ties with domestic traders and economists as well as Russian and Indian economists for expansion of the North-South Corridor, IRISL invested very much in the Caspian Sea.

He said that one of the investments is the ten-million-dollar investment in the Port of Solyanka, and the group has also signed an agreement for building and purchasing some 120 ships especial for ply in the Caspian Sea.

Bayat noted that IRISL is currently working on reinforcing the structures and infrastructures of transportation and therefore it has transformed a method for broadening trade exchange for transporting from India to Iran and Russia and vice versa.

He further said that on the sidelines of the exhibitions traders of many countries talked with IRISL and it shows that IRISL is now a famous brand under any condition.

Bayat reiterated that shipping in the Caspian Sea needs special ships, adding that Caspian Sea Shipping Line is the biggest and strongest shipping lines in the Caspian Sea and this company has 27 vessels and three more of vessels of omskiy type have been bought and will joint its fleet.

He went on to say that the group has signed an agreement for building four vessels that two of them are in their final stage of building.



Indian Police Arrest Sikh Separatist

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian police have arrested Sikh separatist Amritpal Singh after searching for him for more than a month, a state police official said, a move against the revival of an independent homeland in the state of Punjab bordering Pakistan.

The rise of Singh, a preacher in the northwestern state of Punjab where Sikhs are in the majority, has revived talk of an independent Sikh homeland and stoked fears of a return to violence that killed tens of thousands of people in the 1980s and early 1990s during a Sikh insurgency. "Amritpal Singh has been arrested from the Rode village in Moga district, Punjab on the basis of specific intelligence," Sukhchain Singh Gill, a top official of the Punjab police told reporters.



Senior Military-Linked Election Official Shot Dead in Myanmar

YANGON (Dispatches) - The deputy head of Myanmar's military-appointed election commission has been shot dead in the country's commercial capital Yangon by rebels, authorities said, the latest killing of a high-profile individual linked to the country's military rulers.

Sai Kyaw Thu, deputy director of the Union Election Commission, was killed in the township of Thingangyun in eastern Yangon on Saturday, the army's information team said in a statement. Local media reported that he was shot multiple times in the chest, neck and head.

The army statement said that "People's Defence Forces" were responsible for the killing but did not give further details.



Foreign States Rush to Evacuate From Sudan



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - The United States and the United Kingdom said their armed forces helped staff from both embassies get out of Sudan, but evacuations by some other countries faced problems as rival military factions battled in the capital Khartoum.

The eruption of fighting eight days ago between the army and Rapid Support Forces (RSF) paramilitary group has triggered a humanitarian crisis, killed 400 people and trapped many thousands of civilians in their homes.

As people attempted to flee the chaos and foreign countries tried to pull out their nationals, gunfire rang out across the capital and dark smoke hung overhead, a Reuters reporter said.

The warring sides accused each other of attacking a convoy of French nationals, both saying one French person was wounded. France's Foreign Ministry, which had earlier said it was evacuating diplomatic staff and citizens, did not comment.

The army also accused the RSF of attacking and looting a Qatari convoy heading to Port Sudan. Doha released no immediate statement on any incident.

Egypt said a member of its mission in Sudan had been wounded by a gunshot, without giving details.

President Joe Biden said the U.S. was temporarily suspending operations at its embassy in Khartoum but remained committed to the Sudanese people, reiterating calls for a ceasefire.

"The belligerent parties must implement an immediate and unconditional ceasefire, allow unhindered humanitarian access, and respect the will of the people of Sudan," Biden said in a statement.

Pope Francis appealed for an end to the violence during his Sunday midday prayer in Rome.

The fighting broke out in Khartoum, along with its adjoining sister cities of Omdurman and Bahri, and other parts of the country on April 15, four years after long-ruling autocrat Omar al-Bashir was toppled during a popular uprising.

The army and RSF jointly staged a coup in 2021 but fell out during negotiations over a plan to form a civilian government and integrate the RSF into the armed forces. British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak said the country's armed forces has evacuated diplomatic staff and their family members.

U.S. officials said special forces using aircraft including MH-47 Chinook helicopters swept into Sudan's battle-stricken capital on Saturday from a U.S. base in Djibouti, spending just one hour on the ground to bring out fewer than 100 people.

"We did not take any small-arms fire on the way in and were able to get in and out without issue," said Lieutenant General Douglas Sims, the director of operations at the military's Joint Staff.

Chris Maier, an assistant secretary of defense, said the U.S. military might use drone or satellite imagery to detect threats to Americans travelling on overland routes out of Sudan, or position naval assets at Port Sudan to aid Americans arriving there.

Sudan's sudden collapse into warfare has dashed plans to restore civilian rule, brought an already impoverished country to the brink of humanitarian disaster and threatened a wider conflict that could draw in outside powers.

Beyond Khartoum, reports of the worst violence have come from Darfur, a western region bordering Chad that suffered a conflict that escalated from 2003 leaving 300,000 people dead and 2.7 million displaced.

The army under Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and the RSF, headed by Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo, known as Hemedti, have failed to observe ceasefires agreed almost daily, including a three-day truce for the Muslim holiday of Eid al-Fitr, which began on Friday.

Ukraine Slams China Envoy's Remarks on Ex-Soviet Nations

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine has condemned what it called "absurd" comments from China's ambassador to France, who questioned the sovereignty of former Soviet countries.

France and the Baltic states of Estonia, Latvia and Lithuania have also expressed dismay over the remarks.

Asked about his position on whether Crimea is part of Ukraine, Chinese Ambassador Lu Shaye said in an interview aired on French television on Friday that historically, the peninsula was part of Russia and had been offered to Ukraine by former Soviet leader Nikita Khrushchev.

"These ex-USSR countries don't have actual status in international law because there is no international agreement to materialise their sovereign status," Shaye said. His comments refer not just to Ukraine, which Russia invaded in February last year, but also to all former Soviet republics, which emerged as independent nations after the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991, including many members of the European Union.

Responding on Sunday, Ukrainian presidential aide Mykhaylo Podolyak said the status of post-Soviet countries was "enshrined in international law".

"It is strange to hear an absurd version of the 'history of Crimea' from a representative of a country that is scrupulous about its 1,000-year history," Podolyak said, referring to China. France stated its "full solidarity" with all the allied countries affected, which it said had acquired their independence "after decades of oppression".

"On Ukraine specifically, it was internationally recognised within borders including Crimea in 1991 by the entire international community, including China," a foreign ministry spokesperson in Paris said. The spokesperson added that Beijing will have to clarify whether these comments reflect its position.

The three Baltic states, all formerly part of the Soviet Union, reacted along the same lines as France. "Remarks by the Chinese Ambassador in France concerning international law and sovereignty of nations are completely unacceptable," Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics wrote on Twitter.

The spokesperson added that Beijing will have to clarify whether these comments reflect its position.

The three Baltic states, all formerly part of the Soviet Union, reacted along the same lines as France.

"Remarks by the Chinese Ambassador in France concerning international law and sovereignty of nations are completely unacceptable," Latvian Foreign Minister Edgars Rinkevics wrote on Twitter.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

A spokesperson for Ukraine's southern command neither confirmed nor denied the report and called for "informational silence" to ensure operational security.

Lula Doesn't Want to Please Anyone With Ukraine Stance

LISBON (Dispatches) - Brazil's Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva said he did not want to "please anyone" with his views about Russia's invasion of Ukraine, after provoking criticism in the West for suggesting Kyiv shared the blame for the war.

Speaking in Lisbon at the start of his first visit to Europe since being elected president, Lula said his aim was to "build a way to bring both of them (Russia and Ukraine) to the table".

"I want to find a third alternative (to solve the conflict), which is the construction of peace," he told a news conference.

Last week he said the United States and European allies should stop supplying arms to Ukraine, arguing that they were prolonging the war. "If you are not making peace, you are contributing to war," Lula said.

The White House accused Lula of parroting Russian and Chinese propaganda.

Portuguese President Marcelo Rebelo de Sousa, who accompanied Lula at the news conference, said their countries' stances on the war were different.

Portugal is a founding member of the Western

NATO defense alliance and has sent military equipment to Ukraine. Rebelo de Sousa said Ukraine had the right to defend itself and recover its territory.

Lula arrived in Portugal for a five-day visit as he strives to improve foreign ties after Jair Bolsonaro's four years in office, during which Brazil's relations with many countries including its former colonial power frayed.

Bolsonaro did not visit Portugal, home to around 300,000 Brazilians, during his time in office.

"I wanted to tell you how happy I am," Lula, standing next to Costa, told a room packed with government officials and reporters. "Brazil spent almost six years, especially the last four, isolated from the world."

"Brazil is back, to improve our relationship."

Lula signed 13 agreements on technology, energy transition, tourism, culture and education with Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa.

Brazil has said Portugal could be an important ally in helping South America's Mercosur bloc to negotiate a free trade deal with the European Union (EU). "Small adjustments are needed but we will do it," Lula said.



Serbs in North Kosovo Boycott Local Elections

ZUBIN POTOK (Dispatches) - Serbs in northern Kosovo boycotted local elections in protest that their demands for more autonomy have not been met, in another sign that a peace deal signed between Kosovo and Serbia last month is not working.

The main political party in Serb-dominated northern Kosovo, Serbian List, called on Friday on the Serb community not to vote on Sunday.

"Except in some rare and very few cases, Serbs are boycotting the elections," an official from the central election commission, who did not wish to be named, told Reuters on Sunday.

Serbia and the Kosovo Serbs are demanding the creation of an association of Kosovo Serb municipalities, in line with a decade-old EU-brokered deal with the Kosovo government in Pristina, before they take part in the vote.

Fearing possible violence on Sunday, the central election commission abandoned plans to put voting booths in schools and instead set up mobile huts at 13 locations, while NATO troops from Latvia and Italy, part of a more than 3,000 strong peacekeeping force in Kosovo, patrolled roads in voting areas.

Election officials in Zubin Potok, a municipality inhabited mainly by Serbs, were on standby in case any voters showed up.

"Whether anyone will vote or not we have to keep the doors open," one election commission official in Zubin Potok, who did not wish to be identified, told Reuters.

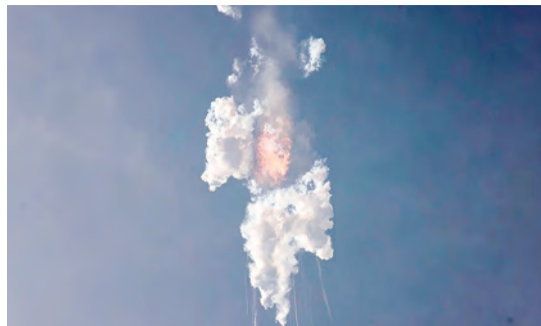
The voting huts were guarded by Albanian police officers brought in from other regions after 500 Serb police officers, along with Serb administrative staff and judges resigned collectively last November in protest over the Kosovo government's plan to replace Serbian car license number plates with those of Kosovo.

Kosovo declared independence from Serbia in 2008, following the 1998-99 war in which NATO intervened to protect the ethnic Albanian majority, but Serbia has not recognised independence and Kosovo's Serbs view themselves as part of Serbia and see Belgrade, not Pristina, as their capital.

Northern Kosovo is home to around 50,000 Serbs. On March 18, Pristina and Belgrade verbally agreed to implement a Western-backed plan aimed at improving ties and defusing tensions in northern Kosovo, by offering more autonomy to local Serbs with Pristina given ultimate control. But Serbs say the agreement has yet to produce concrete action.



SpaceX Rocket Explosion Illustrates Musk's Successful Failure Formula



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The spectacular explosion of SpaceX's new Starship rocket minutes after it soared off its launch pad on a first flight test is the latest vivid illustration of a "successful failure" business formula that serves Elon Musk's company well, experts said on Thursday. Rather than seeing the fiery disintegration of Musk's colossal, next-generation Starship system as a setback, experts said the dramatic loss of the rocket ship would help accelerate development of the vehicle.

Images of the Starship tumbling out of control some 20 miles up in the sky while mounted to its Super Heavy rocket booster before the combined vehicle blew to bits dominated media coverage of the highly anticipated launch.

SpaceX acknowledged that several of the Super Heavy's 33 powerful Raptor engines malfunctioned on ascent and that the booster rocket and Starship failed to separate as designed before the ill-fated flight was terminated.

But SpaceX executives including Musk - the founder, CEO and chief engineer of the California-based rocket company - hailed the test flight for achieving the major objective of getting the vehicle off the ground while providing a wealth of data that will advance Starship's development.

At least two experts in aerospace engineering and planetary science who spoke with Reuters agreed that the test flight delivered benefits.

"This is a classical SpaceX successful failure," said Garrett Reisman, an astronautical engineering professor at the University of Southern California who is a former NASA astronaut and is also a senior adviser to SpaceX.

Reisman called the Starship test flight a hallmark of a SpaceX strategy that sets Musk's company apart from traditional aerospace companies and even NASA by "this embracing of failure when the consequences of failure are low."

No astronauts were aboard for the crewless flight, and the rocket was flown almost entirely over water from the Gulf Coast Starbase facility in south Texas to avoid possible injuries or property damage on the ground from falling debris.

"Even though that rocket costs a lot of money, what really costs a lot of money are people's salaries," Reisman told Reuters in an interview hours after Thursday's launch.

Reisman said SpaceX saves more money in the long run, and takes less time to identify and correct engineering flaws by taking more risks in the development process rather than keeping "a large team working for years and years and years trying to get it perfect before you even try it."

"I would say the timeline for transporting people (aboard Starship) is accelerated right now compared to what it was a couple of hours ago," Reisman said.

Planetary scientist Tanya Harrison, a fellow at the University of British Columbia's Outer Space Institute, said clearing the launch tower and ascending through a critical point known as maximum aerodynamic pressure were major feats on the first flight of such a large, complex launch system.

"It's part of the testing process," she said in an interview. "There are a lot of accidents that happen when you're trying to design a new rocket. The fact that it launched at all made a lot of people really happy."

She said the risks of a single flight test were small in comparison to the ambitious gains at stake. "This is the biggest rocket that humanity has tried to build," she said, adding that it is designed to carry "orders of magnitude" more cargo and people to and from deep space than any existing spacecraft.

Tough at Home, Steady Abroad: Six Months of Italy's Meloni



ROME (Dispatches) - Six months after taking the helm of Italy's most right-wing government since World War II, Giorgia Meloni has talked tough on domestic issues but not rocked the boat internationally.

Meloni's Brothers of Italy party, which has roots in the post-war Fascist movement, sent shock waves across the European Union when it came top in September elections.

She took office in October at the head of a coalition comprising Matteo Salvini's anti-immigration League and Silvio Berlusconi's right-wing Forza Italia.

Within weeks, they introduced laws to tackle mass migration and, after vowing to protect traditional family values, stopped local authorities registering the children of same-sex couples.

But Meloni is aware of the need for economic credibility, and despite handing out billions of euros to help Italians manage soaring inflation, and moves to cut taxes, she has committed to reducing Italy's colossal debt and the deficit.

The self-described "Christian mother" has also toned down her once-inflammatory rhetoric and sought to project stability on the world stage, including strongly supporting Ukraine following Russia's invasion.

Commentators say that while she portrayed herself as a radical to win power, she needs to widen her appeal if she wants to stay there.

"She's moved to the centre very, very quickly... to look beyond the radical right electorate," said Daniele Albertazzi, professor of politics at the UK's University of Surrey.

For more moderate Italians, "she's saying, I'm not a monster. I haven't done anything to rock the boat."

Meloni's election victory was attributed in part to her appeal as a fresh face, as leader of the only party that stayed out of Mario Draghi's national unity government.

So far, her support is holding up -- the latest YouTrend survey showed Brothers of Italy with 28.6 percent of voter support, above the 26 percent it won in September.

On the domestic front, the coalition acted quickly to demonstrate it would keep its manifesto promises, helped by a weak opposition.

The first migration decree limited the activities of charities operating rescue ships in the Mediterranean, while Meloni later moved to eliminate a special protection status for migrants who do not qualify as refugees.

Critics warned the moves would cost lives and remove basic rights from vulnerable people.

Meanwhile, about 35,000 people have landed on Italy's shores so far this year, four times as many in the same period in 2022 and 2021.

Agriculture Minister Francesco Lollobrigida, a close aide, also drew outrage this week by warning against the "ethnic replacement" by migrants of Italians, who have for decades recorded a low birth rate.

Meloni has vowed to provide more help for families, while railing against what she has called "the LGBT lobby".

Earlier this year, the coalition blocked local authorities that had been registering the children of same-sex couples in the absence of a national legal framework.

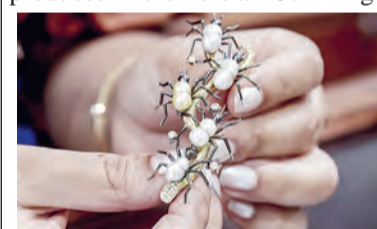
The move left thousands of families in limbo and was condemned by European MPs who expressed fear of a broader attack against Italy's LGBTQ community.

Francesco Galietti, from the Policy Sonar consultancy, says many domestic measures -- which include a widely mocked proposal to ban non-Italian words in public communications -- are about keeping Meloni's allies inside.

A Real Gem: in Bahrain, Only Natural Pearls Will Do

MANAMA (Dispatches) - Customers at a Bahrain jewellery store study displays of pearls that are, unusually, 100 percent natural -- the result of attempts to preserve a centuries-old industry.

While rare elsewhere, natural pearls prized from seabed oysters by divers are the only variety produced in the Persian Gulf kingdom, which is fiercely proud of its pearling tradition.



Bahrain, a tiny island state neighboring Qatar, is the sole country worldwide to have banned the cultivation of artificial pearls, which have flooded the market since the 1920s.

"We can't mass-produce," said Faten Mattar, who works at the family-run jewellery shop.

It can take up to five years to complete one strand of a necklace by sourcing pearls directly from divers, she said, admitting it is "a challenge".

And larger pieces, which can go for up to \$25,000, might take more than a decade to complete.

But with no two natural pearls identical, Mattar said that was part of the appeal.

"Each person... who owns or gets a piece of jewellery that contains natural pearls knows no one else has the same."

Mattar is one of the first women to work in a family business which was established more than two centuries ago, making it one of the oldest in Bahrain.

Pearls adorn bracelets, necklaces, cufflinks and other items in the small store.

"One of our goals... is to make pearls more attainable for everyone, so we created different lines instead of having just big pieces," she explained, mentioning designs for men and "daily jewellery for a younger crowd".

Like other Arab Persian Gulf states, Bahrain's economy before the discovery of oil had relied on pearl harvesting.

Bahraini free-divers would spend months aboard traditional dhows, the wooden sailboats that have plied Persian Gulf waters for centuries, to capture pearls prized by the region's royal families as well as European fashion houses.

But the natural pearl trade crashed after the Great Depression of the 1930s and the development in Japan of cultured pearls, artificially propagated in freshwater mussels, which are cheaper and easier to produce.

Muharrag, in Bahrain's north, is home to "the last remaining complete example of the cultural tradition of pearling", according to UNESCO, with a heritage site featuring oyster beds and a fortress where dhows used to set off.

Today, young gemologists at the Bahrain Institute for Pearls and Gemstones (DANAT) -- nestled among the capital Manama's skyscrapers -- scrutinise pearls using modern machinery or the naked eye.

One researcher passes a pearl through an X-ray machine under the watch of Fatima Almahmood, a graduate in physics and gemology.

The X-ray detects "growth lines" that distinguish natural pearls from cultured ones, she explained, pointing to an image of the scan projected onto a screen.

Created in 2017, DANAT appraises pearls at the request of merchants and individuals.

"You'd be surprised by how many clients come to DANAT that have inherited pieces and are then shocked to know... (they) contain cultured pearls," says Noora Jamsheer, who heads the research centre.

Apart from appraisal, DANAT also monitors conditions in the water where natural pearls are harvested. Jamsheer said climate change is a cause for concern.

"We have a research team that is continuously going to the field, researching and collecting data -- the water temperature, water quality, salinity -- to determine and study the impact of these factors."

Tokyo Olympics: Key Questions Around Spiralling Scandal

TOKYO (Dispatches) - The pandemic-postponed Tokyo 2020 Olympics were unusual, and controversial, for a number of reasons.

After a Tokyo court handed down a suspended jail sentence against the former chairman of a Games sponsor, AFP looks at some of the scandals around the event:

What are the corruption claims?

Japanese prosecutors are investigating or have filed charges in several cases involving allegations of bid-rigging or bribery.

On Friday, the former chairman of retailer Aoki Holdings was handed a suspended prison sentence after he reportedly admitted making payments to secure sponsorship rights.

Several allegations centre around former Tokyo 2020 board member Haruyuki Takahashi, who has been arrested on claims he pocketed hundreds of millions of yen in sponsorship bribes.

Companies implicated range from a publishing firm to a merchandise company licensed to sell soft toys of the Games' mascots.

A separate strand of allegations involves Japan's biggest advertising agency, Dentsu, and five other firms, who are accused of bid-rigging to secure Games contracts.

What about other scandals?

Questions over impropriety around the Games erupted well before they finally took place a year late. In 2019, the then-head of Japan's Olympic Committee, Tsunekazu Takeda, stepped down after French prosecutors launched an investigation into corruption allegations linked to Tokyo's Olympic bid.

A consulting firm hired by the bid committee reportedly paid \$370,000 to the son of an International Olympic Committee member before and after Japan was picked to host the Games.

Takeda has denied any wrongdoing.

Other controversies dogged the Games, including a sexism row involving organising committee chief Yoshiro Mori, who stepped down after saying that women speak too much in meetings.

The opening ceremony's director was fired days before the event over a decades-old skit referencing the Holocaust, while a composer for the ceremony resigned after an old interview surfaced in which he described abusing disabled schoolmates.

How did Covid affect the Games?

The Tokyo Olympics were postponed by a year to the summer of 2021, the first time the Games had ever been shifted during peacetime.

Doubts over whether they would take place at all continued almost up to the last minute. They eventually went ahead in a stripped-back form that saw spectators locked out of most events.

The Games took place during a virus state of emergency and against a backdrop of public anger, with polls showing a majority of Japanese wanted the event to be cancelled or further postponed.

Athletes were subject to strict quarantine and testing, and were not allowed to interact with other teams or locals.

The final price tag of the Games was more than double Tokyo's original 2013 estimate, weighing in at 1.42 trillion yen, the equivalent of \$13 billion at the time.

What about wider implications?

The northern Japanese city of Sapporo had been a frontrunner to host the Winter Olympics in 2030 but the Tokyo scandal has left the bid in serious doubt.

Japanese Olympic Committee president Yasuhiro Yamashita said earlier this month that it would be "difficult to move ahead" with the bid "without gaining people's understanding" and suggested Sapporo could aim for 2034 instead.

Recent polls showed that a majority of Sapporo residents oppose hosting the Games, although the city has ruled out holding a public referendum.

The International Olympic Committee has been battling waning interest in hosting Olympics in recent years because of the price tag.



Zimbabwe Economy Could Grow 6% This Year

HARARE (Dispatches) - Zimbabwe's economy could grow 6% this year, better than a previous forecast for 3.8% growth, thanks to a strong performance by agriculture and easing power shortages, Finance Minister Mthuli Ncube said.

"We are saying 3.8% growth is an underestimate. The growth should be higher than that and close to 6%," Ncube told an online briefing.

In a cabinet statement this week, the government said it expected to harvest 2.3 million tonnes of maize this year, a 58% jump from the previous season driven by favourable rains.

"What we mainly did this week was to recognise the strong recovery in the agricultural sector where we have seen 54% growth, at least in the grains sub-sector. We are seeing a 35% growth in the non-food sector," Ncube said.



China May Cut Oil Products Export Quotas in Second Batch for 2023

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - China may cut quotas for refined oil products exports in a second batch for 2023 as domestic demand improves while the need to boost its economy through oil products abates, a Reuters survey showed.

A reduction in oil products exports from the world's second-largest refiner could help ease oversupply in gasoil markets, which has caused Asian refining margins to slump to a six-month low.

The second batch of quotas for gasoline, gasoil and jet fuel exports could range between 8 million and 12 million tons, the survey of four state refining sources and three consultancies showed.

That figure would be down from the first batch of 18.99 million tons, although up almost three times on the year, at the high end of the range for estimates, Reuters data showed.

"Refineries will be granted around 10 million tons of new export quotas in coming weeks, as they could use over 80% of 2023 quotas by the end of April," said Energy Aspects analyst Sun Jianan.

The quotas are typically issued only to state refiners Sinopec, PetroChina, Sinochem, CNOOC, China National Aviation Fuel Co and privately-owned Zhejiang Petrochemical.

It is unclear when the commerce ministry will notify the companies of their volumes in the second batch of quotas, although the second batch of volumes was issued in June last year.

Chinese refiners are expected to focus more on domestic sales, as their margins have improved while prices for diesel in Asian markets have dropped, traders said.

Domestic diesel prices are 270 yuan (\$39.19) a ton higher than export prices, a source at a state refinery said, which discourages exports.

Refiners are building stocks ahead of peak refinery maintenance later in second quarter in preparation for improving demand in the third quarter during summer, traders added.

With the economy improving mostly through domestic consumption activities this year, China's government will be less pressured to rely on oil product exports to boost economic growth, Sun said.

China's exports of the three key products are likely to stay elevated in April at about 3 million tonnes, according to a Reuters tally of estimates from consultancies and trade sources.

Argentina's Economy Teeters on the Edge of Deeper Crisis

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina's economy will teeter on the edge of a deeper crisis in the run up to October's presidential vote as growing market anxiety adds to a harmful mix of drought-induced recession and skyrocketing inflation, a Reuters poll showed.

A flight to the safe-haven U.S. dollar sped up this week after the failure of stopgap efforts to bolster exhausted international reserves rekindled fears about a possible devaluation of the heavily-regulated official exchange rate. Economic activity is set to contract 2.3% this year, the worst performance among the Group of 20 countries, with consumer prices expected to soar more than 100%, according to median estimates from 32 economists polled April 10-19.

Pointing to an increasingly negative outlook, the number of recession forecasts escalated to 27 of 32 respondents from just 7 of 23 in January. Views ranged from 1.1% growth to a slump of 4.5% in 2023.

"The situation is very complicated but if the government collaborates with the likely winners of the [presidential] primaries, the economy will undergo an orderly transition," said Andres Borenstein, an economist at Econviews consultancy. "However, the transition will be difficult if the government, which is weak and unable to implement any stabilization plans, does not collaborate following the primaries."

The date is yet to be confirmed for votes to decide party candidates. In the past, the naming of candidates has preceded big financial crashes weeks before general elections. President Alberto Fernandez and other Peronists trail opposition candidates in voter surveys.

World's Biggest Lithium Producers

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Chilean President Gabriel Boric said he would nationalise the country's lithium industry and create a state-owned company to produce the metal that is a key component of electric vehicle batteries.

Boric said future lithium contracts would only be issued as public-private partnerships with state control. Chile holds the world's largest lithium reserves and is the world's second-largest producer.

Following are key details on the global lithium industry.

Lithium is currently produced from hard rock or brine mines.

Australia is the world's biggest supplier, with production from hard rock mines. Argentina, Chile and China mainly produce it from salt lakes.

World output was 737,000 tonnes of Lithium Carbonate Equivalent (LCE) in 2022 and is estimated to reach 964,000 tonnes in 2023 and 1,167,000 tonnes in 2024, according to the Resources and Energy Quarterly Report by the Australian Department of Industry, Science and Resources in March.

Rapid growth is forecast to be met by output gains in Australia, Chile and Argentina.

Greenbushes, Western Australia, by Talison Lithium (a joint venture of Tianqi Lithium (002466.SZ), IGO and Albemarle Corp. Current production capacity at 1.34 million tons a year of chemical-grade and technical-grade lithium concentrate.

Pilgangoora, Western Australia, owned by Pilbara Minerals, produces 360,000 to 380,000 tons of spodumene concentrate per annum, with two expansions underway that will increase production capacity to one million tons per annum.

Mt Cattlin, Western Australia, owned by Allkem (AKE.AX), the company formed from the merger of Orocobre and Galaxy Resources, produced 194,000 tonnes of spodumene concentrate in 2022.

Mibra, Minas Gerais, Brazil, owned by Advanced Metallurgical Group (AMG.AS), produces 90,000 tons of spodumene a year, with plans to expand to 130,000 tonnes by the end of Q2 2023.

Mount Marion, Western Australia, owned by Mineral Resources Ltd (MIN.AX), was on track to produce 450,000 to 600,000 tons of spodumene as of August 2022, with a targeted expansion to 900,000 tons per annum delayed until July 2023.

UK Economy Shows Signs of Recovery Despite Inflation's Drag

LONDON (Dispatches) - British businesses reported their busiest month in a year and consumers turned more confident, according to surveys published on Friday that added to signs of a recovery in the economy that has so far defied forecasts of a recession.

The preliminary reading of the S&P Global/CIPS UK Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) also showed the slowest unit cost inflation in over two years, but price pressures look strong enough for the Bank of England to raise rates again next month.

The PMI - spanning services and manufacturing firms - rose to 53.9 in April from 52.2 in March, putting it further above the 50 line denoting growth for the third consecutive month and representing the strongest growth since April last year.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast a lower reading of 52.5.

"The key takeaway is that the economy as a whole is not only showing encouraging resilience but has gained growth momentum heading into the second quarter," Chris Williamson, chief business economist at S&P Global, said.

The PMI was driven by the services sector as consumer spending on travel, leisure and entertainment showed strength while manufacturing remained weak.

Williamson said the survey was consistent with quarterly gross domestic product growth of 0.4%.

Last month the BoE said it expected modest economic growth in the second quarter of 2023, though it still predicted a contraction in the first quarter.

It is widely expected to increase borrowing costs for the 12th meeting in a row in May as it continues to grapple with an inflation rate above 10%.

The International Monetary Fund this month predicted that Britain's economy would shrink by 0.3% in 2023, a less severe hit than its previous forecast but still the sharpest contraction among the world's big rich economies this year.

S&P Global's input price index - a good guide to future inflation pressures - showed the slowest growth in costs for firms since March 2021, although overall cost pressures remained high by historical standards.

There were also signs of recovery in Friday's consumer confidence survey by polling firm GfK which rose to its highest since February last year, albeit to weak levels.

Consumers' expectations for Britain's economy in the next 12 months hit a 15-month high and they rated the prospects for their finances as the best since February 2022.



U.S., Euro Zone Business Activity Accelerates to 11-Month Highs in April

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. and Euro zone business activity gathered pace in April, according to surveys released, despite central bankers signaling they are nearing the peak of their interest rate hiking cycles designed to cool demand enough among consumers to bring high inflation down.

S&P Global said its flash U.S. Composite PMI Output Index, which tracks the manufacturing and services sectors, increased to 53.5 this month. That was the highest level since last May and followed a final reading of 52.3 in March. It is at odds with growing signs that the economy is in danger of slipping into recession as higher interest rates begin to bite.

It was the third straight month that the PMI remained above 50, indicating growth in the private sector. The survey data was collected April 12-20.

The survey's flash services sector PMI rose to 53.7, the highest reading in a year, from 52.6 in March. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the services PMI falling to 51.5.

The survey's flash manufacturing PMI increased to 50.4, a six-month high, from 49.2 in March. Economists had forecast the index at 49. New orders increased, ending six straight months of contraction.

In the euro zone, the bloc's dominant services industry saw already-buoyant demand rise too, more than offsetting a deepening downturn in manufacturing.

HCOB's flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI), compiled by S&P Global and seen as a good gauge of overall economic health, jumped to an 11-month high of 54.4 in April from March's 53.7.

A PMI covering the services industry soared to 56.6 this month from 55.0, confounding expectations in the Reuters poll for a decline to 54.5 and the new business index rose to a one-year high of 55.8 from 54.2. However, the manufacturing PMI fell to 45.5 from 47.3, its lowest since the coronavirus pandemic was cementing its grip on the world three years ago.

"The PMI sheds a positive light on the economic performance in the euro zone, as a pickup in service sector activity is boosting growth," said Bert Colijn, senior euro zone economist at ING, noting manufacturing weakness remained a concern.

In the United States at least though, the so-called hard data are increasingly painting a darker picture. The labor market is cooling, retail sales are declining and manufacturing output is slumping, leading most economists to forecast a recession as early as the second half of the year.

Kazakhstan Ramps Up Oil Exports Bypassing Russia



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan ramped up oil exports bypassing Russia in the first quarter of 2023 as it seeks to reduce its dependency on its vast neighbor, data from industry sources and Refinitiv showed.

While Kazakh oil exports through the Caspian Sea and the Caucasus are relatively small, they have risen sharply since Moscow began what it calls a "special military operation" in Ukraine in February last year.

Kazakhstan, which has the longest land border with Russia of any former Soviet state, has been treading a delicate line to reduce dependence on Russia without alienating its neighbour.

President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev has refused to recognise the Russian-annexed regions of Ukraine and has sought to limit Kazakhstan's reliance on Russia, including on its huge network of oil pipelines and ports.

Data seen by Reuters showed that oil supplies from the Caspian Sea port of Aktau to Azerbaijan's Baku, the main single route bypassing Russia, jumped to 163,436 tons in January - March from 28,875 tonnes in the same period in 2022.

Kazakhstan's state transportation company, Kazmortransflot, told Reuters that 104,000 tons of oil were further sent to the Baku-Tbilisi-Ceyhan pipeline in the January-March period.

Kazakhstan also supplies more than 80,000 tons of oil a month to China. Last year, Kazakhstan's oil exports via routes other than Russia reached 1.8 million tons (36,000 barrels per day), up by 638,000 tons from 2021.

Kazakh oil is not subject to Western sanctions, unlike Russian crude, although the sanctions have created problems for some Kazakh products.

"Russian ports remain toxic for European buyers, so the oilmen are playing it safe and looking for routes that are not related to the (Russian oil pipeline monopoly) Transneft," said a Western trader who deals with oil from Kazakhstan. The main, and most profitable, route for oil exports from Kazakhstan remains the Caspian Pipeline Consortium (CPC), which supplies the global market via a Russian Black Sea terminal.

Iran Seizes About 200k Liters of Smuggled Gasoline

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's security guards have succeeded in confiscating around 200,000 liters of gasoline in Minab waters, eastern Hormozgan province.

Commander of the border patrol Bahador Esmaili said on Monday that marine guards of the Minab border base got informed of a consignment of smuggled fuel in the

area and investigated the issue.

The border patrol officers of the base were dispatched to the point where a number of smugglers relinquished their gasoline plastic bags into the sea and fled the scene, but the officers managed to seize a launch used for shipping the fuel, he said.



Asia's Collapsing Refinery Margins Undermine Bullish Crude Case

LAUNCESTON (Dispatches) - There is an increasing disconnect between the forecasts for strong global oil demand growth this year, led by Asia, and the reality of weakening margins for refined fuels.

The profit from turning a barrel of Dubai crude into refined products at a typical Singapore refinery dropped to \$2.53 a barrel.

This was the lowest since Oct. 27 and down 82% from the peak so far in 2023 of \$14.33 a barrel on Jan. 25. It is also about a quarter of the moving 365-day average of \$10.34 a barrel.

The slide in refinery margins comes as OPEC+ producers act to further cut crude supply, a move seen as aimed at asserting the group's influence in the global market as well as boosting oil prices.

The drop in refinery profits is being led by a contracting margin for gasoil, the base for diesel and jet fuel, with 10 ppm gasoil margin dropping for a seventh session on Monday.

The margin declined to \$14.25 a barrel on Monday, the lowest since January 2022 and down 63% from the peak so far in 2023 of \$38.89 on Jan. 25.

Given diesel is mainly used as a heavy vehicle transport and industrial fuel, falling margins indicate that sectors such as construction and manufacturing may be starting to come under pressure.

It is not just gasoil that is being affected, with the margin on gasoline also dropping.

The profit from turning a barrel of Brent crude into the light motor transport fuel in Singapore slid to \$12.03 on Monday, the weakest since March 7 and down 38% from the peak so far in 2023 of \$19.32 on March 30.

The falling margins on refined fuels may result in refiners in Asia processing less, especially as crude costs continue to rise.

The April 2 announcement by OPEC+, the group consisting of the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and allies including Russia, that they would cut a further 1.16 million barrels per day (bpd) of output from May has boosted oil prices.

Global benchmark Brent futures ended at \$84.76 a barrel on Monday, having held onto the gains of about \$5 a barrel made in the wake of the OPEC+ production decision.

The cost of some physical crude for Asian refiners has also risen after top exporter Saudi Arabia hiked its official selling prices (OSPs) for May-loading cargoes for a third straight month.

The OSP for the kingdom's benchmark Arab Light blend was raised to a premium of \$2.80 a barrel over the Oman/Dubai, up 30 cents from April-loading cargoes.

Saudi Arabia's pricing moves tend to be followed by other major Middle East exporters, thereby affecting the bulk of seaborne crude shipped to Asian customers.

The question for the crude market is whether Asia's refiners will start to cut throughput in response to the higher crude price and weaker margins on refined products.

It is likely that they will first try to buy cheaper oil from non-OPEC producers such as the U.S., as well as seeking discounted Russian oil that can no longer be sold to Europe.

But if margins continue to come under pressure, refiners are likely to lower output



in a bid to drive product prices higher.

The problem is that with the global economy starting to look weak outside of China, higher fuel prices may exacerbate the slowdown and raise recession risks.

Despite the current problems facing refiners, both OPEC and the International Energy Agency (IEA) are sticking to bullish forecasts for crude demand growth in 2023.

However, these are now largely centred on strong demand in the second half of 2023, led by China, with the IEA predicting global oil demand will rise an overall 2 million bpd in 2023.

The IEA does acknowledge the risk to economic growth from rising fuel prices amid an anticipated shortfall in crude supply in the second half of the year.

But it seems the agency is expecting, or perhaps hoping, that supply constraints may be eased rather than demand being destroyed by a weakening global economy.

OPEC is also maintaining a bullish view for 2023 oil demand growth, keeping its forecast for an increase of 2.32 million bpd in its latest monthly report.

But the group also highlighted downside risk to oil demand in the northern summer as a result of weakness in developed economies, which are still battling high inflation and the impact of tighter monetary policy.

The main risk to the IEA and OPEC forecasts would appear to be what impact the relatively high price of crude will have on the forecast surge in demand in the second half of 2023.

If OPEC+ is successful at keeping crude prices above \$80 a barrel, it should serve to undermine the bullish growth forecasts as more and more economies experience slowing growth and tip toward recession.

The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a columnist for Reuters.

Ramadan Brings Hope for...

FROM PAGE 1

During the holy month of Ramadan, Israeli authorities imposed strict restrictions on the entry and exit of Palestinians to and from the gates of al-Aqsa Mosque. Amid heightened tensions with Palestinian worshippers, Israeli settlers also pressed ahead with their frequent incursions and provocative rituals at the holy site.

The Zionist regime in Ramadan resorted to any action and plot to undermine Palestinians' struggle for freedom and liberation of their lands but their efforts were in vain because Muslims in the world and even other non-Muslim people held rallies during Quds Day in support of Palestine.

On Eid al-Fitr 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 Seyyed Ali 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."

After the Founder of the Islamic Revolution the late Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini, Supreme Leader has been the only other leader and politician who has predicted the decline of Israel and liberation of the Al-Aqsa Mosque and Palestine and it seems many more politicians or analysts think so and they believe Israel will collapse and it is just a matter of time.

As the Supreme Leader has said, Muslims should unite against the Zionists in order to accelerate the Zionist regime's collapse and Ramadan is a month when Muslims can get more united in defending Islam and Muslim states against the Zionists and the Quds Day is turning into a bullet in the heart of the killer regime of Israel.

So we Muslims see Ramadan as a month of preparation of soul and body for a better life and resistance against enemies and fighting them and therefore Ramadan is month of injection of hope for Muslims.



China Boosts Crude Oil Inventories Despite Record Refinery Processing



LAUNCESTON (Dispatches) - China's refineries processed more crude than ever before in March, but despite this record the world's largest oil importer still boosted inventories.

China's refinery throughput hit an all-time high of 63.9 million tons in March, equivalent to about 15.11 million barrels per day (bpd), up from 14.36 million bpd in the first two months of the year.

However, the amount of crude available to refiners from imports and domestic output also rose in March, reaching 16.67 million bpd, according to calculations based on official data.

China doesn't disclose the volumes of crude flowing into or out of strategic and commercial stockpiles, but an estimate can be made by deducting the amount of crude processed from the total of crude available from imports and domestic output.

Crude imports in March were 12.37 million bpd, while domestic output was 4.30 million bpd, giving a combined total of 16.67 million bpd.

Subtracting the refinery throughput leaves 1.56 million bpd that likely flowed into either commercial or strategic inventories.

This was an increase in the amount available for stockpiles from the first two months of the year, when the surplus was 270,000 bpd.

For the first quarter as a whole, China added about 770,000 bpd to inventories, slightly more than the 740,000 bpd average for all of 2022.

The question for the oil market is what does it all mean for the outlook for crude oil demand in China?

Much of the optimism over forecasts for strong growth in global oil demand this year are centered around a rebound in China, especially in the second half of the year as the world's second-largest economy is expected to experience strong growth after ending its strict zero-COVID policy.

There is nothing inherently wrong with OPEC+'s forecast for global oil demand growth of 2.32 million bpd in 2023, or the 2 million bpd forecast from the International Energy Agency.

China's Role in Uzbekistan's Green Energy Boom

LONDON (OilPrice) - Against the backdrop of the Russo-Ukrainian war and fluctuating relations between Kazakhstan and Russia, Uzbekistan is gaining strategic importance for China as a potential stable emerging market in Central Asia. As a result, Beijing has made more concerted efforts to expand its soft power throughout the country. Since the beginning of the war, Chinese investment in Uzbekistan has been steadily growing. Two sectors in particular, the automotive and green energy sectors, reflect Beijing's overall growing economic power in the region.

In the automotive sector, Chinese car brands have been expanding their market share as Russian companies are retreating from the region due to Western sanctions. Furthermore, more affordable and environmentally friendly Chinese brands are attracting the attention of Uzbekistani consumers in increasing numbers. In 2022, Uzbekistan imported automobiles from 34 foreign countries, with China accounting for the largest share at 11,159 cars. In this industry, China plays a particularly important role for Uzbekistan, especially in the context of importing hybrid and electric vehicles. In January 2023, Uzbekistan imported 389 electric vehicles, with Chinese cars accounting for 346 of them.

In addition to imports, Uzbekistan has signed agreements with various Chinese companies to attract investment and localize production. Recently, the main examples of the growing presence of Chinese brands in Uzbekistan were the agreement signed between UzAuto Motors and Chinese car manufacturer BYD Auto and the contract agreed to by Asaka Motors International and EXEED to organize car production in Uzbekistan (Tashkent Times, August 22, 2022; Uzdaily.com, January 9). In addition, Uzbekistani company Roodell has started assembling models from the Chinese company Chery at the ADM-Jizzakh plant located in the Jizzakh Free Economic Zone in eastern Uzbekistan.

Green energy is another area in which Chinese companies are becoming increasingly active. During the winter of 2022, gas shortages and an energy crisis caused many problems in Uzbekistan, forcing thousands of industrial workers into temporary layoffs. In this context, Tashkent began to look for alternative energy sources, especially green energy sources, with the industry experiencing a significant increase in the flow of Chinese investment. In 2022, the bid was selected from Chinese companies GD Power Development and PowerChina for the construction of photovoltaic (solar) plants in Namangan. In February 2023, Uzbekistan signed two agreements



with Energy China and Huaneng Renewables for the construction of solar photovoltaic and photoelectric power plants, respectively.

In addition, China plans to build a solar panel production plant in Fergana in eastern Uzbekistan. Not

surprisingly, Chinese companies prefer to invest in regions where energy demand is growing, such as the Namangan and Fergana regions, where electricity demand has increased by 40 percent. Even if China does not play a role as an investor, it plays a key role as an exporter of critical equipment. For example, China is supplying turbines and generators for the construction of the Zarafshan Wind Farm being built by United Arab Emirates state-owned company Masdar in the Navoi region of Uzbekistan. In particular, the decree signed by Uzbekistani President Shavkat Mirziyoyev on accelerating the introduction of renewable energy and energy-saving technologies in 2023 will most likely promote the further participation of Chinese companies in Uzbekistan's green energy sector, as Beijing plays a central role in providing these technologies to the world.

Chinese investments in Uzbekistan's automotive and green energy sectors are a continuation of recent changes in Beijing's strategy toward Central Asia. In the words of Chinese President Xi Jinping, Beijing has a "grandiose plan" for the region.

Iran Launches Direct Containerized Shipping Line to SE Asia

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - An Iranian official announced the launch of regular containerized shipping services from the country's southern port of Imam Khomeini to Southeast Asian countries.

Director General of the Ports and Maritime Organization of Iran in the southwestern province of Khuzestan told IRNA on Saturday that a direct containerized shipping line has been launched from Imam Khomeini Port to the Southeast Asian countries in line with efforts to achieve the objectives of foreign trade policies adopted by the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

Behrouz Aghaei said the direct shipping line has been set up with the focus on the ports of the United Arab Emirates (UAE), India and China.

He went on to say that the dispatch of containerized vessel of the fifth generation with 5,000 TEU (Twenty-Foot Equivalent Unit) capacity to China is aimed at increasing the accessibility of Imam Khomeini Port to the world maritime transport network and also the international markets.

Reducing the time and cost of transporting imports and exports has been cited as the most important purpose behind launching the direct shipping line, he said, adding that this move will increase competitiveness among the exporters and help them get the lion's share of products at the regional markets.

Aghaei also pointed to the attractiveness of transit and transshipment markets of the region as the other objective behind launching the direct containerized shipping line.

The new shipping line will pave the ground for the optimal use of the current containerized terminal of Imam Khomeini Port with the annual capacity of more than 600,000 containers, he concluded.

FIFA Announces Draw For 2023 U20 World Cup

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Football's world governing body FIFA held the draw for the 2023 Under-20 World Cup with the hosts Argentina kicking off the tournament against Uzbekistan on May 20, reported Xinhua.

The ceremony was held at the FIFA headquarters in Zurich, Switzerland and FIFA confirmed the match schedule and the host cities as well.

Twenty-four teams will compete in six groups across four cities, La Plata, Mendoza, San Juan and Santiago del Estero.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

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

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

Gooch Claims Maiden LIV Tour Victory

ADELAIDE (Dispatches) - Talor Gooch held his nerve to claim the LIV Golf Adelaide title at a sold-out The Grand Golf Club today, overcoming a mid-round slump to keep Anirban Lahiri at bay to win by three strokes and secure the US\$4 million first-place pay cheque.

Gooch held a 10-shot lead over former Masters champion Charl Schwartzel going into the third and final round of the event, the Saudi Arabia-backed tour's first in Australia, only to see his advantage whittled down throughout the course of the day.

Sixers Sweep Nets to Advance, Suns on Brink

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The Philadelphia 76ers shook off the absence of Joel Embiid to sweep Brooklyn out of the NBA playoffs as the Phoenix Suns closed in on a second-round berth and the Los Angeles Lakers made a statement against Memphis.

The Sixers romped into the next round of the playoffs with a dominant 96-88 victory over the Nets that completed their 4-0 triumph in the best-of-seven series.

Philadelphia trailed by 11 points early in the third quarter but transformed the contest with an 18-4 run to take the lead before closing out victory with a fourth-quarter rally.

The Sixers' win was all the more impressive given the absence of Most Valuable Player candidate Embiid, who suffered a right knee sprain in Thursday's 102-97 game three win.

Tobias Harris led the scoring for Philadelphia with 25 points and 12 rebounds, while De'Anthony Melton came off the bench to produce 15 points and lead the fourth-quarter surge.

Harris said the Sixers were determined to use Embiid's absence as a motivator.

"He's the MVP. And when we heard he wasn't playing, I think it was an opportunity for everybody else to really step up and understand that we've got to get a win without the big fellow," Harris told broadcaster TNT.

In the West, LeBron James, Anthony Davis and the rest of the Lakers let their play answer the trash-talking of Grizzlies forward Dillon Brooks, exploding out of the gate on the way to a playoff record-tying 35-9 first-quarter lead.

They led by as many as 29 in the second quarter as they rolled to a 111-101 victory.

Davis bounced back from a dismal showing in the Lakers' game two defeat to score 31 points and grab 17 rebounds.

He also had two steals and three blocked shots, while James added 25 points, nine rebounds and five assists.

Brooks, who had mocked NBA all-time scoring leader James as "old" after game two, saying he was happy to "poke bears," was tossed early in the third quarter after hitting James in the groin with his arm -- a blow that sent James to the court in pain.



"There was a lot of game to be played when that incident happened," James said. "So (I) just tried to get up, protect my crown jewels, and move on to the next play."

Davis said the Lakers weren't interested in a war of words with the Grizzlies. Brooks, booed every time he touched the ball, finished the night with seven points. Even a dazzling 45-point display from star guard Ja Morant could save the Grizzlies. Morant, back in action after missing game two with a right-hand injury, scored 22 straight points for Memphis in the fourth quarter.

In the first game of a Los Angeles double-header, Kevin Durant finished with 31 points, 11 rebounds and six assists to help Phoenix beat the Clippers 112-100 for a 3-1 series lead. Devin Booker plundered 30 points and veteran Chris Paul added 19 in a late burst of scoring as Phoenix bagged their second straight win in Los Angeles.

The Suns need just one more win to book their place in the Western Conference semi-finals, with game five set for Phoenix on Tuesday.

The Clippers' hopes of squaring the series had been dealt a blow by the absence of Kawhi Leonard, who joined Paul George on the injured list.

Russell Westbrook produced one of his best performances for the Clippers with a 37-point display.

In Miami, the eighth-seeded Miami Heat gained a 2-1 series lead over Eastern top seeds Milwaukee, taking full advantage of the absence of the Bucks' MVP contender Giannis Antetokounmpo in a 121-99 victory.

Jimmy Butler scored 30 points on 12-of-19 shooting for the Heat before departing late in the third quarter after taking a hard fall. After visiting the locker room he returned to the bench but in game in which Miami led by double digits much of the way he did not go back on the floor.

Duncan Robinson scored 20 points and fellow reserve Kyle Lowry added 15 as the Heat bench delivered 59 points.

Djokovic Pulls Out of Madrid Masters

MADRID (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic pulled out of the Madrid Masters today according to the competition's organizers.

"Novak Djokovic is unable to compete at the Madrid Open," the organizers wrote on Instagram ahead of the tournament which starts April 26.

Djokovic's withdrawal, thought to be related to an elbow problem he has been suffering from, is a blow to his preparations for the French Open, which starts at the end of May.

The Serb, 35, suffered a straight-set defeat by compatriot Dusan Lajovic in the quarter-finals at Banja Luka in Bosnia-Herzegovina on Friday.

Djokovic was beaten by underdog Lorenzo Musetti at the Monte Carlo Masters earlier in April and said ahead of the Srpska Open that his elbow was "not in an ideal condition".

Neither Djokovic or Rafael Nadal, joint record 22-time Grand Slam champions, will take part in Madrid, a key part of the preparation for Roland Garros.

Djokovic missed tournaments earlier this year at Indian Wells and Miami, over his refusal to get a Covid-19 vaccination.

"I was many levels below what I want," said the two-time French Open champion on Friday, after his defeat by world number 70 Lajovic.

Antetokounmpo Ruled out of Game 3 Against Miami

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Milwaukee star Giannis Antetokounmpo was ruled out of the third game of the Bucks' NBA playoff series against the Miami Heat on Saturday an hour before tip-off.

The two-time NBA Most Valuable Player will miss a second straight game with a lower back contusion, suffered in a bad fall of the opening game of the best-of-seven Eastern Conference first-round series.

Head coach Mike Budenholzer had indicated Friday that Antetokounmpo might be ready to take the floor, but said in his pre-game remarks to reporters that it's not clear when he will return.

"We'll continue to monitor him throughout the day (Sunday) and the next day," Budenholzer said. "It's not always a linear thing. He's not in a position where he can play, so we're going to continue to monitor and work with him and hope for the best."

Without Antetokounmpo the Bucks won game two of the series to go into the game in Miami level at 1-1.

Antetokounmpo is just one of the high-profile players with injury concerns in the first round of the playoffs.

Klopp Says Things Have Changed For Resurgent Liverpool

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool have shown a marked improvement in their performances in recent weeks, manager Juergen Klopp said after a 3-2 Premier League win over Nottingham Forest.

Liverpool crushed Leeds United 6-1 earlier in the week before edging past strugglers Forest to secure back-to-back league wins for the first time since the start of last month.

The Merseyside club are now unbeaten in their last four games and are seventh in the standings with 50 points — six adrift of Newcastle United in fourth, who play fifth-placed Tottenham Hotspur later today.

Lukaku's Ban Overturned in Statement Against Racism



MILAN (Dispatches) - Inter Milan striker Romelu Lukaku will play in the Coppa Italia semi-final second leg against Juventus on Wednesday after his one-match ban was overturned by the president of the Italian Football Federation (FIGC) as a measure to fight racism.

Inter expressed their disappointment on Friday when Italy's Sports Court of Appeal upheld the ban for Lukaku, imposed after his expulsion for a second yellow card, saying the Belgian player had been punished despite being racially abused in the semi-final's first leg.

However, FIGC President Gabriele Gravina overturned the suspension after evaluating the report of the Federal Prosecutor's Office, the federation said.

The report indicated "unequivocally that the behaviour of the player sanctioned by the

match director followed the serious and repeated displays of hatred and racial discrimination by the opposing fans", the FIGC statement added.

"The measure reiterates how the fight against all forms of racism constitutes one of the founding principles of the sporting system," it said.

Lukaku was happy with the decision, saying the president had shown great sensitivity to the situation.

"I believe that thanks to his intervention justice has been done and this sends out a great message to the whole world of sport and beyond," Lukaku said.

"This has shown that the desire is there to fight racism."

The striker was subjected to racial abuse during the first leg at Juventus "before, during, and after the penalty" he scored to earn Inter a 1-1 draw, the player's representatives said.

Lukaku was then sent off after receiving a second yellow card for his goal celebration during which he held his finger up to his mouth in front of Juve fans, a gesture which was judged to be provocative.

Alcaraz to Play Tsitsipas in Barcelona Open Final

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz swept past Dan Evans 6-2, 6-2 to set up a Barcelona Open final clash with Stefanos Tsitsipas.

The Greek second seed earlier defeated Lorenzo Musetti 6-4, 5-7, 6-3 to reach the final for the third time.

World number two Alcaraz beat Tsitsipas in the quarter-finals at Barcelona last year in three sets in what was the Spaniard's third win in three meetings against the Greek.

"I feel really comfortable playing here in Barcelona and (I'm) playing well," said Alcaraz, who has not dropped a set in the tournament this year.

"Stefanos is playing great matches as well. Last year we had a spicy match, let's say.

"I know he's a really nice guy off the court, so I'm going to try to forget everything that has happened in the matches before, try to focus on my game tomorrow, and try to get the win."

Alcaraz missed the Monte Carlo Masters last week because of hand and back problems and has not been at his most consistent on his way to the final.

An easy win over Nuno Borges was followed by trickier triumphs against Spanish compatriots Roberto Bautista Agut and Alejandro Davidovich Fokina.

Chasing down his third title of the season after triumphs at Buenos Aires and Indian Wells, home favourite Alcaraz started impressively.

The 19-year-old top seed won the first game without dropping a point, sealing it with an ace, ominously for Evans, who was pulled all over the court.



German Magazine Apologizes to Schumacher Family, Sacks Editor

LONDON (Dispatches) - The publishers of a German magazine that ran an 'interview' with Michael Schumacher generated by artificial intelligence have sacked the editor and apologized to the Formula One great's family.

Seven-times world champion Schumacher, now 54, has not been seen in public since he suffered a serious brain injury in a skiing accident on a family holiday in the French Alps in December 2013.

His family said this week that they were planning legal action against weekly magazine Die Aktuelle, owned by the Essen-based Funke media group.

Funke apologized in a statement on their website www.funkemedien.de.

"This tasteless and misleading article should never have appeared. It in no way meets the standards of journalism that we — and our readers — expect from a publisher like Funke," said Funke magazines managing director Bianca Pohlmann.

"As a result of the publication of this article, immediate personnel consequences will be drawn.

"Die Aktuelle editor-in-chief Anne Hoffmann, who has held journalistic responsibility for the paper since 2009, will be relieved of her duties as of today."

The latest edition of Die Aktuelle ran a front cover with a picture of a smiling Schumacher and the headline promising 'Michael Schumacher, the first interview'.

The strapline added: "it sounded deceptively real".

Inside, it emerged that the 'quotes' had been produced by AI.

