

Hamas Political Bureau Chief  
 Ismail Haniyeh Has Accepted  
 Iran's Invitation to Visit the  
 Country and He Will Pay a Visit to  
 Tehran in the Near Future

# IRAN NEWS

Oil Minister Javad Owji Says That  
 Oil and Gas Projects Worth  
 \$15 Billion Will Be Inaugurated by  
 The End of the Current Iranian  
 Calendar Year (March 19, 2024)

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## Tehran-Baghdad Security Agreement to Help Regional Security

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Referring to the security agreement signed between Tehran and Baghdad last year, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that the understanding will help the security of the region.

Speaking in a joint press conference with his Iraqi counterpart Abdul Latif Rashid, the Iranian president said that Tehran and Baghdad enjoy good relations in the political, economic, commercial, and cultural fields.

Saying that commercial and economic relations between Iran and Iraq hit over \$10 billion, Raisi said that the figure can be raised to a higher level.

Referring to the security agreement signed between Tehran and Baghdad last year, he said that this security understanding will help the security of the region.

The security of Iraq is important for Iran, he further noted, saying that the smallest insecurity in Iraq is considered to be insecurity in Iran.

Regarding the presence of American forces in the region, Raisi said that Tehran considers the presence of Americans as a threat to the security of the region.

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## Iran Declares Readiness to Expand Military Drills With China

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani has expressed Tehran's readiness to expand joint military drills with China as part a bid to further development bilateral strategic ties and counter the West's persisting unilateralism.

Underlining that the United States is currently engaged in fomenting crisis and tension in Eastern Europe and West Asia, Ashtiani insisted during a Saturday meeting with his Chinese counterpart Li Shangfu on the sidelines of a Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) in India's capital of New Delhi that "American policies are a common threat to Iran and China; we are against a unipolar world."

Stressing that the Shanghai Cooperation Organization has turned into an influential organization in global developments, Ashtiani said the expansion and consolidation of the SCO is an effective step towards promoting multilateralism in the international arena.

The Iranian defense chief further pointed to significant changes in the regional and international issues, and added that the two countries have invariably collaborated to thwart the implementation of "unilateralist and totalitarian approaches" pursued by the West in independent countries.

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## Leader Hails Workers for Foiling Enemy Plots to Export Grievance



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei says the Iranian laborers' community has not allowed the enemy to cash in on their legitimate grievances, emphasizing the need for strenuous and all-out efforts in order to put an end to any possible acquisition of money or property through illegal or dishonest means.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks on Saturday as he received a group of workers from all over the country on the occasion of Labor Week.

"There have been a number of labor protests. As far as I know, some of these protests have been legitimate, and have been over delayed salaries, transfer of a business to another entity and other issues," the Leader said. However, he added, they kept the enemy at bay and did not allow it to take advantage of the situation.

The Leader further highlighted that the culture of seeking windfall profit should be stopped in the country. Ayatollah Khamenei noted that income should be consistent with the amount of the work that one does.

He expressed dismay over practices such as bribery and usury in the economic sector, and urged the government and Parliament to seriously deal with corruption.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution called on the Iranian administration and the legislature to press on with tackling corruption with no toleration.

"If an [Iranian] official does not have the courage to confront a domestic corrupt, he will not be brave enough either to fight a foreign oppressor. We hope for the government and the Majlis (parliament) to carrying on the fight against the menace of corruption," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

He called unemployment the root cause of corruption, saying, "A great proportion of rampant corruption has its roots in joblessness. Three or four years ago, we initiated a campaign with then administration to look into social ills. I even took in hours-long meetings aimed at addressing social harms. What I have personally come to the conclusion is that many of such ills are caused by unemployment."

"Addiction is connected to unemployment, corruption is related to unemployment, and so are burglary, divorce and break-up of families. Those institutions responsible for creation of jobs should know how important it is for the society to see new opportunities being made available," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader underscored that the situation of the country will improve once efforts are made to improve the living conditions of workers.

"If workers have no worries about their job security, their performance and the quality of products will improve accordingly," Ayatollah Khamenei highlighted.

## Iran Can Solve Lebanon's Electricity Problem Despite U.S. Bans

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Iran can solve Lebanon's electricity shortage problem through bilateral cooperation with the Arab country and in defiance of the already failed US sanctions.

Speaking at a press conference in Beirut on Friday, Amirabdollahian said he told Lebanese officials during his three-day visit that Iran can solve the issue provided that an agreement is reached between the two countries on joint cooperation.

"Of course, the US pressures and fearmongering about sanctions are among the problems in this regard, but you should know that the US sanctions have failed," he said.

He hastened to add that Iran, which is under harsh US sanctions, exports electricity and oil to some countries, such as Iraq.

"Given Iran's capabilities, [bilateral] cooperation in the electricity and gas sectors is a profitable and two-way business both for Lebanon and Iran, and of course, it helps to improve the Lebanese people's welfare," the top Iranian diplomat said.

Tehran and Beirut are advancing negotiations in this regard, Amirabdollahian said, expressing hope that the sides would be able to take practical steps after the completion of the political processes in Lebanon and the election of the country's president.

Lebanon has been beset by a severe fuel crisis that has left many households and businesses struggling with recurrent power outages, while its economic meltdown since 2019 has slowed down imports of fuel for government plants.

Last year, Iran supplied much-needed fuel shipments to Lebanon via Syria after the Lebanese Hezbollah resistance movement asked for Iranian help to ease the energy shortage in the Arab country. On Lebanon's political problems, Amirabdollahian said Iran has always supported any agreement among the Lebanese parties and will make use of its capacities to help the Arab country complete its political process.

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## ViewPoint By:Hamid Reza Naghashian Sanctions Turning Into a Laughing Stock

Imposition of sanctions on nations, countries, entities and individuals is turning to a laughing stock and becoming meaningless because of its overdose by Western countries especially by the U.S. as Washington does not want to retreat from this bad and wrong habit which is used as a tool by it for putting pressure on nations.

The Islamic Republic of Iran since its first day of establishment in 1979 has been under different sanctions of the U.S. and Western countries and those sanctions were intensified during the Trump Administration but Iran proved the world that if there is a will there is a way as the country by taking different measures and actions almost made ineffective sanctions and even witnessed amazing progresses and achievements during the sanctions against Iran.

At first it seemed during Biden Administration the pressure of sanctions was to be slowed down but President Joe Biden showed that he is not better than his predecessor Donald Trump and every day and under any pretext Biden Administration imposes a series of sanctions on Iranians officials or entities.

Of course the Biden Administration uses human rights and Ukraine war as its pretexts to increase pressure on Tehran and Iranians are familiar with the pretexts of the Americans and give no damn to it.

On Thursday, the U.S. imposed new sanctions on groups in Russia and Iran accused of taking Americans hostage as it works to prevent more captive-taking and potentially secure the release of citizens currently being detained.

The sanctions ordered up Thursday are to punish organizations the U.S. accuses of being responsible for holding hostage or wrongfully detaining Americans. In Iran, four individuals are also coming under new sanctions.

The groups are Russia's Federal Security Service and the Intelligence Organization of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. Officials said the steps should act as a so-called warning to those thinking of taking Americans hostage.

Earlier on Monday the U.S. sanctioned four senior Iranian officials under the baseless pretext of brutal suppression of protests that erupted last year.

The U.S. also sanctioned a fifth official it claimed has blocked popular online news sites and spying on journalists and dissidents.

The Treasury Department action was the 11th time the U.S. has blacklisted Iranian officials claiming had role in the death last September of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini. The move was in coordination with Britain, which also imposed similar sanctions against senior Iranian officials.

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## Iran Targets \$10b Trade With EAEU

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) says given the existing free trade agreement between Tehran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Iran intends to increase trade exchanges with the economic bloc up to \$10 billion within less than two years.

Mohammad Reza Ashtiani, head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, made the remarks in a meeting with Minister in charge of Customs Cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Commission Eldar Alisherov on Saturday. According to the Iranian official, the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi is determined to develop strategic ties with the member states of the EAEU.

The total volume of trade exchanges between Iran and the member states of the EAEU stood at \$3.3 billion in 2022, he said, adding that the Islamic Republic exported \$1.5 billion of commodities and imported \$1.7 billion of goods in that year.

The transit exchanges between Iran and the EAEU member states were reported 1.8 million metric tons in the same year, including one million metric tons from Iran and 700k metric tons from the EAEU member countries, he added.

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# Iran Saffron Exports Top \$240m

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - A total of \$244.22 million worth of saffron was exported from Iran during the last Iranian year that ended on March 20, according to the Agriculture Ministry's data for fiscal 2022-23.

The UAE, Spain and China were the main destinations.

Iran produces over 90% of all saffron produced in the world, 80% of which are exported. However, the share of Iran in the global trade of saffron is disproportionately low, as many customers of the Iranian spice buy it in bulk and reexport after packaging it to third countries, Finacial Tribune reported.

The city of Torbat-e Heydariyeh in Khorasan Razavi Province is considered the capital of saffron in the world.

## Raisi Inaugurates 70km of Ahvaz-Andimeshk Two-Track Railway Project

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has inaugurated 70 kilometers of the Ahvaz-Andimeshk two-track railway project.**

The project was inaugurated during President Raisi's visit to Khuzestan province on Thursday. The 70-kilometer railway, between Shush and Bamdezh, was completed with a credit worth 40 trillion rials.

Ninety percent of the entire 140-kilometer two-track railway has been already completed.

Double-tracking of the Ahvaz-Andimeshk railway is one of the important infrastructure projects of Khuzestan.

Increasing the speed of passenger trains to 120 km/h and the annual load capacity of the railway from 10 million to 14 million metric tons are among the benefits of this project.

Raisi ordered the construction of the second railway track from Ahvaz to Andimeshk during his first visit to Khuzestan.

The president arrived in the southwestern Khuzestan province on Thursday and inaugurated a number of development projects during his two-day trip.

Raisi has opened the Persian Gulf Hoveyze Gas Refinery, a large environmental project, in the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

Over €1.3m and more than 22,000 billion rials have been allocated to the implementation of the Persian Gulf project inaugurated by President Raisi.

97,000 barrels of natural gas including 7,318 metric tons of natural gas liquids (NGLs) and 6,649 metric tons of sweet gas and 41 metric tons of solid sulfur are produced in the Persian Gulf Hoveyze Gas Refinery per day.



By implementation of this environmental project, West Karun Power Plant's flare gas is collected and recovered, so the project will not only create billions of dollars of wealth but also reduce CO2 production by 15 million metric tons.

The big project also leads to tackling and controlling air pollution in Ahvaz, the center of Khuzestan province.

Activities in the Persian Gulf Hoveyze Gas Refinery and Persian Gulf Bidboland Gas Refinery, both located in Khuzestan, will help Iran fulfill 70% of its environmental commitments to international conventions including Paris and Geneva.

President Raisi along with a number of his cabinet members arrived in Khuzestan on Thursday (April 27) to open various provincial projects and meet with people to listen to their problems and concerns.

## Iran, EAEU Discuss Expansion of Customs Cooperation to Boost Bilateral Trade

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - During a meeting between Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) Mohammad Rezvani-Far and Minister in Charge of Customs Cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Commission Eldar Alisherov in Tehran on Saturday, the two sides explored the ways for increasing customs cooperation to boost the bilateral trade.

During this meeting, Rizvani-Far said: "Although the memorandum of understanding with Eurasia is for three years, the formalities of turning this memorandum into a long-term agreement will be completed soon, and we will follow up on these agreements through approval in Iran's parliament."

According to the IRICA head, Iran's trade with Eurasian countries is 3.3 billion dollars annually, which includes over 1.5 billion dollars of Iran's exports to Eurasia and more than 1.7 billion dollars of imports from Eurasia.

He also said: "After the agreement and facilitation, our trade exchanges with this union increased by 32 percent in the previous year, and we have set a target in the customs that the figure will increase from 3.3 billion dollars to 10 billion dollars. I think it is quite possible."

"In the goods transit sector, our trade volume was 1.8 million tons, of which more than one million tons of goods were transited from Eurasia through Iran, and over 700,000 tons of goods were transited from Iran to Eurasia", the official further announced.

Minister in charge of Customs Cooperation of the Eurasian Economic Commission, for his part called the meeting with the IRICA head a success and said: "We hope that our three-year temporary agreement with Iran will turn into a long-term agreement in the future and more privileges will be considered between this union and Iran."

He expressed hope that the trade exchanges between Iran and this union be doubled and a trade agreement between the two sides be arranged as soon as possible.



In mid-January, the head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) said the long-awaited free trade agreement (FTA) between the Islamic Republic and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is going to be put in effect by mid-Iranian calendar year 1402 (late September).

Alireza Peyman-Pak made the remarks after a meeting with Minister in charge of Trade of the Eurasian Economic Commission Andrey Slepnev in Tehran.

"In the last two and a half years, more than 30 rounds of negotiations have been held with the representatives of five member countries of the Eurasian Union, and thank God, we reached a final agreement in this round," the TPO head said.

According to Peyman-Pak, during the meeting, the two sides concluded their negotiations and the draft of the agreement was finalized.

The official noted that the list of the commodities to be included in the FTA has been also finalized, saying: "The two sides made the final talks today, according to which 90 percent of the items were put on the green trade list with the rest 10 percent enlisted as forbidden items."

He noted that the FTA will have a significant positive effect on the volume of trade between the two sides.

In the meantime, the EAEU trade minister said that the five members of this union attach special significance to cooperation with Iran.

Slepnev said that Iran is a close ally of Russia and other EAEU member countries. He also believed that the preferential trade agreement between the two sides led to an expansion of economic cooperation with Iran.

Despite all the restrictions caused by the outbreak of the coronavirus disease, EAEU's trade with Iran has grown by 20 percent over the past year, the official said.

## Iran Rights Chief Slams EU's Stance on Terrorist Execution Verdict

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights has criticized the European Union (EU) for its interventionist statement regarding the death sentence given to Iranian-German terrorist ringleader Jamshid Sharmahd.

"A terrorist Iranian national was supported in Europe and in the United States," Gharibabadi wrote on his Twitter account on Saturday, adding that Sharmahd has been sentenced to death based on Iranian laws.

Gharibabadi said that those who oppose the execution of Sharmahd have no regards for rights of the victims of terrorism, adding that instead of condemning the terrorist acts committed by Sharmahd, the EU and the US have decided to defend the terrorist.

"This is the face of the Europe which apparently defends human rights", he said in Farsi tweet.

In an interventionist statement issued on Friday, the European Union announced that it "strongly condemns" the death sentence imposed on Sharmahd.

In the statement, EU's foreign policy chief Josep Borrell called on Tehran to refrain from executing the death penalty on Sharmahd.

## Iran, Georgia Stress Developing Cultural, Scientific Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian and Georgian cultural officials stressed the need for developing the Tehran-Tbilisi cooperation in the fields of science and culture.

Iran's Ambassador to Georgia Mahmoud Adib and the Iranian Cultural Attaché Ahmad Ali Mehri Ardestani met and held talks with the President of Georgia's Caucasus University Kakha Shengelia.

During the meeting, the officials discussed expanding bilateral cooperation, as well as implementing joint scientific, cultural, artistic, educational and research programs for Iranian and Georgian students.

Referring to the historical and cultural commonalities between Iran and Georgia, the Iranian envoy called for student and professor exchange, and training camps.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Adib expressed Tehran's readiness for offering scholarships to Georgian students to continue their studies in Iran for master's and PhD degrees in various fields.

The Georgian side also expressed readiness to boost cooperation with Iran in different fields.

## Iran Evacuates 65 Nationals From Sudan

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for Iran's Foreign Ministry says the Islamic Republic has managed to evacuate dozens of Iranian nationals from Sudan, in face of the persisting conflict among the North African country's military forces.

Nasser Kanaani announced in a statement on Saturday that 65 Iranians were moved from the Sudanese capital of Khartoum to Saudi Arabia's Red Sea Port of Jeddah in view of the continuing clashes between the Sudanese army and the rival paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which has so far stranded thousands of foreign nationals.

"The Foreign Ministry had seriously put high on its agenda the withdrawal and transfer of the 65 Iranian citizens living in Sudan since unrest broke out in the country [on April 15]. Following necessary arrangements, they were safely transferred from Khartoum to Port Sudan, and from there onwards to the Jeddah port," Kanaani explained.

Early on Saturday, meanwhile, the sounds of airstrikes, anti-aircraft weaponry and artillery could be heard in Khartoum, and dark smoke rose over parts of the city, as fighting in Sudan entered a third week.

Fighting between the army and the RSF continued despite the announcement of a 72-hour ceasefire extension on Friday, when strikes by air, tanks and artillery rocked Khartoum and the adjacent cities of Bahri and Omdurman.

At least 512 people have been killed and close to 4,200 others wounded so far, according to the United Nations, which believes the actual toll is much higher.

More than 75,000 people were internally displaced within Sudan just in the first week of the fighting, according to the world body. Only 16 percent of hospitals were operating as normal in the capital.

## No Trace of Toxic Substances Found in Schools

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Intelligence Ministry has concluded that no toxic substances were used in alleged poisoning attacks across the country, saying the use of non-toxic agents was behind the incidents that stirred public panic over the past few months.

In a statement released on Friday, the Intelligence Ministry laid out the final results of a thorough investigation it ran into the mysterious incidents, which started in late November in the city of Qom, where about 50 female students fell ill and had to be transported to the hospital.

Similar alleged poisonings have since occurred consistently in several other schools in Qom, Tehran, and Kermanshah in the west and Ardabil in the northwest, as a result of which scores of schoolgirls had to be hospitalized.

The ministry acknowledged that the incidents took place in the midst of violent riots after the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in police custody in Tehran in mid-September.

"There were reports of the infirmity of students in some schools of the country and they gradually started to rise," the statement said. "There was an inverse relationship between the gradual decline of riots and the rapid rise of the incidents resulting in the publicization of the students' infirmity."

Stressing that strict orders were immediately issued by Iran's president, Interior Ministry and Health Ministry to investigate the issue, the statement said the Intelligence Ministry mobilized all its intelligence, security, technical, operational and laboratory capabilities to discover the causes and factors.

The ministry said there were five factors involved in creating or inducing infirmity in various schools across the country, which included stink bombs, pepper sprays, panic-inducing odorous agents, anti-security goals and mass hysteria agents.

Pointing to its field and laboratory findings, the ministry also said "malingering" was among the proved causes of the incidents, with the aim of playfulness, skipping classes and exams, and in a few cases, causing tumult and riots.

"Toxic substances have not been spread in any of the country's schools, but non-toxic agents that have caused panic have been used inadvertently or intentionally in some reported settings," the statement said.

It added that several people charged with using the above-mentioned substances were identified, summoned, or arrested, and as per their violations or crimes, they were introduced to the judicial authorities.

## Iran Annual Export To UAE Rises 28%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's non-oil export to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) rose 28 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade announced.

Ruhollah Latifi said that importing non-oil goods worth \$5.767 billion from Iran, the UAE was the third top export destination of the Islamic Republic in the previous year.

Iran imported non-oil commodities valued at \$18.395 billion from the UAE in the past year, which was 11 percent higher than the figure of the preceding year, the official stated, adding that the UAE was Iran's first top source of import in the previous year.

Saying that the UAE is considered as one of the important countries in Iran's foreign trade, Farzad Piltan, the director-general of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO)'s Office of West Asian Countries, said in last October that targeting \$30 billion trade between Iran and the United Arab Emirates for the next two years is on the agenda of the trade organizations of the two countries.

Pointing out that the balance of trade volume between the two countries has always been in favor of the UAE, the official added: "According to the plans, balancing, maintaining and improving the level of trade relations between the two countries is on the agenda of trade organizations."

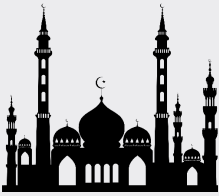
"Considering the position and capacities and facilities that the UAE has for the development of bilateral and multilateral cooperation at the regional and international level, by removing trade barriers and increasing export standards and insurances, we can reach \$30 billion trade with the UAE", the TPO official added.

As announced by Ruhollah Latifi, the value of Iran's non-oil export to its neighbors rose 19 percent in the past Iranian year.

The official said that 75.184 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$30.537 billion were exported to the neighboring countries in the previous year.

According to Latifi, Iran imported 21.582 million tons of non-oil products valued at \$28.305 billion from its neighbor in the past year, with a 10-percent growth in worth year on year.





PRAYER TIME

Noon (Zohr)

Evening (Maghreb)

Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)

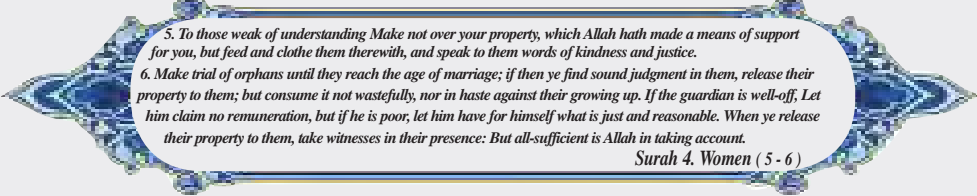
Tomorrow's Sunrise

12:01

19:08

03:39

05:12



5. To those weak of understanding Make not over your property, which Allah hath made a means of support for you, but feed and clothe them therewith, and speak to them words of kindness and justice.

6. Make trial of orphans until they reach the age of marriage; if then ye find sound judgment in them, release their property to them; but consume it not wastefully, nor in haste against their growing up. If the guardian is well-off, let him claim no remuneration, but if he is poor, let him have for himself what is just and reasonable. When ye release their property to them, take witnesses in their presence: But all-sufficient is Allah in taking account.

Surah 4. Women (5 - 6)

# No Obstacle in Trade With Azerbaijan Yet

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

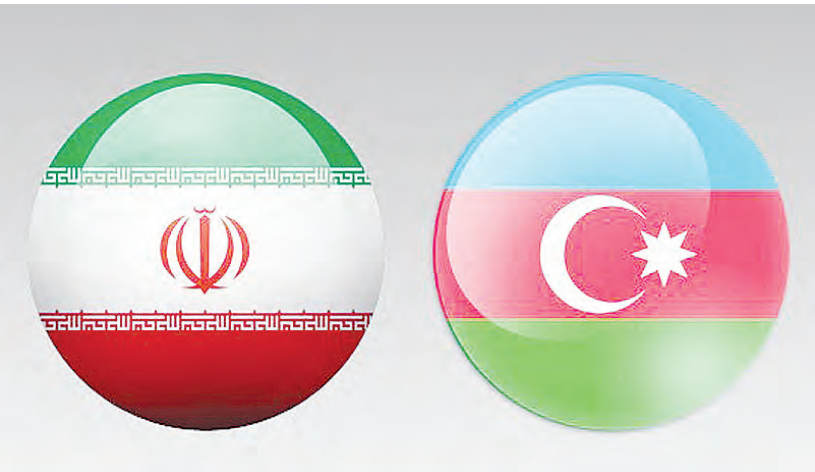
**TEHRAN – A member of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) says recent developments and tensions between Azerbaijan and Iran has not created any hurdle in trade with Azerbaijan yet.**

Speaking to ILNA, Behrouz Pour Soleiman who is also deputy head of Ardebil Chamber of Commerce said that political tensions between Tehran and Baku has not disrupted the trade ties of the two countries, adding that Azerbaijan Government has not created any ban or hurdle yet and the trade between the two countries continue like the past and currently there is no hurdle for exchange of goods at their border checkpoints.

He then pointed to the rise in the trade volume of both countries and said that the trade volume with Azerbaijan was around \$90m two years ago that the figure increased by 20% last year and reached \$110m, adding that the trade in terms of weight saw decrease but it saw rise in terms of value because of the rise in the price of dollar.

When asked what the measures of the chamber for rise in the trade volume with Azerbaijan, Pour Soleimani said that devaluation of national currency rial in the country made exports of many goods justifiable but last year officials had no facilities for exports.

He expressed hope that Ardabil-Mianeh railway would be inaugurated by the yearend, adding that if this corridor is operationalized in the next two years, undoubtedly the volume of exports to Azerbaijan and other countries and officials are determined this railway to be launched.



He touched upon maintaining Azerbaijan market and its importance on Iran's economy and said that Azerbaijan is considered as a suitable market for Iranian goods and at the same time it is a good destination for transit of Iranian goods to the Caucasus countries and Russia and it means major exporters of Azerbaijan are successful Russian readers.

He further said that considerable volume of goods which are bought from Iran are transited via Azerbaijan to the Caucasus and Russia and in other words, Azerbaijan is a bridge for linking Iran to the Caucasus states that maintain this market is very important for Iran.

Pour Soleimani also criticized the officials and said that there has been no support to the border provinces. He also criticized domestic obstructive regulations as the main factor in creating restriction for traders in trade with other states. He said that with the existing regulations one cannot be hopeful for promoting exports and it seems it is the domestic regulations and not Azerbaijan who plays a great role in restricting exports.

Recently, the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining and Trade said that the value of Iran's non-oil export to its neighbors rose 19 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Ruhollah Latifi said that 75.184 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$30.537 billion were exported to the neighboring countries in the previous year.

# Tehran, Tashkent in Talks to Establish Joint Free Zone

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN-** The secretary of Iran's Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones negotiated with the officials of the free trade and special economic zones of Uzbekistan about the establishment of a joint free zone between the two countries, during a two-day visit to Tashkent.

As reported, Hojatollah Abdolmaleki participated in the international investment meeting of Uzbekistan, which was held in the presence of the president and other high-ranking officials of this country and heads of international and regional financial organizations and institutions.

By visiting several free and special zones of Uzbekistan, the Iranian official discussed the benefit and use of joint capacities and opportunities for investment and trade between the two countries

Two weeks ago, Abdolmaleki announced that Iran is negotiating with 17 countries for the establishment of joint free zones and said by setting up these free zones, trade and investment will be facilitated.

He named Russia as one of the countries in this due.

In mid-March, the deputy head of the Free Zones High Council said that Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement to form a joint free trade zone on the border of the two countries in the near future.

According to Ahmad Jamali, the decision for establishing the mentioned zone was made during the two countries' fifth Joint Economic Committee meeting in Baghdad.

Underlining the fact that three of Iran's major free zones are located near the Iraqi border, Jamali noted that along with the joint zone, these four free trade zones can play a significant role in boosting the trade exchanges between the two countries.

The establishment of free trade zones (FTZs) in Iran dates back to the Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989 - March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

# Iran, Brazil to Start Cooperation in Health Economy

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN –** Head of Medical Commission of Iran-Brazil Joint Chamber of Commerce says Iran and Brazil have prepared the grounds for trade commercial in the fields of medicine, medical and hospital equipment.

Alireza Aminian said that in recent months several meetings have been held with organs, associations and businessmen of this field and capacities and directives for developing relations in these fields have been studied.

He went on to say that due to the position of Brazil in the world as economy number 8 and its role in South America as well as its recent progresses, broadening economic relations in the field of medical equipment, dentistry and laboratories has been taken into consideration.

He added that the related organs like ministry of industry, mine and trade have taken a big step regarding exports of some medical items to several countries like producing capabilities of Iran's production units and this is a prelude for introducing Iran's exporting potentials to Brazil and identifying trade partners.

Aminian also pointed to the difference in obligatory standards and health requirements of the countries for imports and this should be studied in the country.

He admitted that the HS scale in Brazil for imports is 10 to 12 digit figures and they have progressed well in this regard while this figure for Iran is still 8 to 10 digits.

Aminian also said that there is a close cooperation between the chamber and Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade and both sides exchange prepared information and data for accelerating trade with Brazil especially in the mentioned fields.

According to the latest report Iran's trade with BRICS member states reached 43.28 million tons worth \$34.98 billion.

Data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, which excludes crude oil exports, show that Iran's trade with BRICS member states, namely Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa, reached 43.28 million tons worth \$34.98 billion during the first 11 months of last Iranian year (March 21, 2022-Feb. 19) while Iran's trade with Brazil was announced 459,959 tons worth \$408.95 million.

# President Inaugurates First Phase of NGL 3200 Plant

**AHVAZ (SHANA) -** President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated the first phase of NGL 3200 plant in southwestern province of Khuzestan on Friday.

Launched in the presence of top officials, including Oil Minister Javad Owji, the first phase of the Persian Gulf Hoveyzeh gas refining project has capacity for collecting 250 million cubic feet of flare gas of West Karoun fields per day. Some \$1.4 million have been invested in the two phases of the project.

NGL 3200 is the first project for gathering associated petroleum gas (APG) of West Karoun fields, mentioned Owji, explaining the plant will inject sweet gas into the national grid and heavy compounds and condensates, as feedstock, will be carried to provincial petrochemical complexes in Mahshahr Petrochemical Special Economic Zone through a pipeline.

According to him, the second phase will become operational within a year to process APG and produce value-added products. The managing director of the Persian Gulf Hoveyzeh Gas Refining Company earlier said the second phase has so far witnessed 80 percent physical progress and is expected to be completed within a year, said the official.

Talking to reporters, Afshin Kiani estimated that the two phases of the refinery's annual revenues would be around 500 million dollars.

He said the project operations started in 2013 and the Petroleum Engineering and Development Company (PEDEC) was in charge of implementing the project, adding the responsibility was handed over to the Persian Gulf Petrochemical Industries Company (PGPIC) in 2016, when it saw 21 percent progress.

The project, Kiani continued, is aimed at protecting the environment and collecting associated petroleum gases from Yadavaran, South and North Azadegan, South and North Yaran, Darkhoein, Sohrab, Jofeir, Sousangerd, and Band-e Karkheh fields.

The CEO of the Persian Gulf Hoveyzeh Gas Refining Company said products with further added value will be produced after gathering associated petroleum gases.

The official stated 97,000 barrels of liquefied natural gas (LNG) will be transferred to Bandar Imam Petrochemical Company (BIPC) through a 185-kilometer pipeline and 360 million cubic feet of sweet gas will be injected into the national grid daily.

Kiani explained that 80 to 85 percent of the equipment used in the project have been manufactured domestically, adding its license is fully local.

# Pakistan Calls for Improved Economic Ties With Iran

**ISLAMABAD (IRNA) -** Pakistan's President Arif Alvi has hailed Iran's position in considering Islamic world issues while calling for a bolstering of economic ties with Iran.

Mohammad Ali Hosseini, at the end of his mission as the Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Pakistan, met and held talks with President Alvi in Islamabad.

The Presidential Palace of Pakistan issued a statement on the meeting saying that President Alvi had called for increased cooperation between Pakistan and Iran in all fields and stated that strengthening economic and trade relations will help provide mutual benefit.

Appreciating the Iranian ambassador's efforts to further strengthen relations between the two brotherly countries during his mission, especially boosting economic interactions, President Alvi said that Pakistan values its fraternal relations with Iran because both countries have historical and cultural ties and share common views on important regional and international issues.

He thanked the Islamic Republic of Iran's support for Pakistan's political positions and noted that it is inevitable for the two to strengthen their counterterrorism cooperation to eliminate terrorism challenges in the region.

The Pakistani president hailed Iran's attention to Islamic issues, especially the Palestinian cause and the fight against Islamophobia, and expressed his satisfaction with the resumption of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia while describing this development as an important initiative that would bring peace and stability to the Middle East.

Hosseini, for his part, referred to the cooperation capacities between the Iran and Pakistan and stressed the need to expand economic, cultural, and political cooperation between the two countries.



# Steam Unit of West Karoun Combined-Cycle Power Plant Launched

**AHVAZ (Shana) -** The steam unit of West Karoun Combined-Cycle Power Plant was inaugurated by Iranian President Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi visiting the southwestern province of Khuzestan.

The steam unit launch coincided with a 200-megawatt increase in the plant's power generation capacity.

West Karoun Combined-Cycle Power Plant has two gas-fired units with a 166 MW nominal capacity and one steam unit having a 160 MW nominal capacity. The plant has high-voltage substations and power transmission lines installed by Iranian experts, supplying West Karoun oil fields with power. Up to now, two 400-kilovolt (kV) substations, two 230 kV substations, and 180-kilometer-long transmission lines have been set up, and 120 kilometers more are under construction.

In addition, West Karoun Combined-Cycle Power Plant has been transmitting the surplus electricity production (SEP) to the national grid over the past three years.

# Joint Azadegan Oil Field Inaugurated

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN -** President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi on Friday inaugurated a project to boost extraction from joint Azadegan oil field in southwestern province of Khuzestan by 45,000 barrels per day (bpd).

The project has been implemented after 40 new wells were drilled, completed, and put into operation in the field shared with Iraq.

Based on the master development plan (MDP), the project of Azadegan oil field consists of two stages.

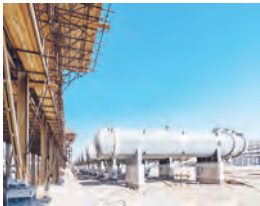
The first phase comprises the drilling and the completion of 206 wells, the installation of overground facilities, 10 manifolds, and two separation plants, and the construction of the Central Treatment Export Plant (CTEP) with a daily processing capacity of 320,000 barrels.

After a years-long hiatus, the development of South Azadegan resumed when the Raisi administration took office.

Since autumn 2021, the first phase of development has been accelerated to make up for lost time by relying on expertise of domestic manufacturers and contractors and their experience in developing oil and gas fields and investing some 400 million dollars.

To that end, drilling facilities were increased by 70 percent, 170-kilometer-long flow pipelines were supplied, of which 130 kilometers were installed and launched, 40 new wells were drilled, completed, and put into operation, daily crude oil output rose by 45,000 barrels, 130 kilometers of major and minor access roads were built or renovated, and 25-kilometer-long 14- and 20-inch transmission pipelines were laid and run.

South Azadegan oil field, located in 80km southwest of Ahvaz, the capital of Khuzestan Province, adjacent to Iran-Iraq border, is a joint field having an area of 765 square kilometers, which is estimated to have 27 billion barrels of crude oil in place.





# BBC Boss Quits Over Boris Johnson Loan

LONDON (Dispatches) - The BBC’s chairman announced his resignation after his involvement in a loan for then UK prime minister Boris Johnson raised questions about the broadcaster’s vaunted impartiality.

Britain’s Conservative government has long been accused of seeking to muzzle the publicly funded BBC, and the appointment of Richard Sharp -- a wealthy past donor to the party -- was denounced by opposition parties at the time.

The appointment of the BBC chair lies in the gift of the government. It only emerged later that Sharp had acted as go-between to facilitate the £800,000 (\$1 million) loan for Johnson.



# U.S. Army Helicopters Crash in Alaska

ALASKA (Dispatches) - Two U.S. Army helicopters collided and crashed in Alaska while returning from a training flight, killing three soldiers and injuring a fourth.

Two of the soldiers died at the scene of the crash near Healy, Alaska, and a third died on the way to a hospital in Fairbanks, the army said in a statement on Thursday. The injured soldier was being treated at a hospital.

Each AH-64 Apache helicopter was carrying two people at the time of the crash, said John Pennell, a spokesperson for the US Army Alaska.

The helicopters were from the 1st Attack Battalion, 25th Aviation Regiment at Fort Wainwright, based near Fairbanks.



# Russian Strikes Kill 16, Kyiv Says Offensive Almost Ready



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russian strikes battered cities across Ukraine early Friday, killing at least 16 people as Kyiv said preparations for a highly-anticipated offensive against Moscow’s forces were nearly complete.

The barrage of almost two dozen missiles overnight ended a weeks-long pause following the repeated Russian strikes that had aimed to paralyse Ukraine’s energy grid during the winter months.

These deadly new attacks included a strike on a residential block in Uman, central Ukraine, where AFP journalists saw rescue workers extracting victims’ remains from destroyed buildings.

“I want to see my children, they are under the rubble,” said Dmitry, a 33-year-old local from Lugansk, a northeastern city under Russian control.

Rescuers were using cranes to search for survivors among the remains of the multi-storey housing block in the central city of 80,000 inhabitants.

“I’ve seen a lot but I haven’t lost my children before. Now I want to see my children alive or dead,” Dmitry said. Ukraine’s interior minister said 14 people had been killed in Uman, with two ten-year-old children among the dead. Regional governor Igor Taburets said the city was hit by two cruise missiles, with one hitting a residential building and the other a warehouse.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky condemned the latest barrage and vowed a response to “Russian terror”.

Russian missiles also hit the central city of Dnipro, already grief-stricken after a January strike on a tower block that killed more than 40 people.

“A young woman and a three-year-old child died,” the city’s mayor Borys Filatov said Friday on Telegram.

Kyiv, which was among the cities targeted Friday, had not been hit by missiles in more than 50 days.

While it has not faced missile barrages since early March, the capital was the target last week of an attack by 12 Iranian-made drones, eight of which were shot down without causing any casualties.

Authorities did not report any casualties in the capital, where air defense forces downed 11 cruise missiles.

Overall, Ukraine said it had downed 21 of 23 Russian missiles and two attack drones overnight.

Ukraine’s air defense system has been bolstered in recent months by the delivery of Western equipment crucial to the country’s war effort.

The new strikes came as Ukrainian defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov said his country’s preparations to push back against entrenched Russian positions were almost complete.

“Equipment has been promised, prepared and partially delivered. In a global sense, we’re ready,” Ukrainian defence minister Oleksiy Reznikov said.

Kyiv has said throughout the war launched by Russia last February that it is intent on repelling Moscow’s forces from territory they control in eastern and southern Ukraine.

“Preparations are coming to an end,” Reznikov added of the planned offensive.

Most of the fighting is now taking place in the east for control of the industrial Donbas region, particularly the city of Bakhmut, which has been almost completely destroyed.

Russian Deputy Prime Minister Marat Khusnullin said Friday he had paid a rare visit to the embattled city in east Ukraine and vowed Moscow would rebuilt it.

“The city is damaged, but it can be restored. As soon as the operational situation allows, we will go in and work, step by step,” he said.

# China Flies Combat Drone Around Taiwan

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - A Chinese uncrewed combat aircraft has flown around Taiwan, the island’s defense ministry said, showcasing Beijing’s ability to attack its fall-back east coast bases, as a U.S. maritime patrol aircraft transited the Taiwan Strait.

China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its own territory, has increased military pressure on the island over the past three years as it tries to force Taipei to accept its sovereignty claim.

This month, China staged war games around Taiwan after Taiwan President Tsai Ing-wen met U.S. House of Representatives Speaker Kevin McCarthy in Los Angeles.

Taiwan’s defense ministry, in an early Friday update of Chinese military activities over the previous 24 hours, said 19 military aircraft had entered the island’s air defense identification zone.

One of those was a TB-001 drone, which flew around Taiwan, first crossing the Bashi Channel that separates Taiwan from the Philippines, then up the east of Taiwan before crossing back toward the Chinese coast, according to a map provided by the ministry.

## Taliban Leader Says UNSC Pressure Won’t Work

KABUL (Dispatches) - A senior Taliban leader warned the United Nations Security Council to give up its “failed policy of pressure” after members adopted a resolution condemning Kabul’s growing restrictions on women.

The resolution, passed unanimously by all 15 Council members on Thursday, said a ban on women working for the world body and NGOs in Afghanistan “undermines human rights and humanitarian principles”.

The Council urged “all States and organizations to use their influence” to “promote an urgent reversal of these policies and practices”.

Since ousting the foreign-backed government and returning to power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have imposed an austere version of sharia that the United Nations has labelled “gender-based apartheid”.

Women have been barred from most secondary education and universities, prevented from working in most government jobs as well as NGOs and blocked from public spaces such as gyms and parks.

Anas Haqqani, a senior leader in the Taliban movement but with no official government role, said the council “shouldn’t continue the failed policy of pressure”.

“Any position adopted, that is not based upon a deep understanding won’t give the desired results and will always be ineffective,” he said on Twitter.

He said the council should instead remove diplomatic and financial sanctions placed on a slew of officials which “amounts to the collective punishment of Afghans”.

Russian ambassador Vasily Nebenzia criticised the text of the resolution despite signing it.

“We seriously regret and are disappointed that steps and a more ambitious approach and texts were blocked by Western colleagues,” he said.

“If you’re so sincere, why not return the assets you’ve stolen from the country and without any preconditions,” he said, referring to the \$7 billion in Afghan central bank assets frozen by the United States after the Taliban government seized power.



# Heavy Clashes Rock Sudan’s Capital Despite Truce Extension

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Heavy explosions and gunfire rocked Sudan’s capital, Khartoum and its twin city of Omdurman early Friday, residents said, despite the extension of a fragile truce between the county’s two top generals whose power struggle has killed hundreds.

After two weeks of fighting that has turned the capital into a war zone and thrown Sudan into turmoil, a wide-ranging group of international mediators — including African and Arab nations, the U.N. and the United States — were intensifying their pressure on the rival generals to enter talks on resolving the crisis.

So far, however, they have managed to achieve only a series of fragile temporary cease-fires that failed to stop clashes but created enough of a lull for tens of thousands of Sudanese to flee to safer areas and for foreign nations to evacuate thousands of their citizens by land, air and sea.

In a sign of the persistent chaos, Turkey said one of its evacuation planes was hit by gunfire outside Khartoum with no casualties on Friday, hours after both sides accepted a 72-hour truce extension, apparently to allow foreign governments complete the evacuation of their citizens.

Fierce clashes with frequent explosions and gunfire continued Friday in Khartoum’s upscale neighborhood of Kafouri, where the military earlier used warplanes to bomb its rivals, the Rapid Support Forces, residents said. Clashes were also reported around the military’s

headquarters, the Republican Palace and the area close to the Khartoum international airport. All these areas have been flashpoints since the war between the military and the RSF erupted on April 15.

There were also signs that the paramilitary was struggling to treat injuries sustained by its forces. Doctors in the capital said the RSF is abducting medical personnel in desperation.

One doctor forwarded a voice note shared on a chat group for Sudanese healthcare workers warning them not to wear medical uniforms or hand over identification listing a profession, should they be stopped.

Dr. Nada Fadul, a Sudanese-American infectious disease physician at the University of Nebraska, who is working with community health leaders in Sudan, said she knew about five instances of doctors being kidnapped by the RSF from Khartoum streets since the start of the fighting.

One of them said he was forcibly taken to an unknown location in Khartoum earlier this week where there were dozens of injured fighters. He saw a stockpile of medical supplies and two other kidnapped doctors working there.

The doctor, who spoke on condition of anonymity for his safety, spent three days treating fighters with gunshot wounds, burns and other injuries. He said he and others were released on late Wednesday.



# Pope in Hungary Urges Europe to Unite to End War Next Door

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Pope Francis on Friday blasted the “adolescent belligerence” that brought war back to Europe and said the continent must recover its founding spirit of peaceful unity to confront Russia’s war in Ukraine.

Francis outlined his vision for the future of Europe as he began a three-day visit to Hungary. In a carefully calibrated speech, he demanded that the European Union approve safe and legal ways for migrants to enter and for the Hungarian government not to hold Europe “hostage” to populist demands.

Francis didn’t mince words when he addressed President Katalin Novak and Hungary’s populist prime minister, Viktor Orban, whose lukewarm support for Ukraine has rankled other EU countries. The pontiff recalled the lofty ideals behind the bloc’s founding and lamented that rising nationalism and “adolescent belligerence” had replaced them.

“We seem to be witnessing the sorry sunset of that choral dream of peace, as the solists of war now take over,” Francis said. “At this historical juncture, Europe is crucial. ... It is called to take up its proper role, which is to unite those far apart, to welcome those other peoples and refuse to consider anyone an eternal enemy.”

Hungarian officials said the pope’s visit, his second to Budapest in as many years, was designed primarily to let him minister to the country’s Catholic community. But with the war in neighboring Ukraine and Orban butting heads with other EU nations over rule of law issues and LGBTQ+ rights, Francis’ words and deeds in the heart of Europe carried strong political undertones.

He has repeatedly called for a peaceful resolution to the war and expressed solidarity with the Ukrainian people, although his trip to Hungary brought Francis the nearest he’s gotten to the front line of the fighting.

The pope plans to meet Saturday with some of the 35,000 Ukrainian refugees who remain in Hungary. Nearly 2.5 million refugees entered the country early on in Russia’s invasion of Ukraine.

Orban has called for a cease-fire. But the nationalist prime minister has refused to supply Kyiv with weapons and threatened to veto EU sanctions against Moscow while maintaining Hungary’s strong dependence on Russian energy. His government also said it would not arrest Russian President Vladimir Putin, who is the subject of an international arrest warrant on war crimes charges, if he came to Hungary.





## Ukraine Launches Tech Cluster To Boost Military Capability

KYIV (Dispatches) - The Ukrainian government on Wednesday launched a new initiative meant to streamline and promote innovation in the development of drones and other technologies that have been critical in the war with Russia.

As part of the initiative dubbed BRAVE1, the government hopes to bring state, military, and private sector developers working on defense issues together into a tech cluster that would give Ukraine a battlefield advantage.

“Considering the enemy that is right next to us and its scale, we definitely need to develop the military tech so that we can defend ourselves,” Mykhailo Fedorov, Ukraine’s minister of digital transformation, said.

Fedorov told The Associated Press ahead of Wednesday’s official announcement that the government had earmarked more than 100 million hryvnias (about \$2.7 million) to fund projects that have the potential to help Ukraine win the 14-month conflict.

“There are many people on the battlefield now of the young generation that can work with technologies, and they need them,” he said.

The name of the defense tech cluster refers to Ukraine’s bravery in the war that Russia started, Defense Minister Oleksii Reznikov said during the presentation.

He said Ukraine is striving for independence in its military capability and BRAVE1 can be a step toward achieving it. Last week Reznikov met with defense leaders from around the globe in Germany to coordinate additional military aid to Ukraine.

“We must not be dependent on the free will of our partners,” he said. “We have to invest resources into our independence so that we can defend ourselves on our own.”

The presentation was held in an underground parking lot and featured some of the Ukrainian technologies already being used on the battlefield, such as unmanned ground vehicles, robotic systems to identify landmines and unmanned aerial systems.

Both Ukraine and Russia make frequent use of unmanned aerial vehicles for reconnaissance and in attacks. Russia extensively uses Iran’s long-range Shahed-136 exploding drones, to damage Ukrainian power plants and instill fear in civilians. The Ukrainian government launched a public fundraising drive last year asking foreign donors to help it build an “army of drones.”

The Moscow-appointed head of the port city of Sevastopol in Crimea, Mikhail Razvozhayev, reported this week that Russian forces destroyed a Ukrainian sea drone that attempted to attack the harbor and another one blew up. Ukrainian officials stopped short of openly claiming responsibility, as they had done after earlier attacks on Crimea, which Russia annexed in 2014.

Oleksandr Kviatkovskiy, a board member of robotic and netcentric military innovation nonprofit Aerorozvidka, sees BRAVE1 as a platform the military can use to communicate its electronic warfare needs and provide strategic support to the military technology industry.

“Even one year to develop a product, it’s a very short time,” he said.

However, Kviatkovskiy isn’t sure that such platform can create a significant boost for development of war technologies.

“Even if it does, it will be minimal,” he said. “Few things can be more effective than the boost created by the tanks near Kyiv,” he said, referring to how Ukrainian forces prevented Russian troops from storming the capital during the first weeks of the war.

Fevzi Ametov, a Ukrainian soldier and co-founder of Drone.ua, a company that specializes in drones, said businesses and their engineers already try to incorporate feedback from military personnel into their products.

“Any assault without drones, right now, it’s like going blind into a minefield, and you don’t know what is waiting around the corner,” he said. “Technologies help save lives.”

Ametov said Ukraine was investing many more resources in military technology than it did before Russia’s invasion. He based his assessment on the various models of drones his unit has tried out.

“We always have something new to test, to understand if it’s needed for our unit or not,” he said.

Ametov, who is originally from Crimea, fights on the Ukraine war’s front line while still involved in running his company, which expects to play an advisory role in the BRAVE1 initiative.

His company distributes a portable anti-drone gun that uses radio signals to jam drones and to bring them down. According to Ametov, Ukrainian forces are using hundreds of the \$12,000 guns, which can run for up to 30 minutes on a single fully charged battery, “with more and more coming.”



## Best Ways to Keep Your Throat Healthy | HealthNews

LONDON (Dispatches) - Keeping your throat healthy involves more than just avoiding a sore throat. It is one of the best ways to promote good oral hygiene, preventing infection or inflammation, and above all, keeping your voice and swallowing in optimal shape. Inevitably, if our throat stays healthy, we have less difficulty talking, singing, eating, drinking, and even clearing our throat and breathing.

The throat has many components that play special, overlapping roles.

Taking care of our throat takes care of swallowing, speaking, singing, and nasal and sinus health.

A healthy lifestyle, including a good diet and exercise, as well as good oral hygiene, goes a long way in keeping our throats healthy.

Take care of your voice and the rest of your throat will follow.

Our throats are one of the most sensitive parts of our body, so taking utmost care and practicing prevention should be a high priority.

Throat anatomy, signs, and symptoms

Typically, we experience four main categories of signs and symptoms including:

Pain or discomfort, Trouble swallowing, Hoarseness or difficulty speaking and Post-nasal drainage or drip

In order to understand these better, it is important to understand the components of our throat since each plays a special role with overlapping functions.

Anatomical diagram of human throat

The oral cavity (mouth) is the first part of our digestive tract. It extends from our lips to the back of our tongue. It includes only the front two-thirds of the tongue, the upper and lower teeth and gums, the floor of the mouth and the roof of our mouth.

The oropharynx is the middle part of the throat behind the oral cavity. It includes the soft palate, the uvula, the back of the throat, the back one-third of the tongue, and the tonsils.

The nasopharynx is the connection from the back of the nose to the oropharynx. It lies above the soft palate and that is where the openings are to the eustachian tubes and the adenoids, if there are any.

The hypopharynx is the lower part of the throat extending from where the oropharynx ends to the crucial area where the throat meets a crossroad. One direction is to the voice box, or larynx and lungs, and the other direction is to the opening to the esophagus.

The larynx, or voice box, is a complex instrument that protects us from aspirating or taking food or drinks into our lungs. It produces sounds that allow us to speak, sing, and make noises. An interesting fact is that we have two sets of vocal cords that are separated by a small space. These are called the true and false vocal cords. The true vocal cords are finely tuned instruments that snap together to give us the quality of our voice — the pitch, tone, and volume. The false vocals are not referred to very much since they do not produce sound but likely play more subtle roles such as producing resonance. Resonance is the quality of reinforcement or prolongation of sounds made by the true vocal cords.

All of these components of the throat play roles in our digestion, breathing, and nasal and sinus health.

Some of the preventative measures which affect the throat begin in the nose and sinuses while others may involve our lungs, airways, and our digestive system. The throat serves as a repository as well as a gateway.

Most of us are familiar with soreness and discomfort in our throat from upper or lower respiratory infection or inflammation. We can also experience similar symptoms with post-nasal drainage, allergies, and even gastroesophageal reflux or heartburn.

Voice abuse or overuse can cause throat soreness, hoarseness, and difficulty swallowing and breathing.

There is a myriad of different disorders and abnormalities that can affect the function and the sensations we have in our throats. Other common malady is tonsillitis and adenoiditis, particularly in children. Excessive tissue in our throat can affect our breathing and is often a prime cause of sleep-disordered breathing such as obstructive sleep apnea.

There are a variety of preventative measures we can take to keep our throats healthy.

Hydration and humidification

Drinking plenty of water and making sure our throat doesn’t get dry protects the lining of the entire extent of our throat. It promotes adequate drainage from our nose, allows us to chew and swallow our food properly, and keeps our voice healthy. Humidification can also be helpful, particularly in dry climates or if you are experiencing a sore throat or respiratory symptoms.



# Introducing Arcturus: A New COVID-19 Variant

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Arcturus variant, or XBB.1.16 strain, has been skyrocketing in India and has currently been detected in a whopping 34 nations.

Experts say the new variant might be 1.2 times more infectious compared to the previous major subvariants. Arcturus has been prevalent across India and detected in all United Kingdom nations, including England, Scotland, Wales, and Northern Ireland. The subvariant has caused five deaths in the U.K. so far.

The strain was initially discovered in January and has been tracked by the World Health Organization (WHO) since March 22, which was then assigned as a “variant of interest” in mid-April.

During a news conference on March 29, Maria Van Kerkhove, the technical lead for COVID at the WHO, commented that Arcturus has been around for a while. “We haven’t seen a change in severity in individuals or in populations, but that’s why we have these systems in place. It has one additional mutation in the spike protein, which,



in lab studies, shows increased infectivity as well as potential increased pathogenicity,” says Van Kerkhove.

Arcturus has traits that make it slightly different from other

variants and subvariants we have previously encountered, including a mutant spike protein that may make it more contagious.

It has now also spread to 31 states across the United States and is estimated to be the most contagious and resistant to vaccination strain of the virus yet. The subvariant is emerging as a hotspot in California, New Jersey, and New York.

The CDC says genetic alterations in XBB.1.16 might provide a growth edge over other lineages. However, there is presently no proof that XBB.1.16 results in more severe illness or reduced vaccination effectiveness.

What are symptoms of the Arcturus variant?

Aside from common symptoms of other COVID-19 variants, the Arcturus variant involves conjunctivitis, a condition that brings redness or inflammation in the eye.

Conjunctivitis, or pink eye, can cause an itching sensation and crusted eyelids. The condition usually goes away on its own within a week or two but may sometimes require prescribed antiviral medication.

# Smaller EV Prices to Come Down as EV Sales Climb

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Nearly one in five cars sold globally this year will be electric, with the prices of smaller EV models dropping to rival those of combustion engine cars in North America and Europe by the mid-2020s, the International Energy Agency (IEA) predicted.

The agency raised its EV sales forecasts in part because of the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act, which supports green industry and subsidises consumers’ purchase of electric vehicles (EVs), IEA executive director Fatih Birol said on a media call.

China features prominently, making up half the EVs on the road worldwide including battery-electric cars and plug-in hybrids, and with 60% of EV sales last year taking place there, according to the IEA’s annual outlook on EVs.

The country has also seen prices for some smaller EV models edging lower towards those of their combustion engine equivalents, said the IEA’s energy technology policy head, Timar Guell.

Electric car sales globally are expected to surge 35% this year to 14 million, the report said, comprising 18% of the passenger car market, up from just 4% in 2020.

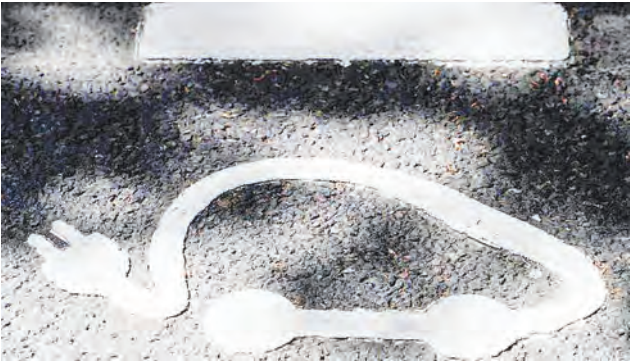
“Our current expectation is that we can see price parity in small and medium-sized electric cars in North America and European markets somewhere in the mid-2020s... for larger cars like SUVs

and pick-ups, purchasing parity is likely to come later, probably into the 2030s,” Guell said.

Governments are investing in EV expansion out of concerns over the environment, to boost industrial policy and decrease dependency on oil, demand for which will fall by 5 million barrels a day by 2030 because of the EV transition, Birol said.

SUVs and large cars account for nearly two-thirds of EVs in China and Europe and a greater proportion in the United States.

In emerging and developing economies, two- or three-wheel electric vehicles outnumber cars. Over half of India’s three-wheeler registrations in 2022 were electric, according to the study.





## Singapore Hikes Property Stamp Duties

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Singapore raised taxes on private property purchases in a surprise move late that includes a doubling of stamp duties for foreigners to an eye-watering 60%.

Authorities in Singapore, where real estate is a safe haven investment for wealthy foreigners, keep close tabs on property prices to ensure housing remains affordable for locals and stays in step with economic fundamentals.

The additional buyer's stamp duty (ABSD) for Singapore citizens and permanent residents will also face increases but much smaller ones, and only on their second and subsequent properties, according to a joint statement from the finance ministry, national development ministry and central bank. Property prices and rents in Singapore have been climbing steadily over recent years due to construction delays caused by the COVID-19 disruptions.



## U.S. Business Spending on Equipment Weakening

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - New orders for key U.S.-manufactured capital goods fell more than expected in March and shipments declined, suggesting that business spending on equipment likely remained a drag on economic growth in the first quarter.

But the economy appears to have stayed on a solid growth path last quarter, with other data from the Commerce Department on Wednesday showing the goods trade deficit narrowed sharply due to a rebound in exports. Even though business spending on equipment weakened, demand remained strong for goods like computers and electronic products as well as electrical equipment, appliances and components.

"The economy isn't going off the rails yet," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York.

Orders for non-defense capital goods excluding aircraft, a closely watched proxy for business spending plans, dropped 0.4% last month. Data for February was revised down to show a 0.7% drop in these so-called core capital goods orders instead of the previously reported 0.1% dip. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast core capital goods orders would slip 0.1%.

Orders for electrical equipment, appliances and components increased 0.8%, while bookings for computers and electronic products surged 1.9%. Orders for machinery, primary metals and fabricated metal products barely rose.

But unfilled orders of core capital goods continued their steady decline, indicating there was less in the pipeline to drive activity. Inventories of these goods rose 0.2%.

Business investment is under threat from a tightening in credit following recent financial market turmoil, which could make funding less accessible to small firms and households. That is spilling over to the manufacturing industry.

Manufacturing, which accounts for 11.3% of the U.S. economy, is already reeling from the Federal Reserve's fastest interest rate hiking campaign since the 1980s to tame inflation.

Spending is also shifting away from goods to services, while sluggish global demand is crimping exports. The inventory cycle is also turning, with restocking by businesses slowing to match cooling demand.

Shipments of core capital goods decreased 0.4% in March after falling by a similar margin in February. Core capital goods shipments are used to calculate equipment spending in the gross domestic product measurement. Shipments of nondefense capital goods, which also go into the calculation of GDP, rebounded 3.6% after slumping 1.1% in February.

"Equipment spending was likely a bit weaker in the first quarter," said Shannon Seery, an economist at Wells Fargo in New York. "Conditions for new capital investment continue to grow less favorable. We anticipate a further tightening in banks' lending standards to take hold."

Stocks on Wall street were mixed. The dollar fell against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices rose.

## UK Sees Record Sickness and Zero Productivity Growth in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain saw a record number of working days lost due to short-term sickness last year and zero annual growth in economic output per hour worked in the final quarter of 2022, according to official data released.

The figures from the Office for National Statistics highlight the challenges facing Britain as it emerges from the COVID-19 pandemic, as well its long-term struggle with productivity which has weighed on living standards for years.

British workers took 185.6 million days off work due to sickness or injury in 2022. This was more than during the height of the COVID-19 pandemic itself, when fewer sick days were recorded as millions of workers were on furlough and lockdown restrictions reduced exposure to minor illnesses.

The record partly reflects the growth in Britain's workforce over recent years, but even measured as a percentage of hours worked, the sickness rate was the highest since 2004, with 2.6% of hours lost due to sickness or injury, up from 1.9% in 2019. The rise in the percentage of days lost to sickness reverses a long-term downward trend in ONS data going back to 1995.

Minor illnesses accounted for 29% of days lost, while respiratory conditions accounted for 8% of days lost - up from 4% in 2019 - and 'other' conditions, which include COVID-19, diabetes and a range of others - rose to 24% from 14%.

Sickness absence was most common among workers in the care sector and related personal services roles.

Previous ONS data has shown a big rise too in long-term sickness among working-age people outside the job market. A record 28.7% of people classed as 'economically inactive' in the three months to February 2023 said they were long-term sick, the most since these records began in 1993. Separate ONS figures on Wednesday showed continued weakness in productivity at work, seen by most economists as the biggest long-term challenge to living standards in Britain.

Output per hour worked was unchanged between the final quarters of 2021 and 2022. Since 2019 it has risen by 2.1%, reflecting a 1.6% fall in the average number of hours each person works and a 0.5% rise in output. Earlier this year, the Bank of England forecast a weak outlook for productivity in Britain, with growth in output per hour worked averaging 0.25% a year over the next three years, down from 0.75% between 2010 and 2019 and 2% in the decade before the 2008 financial crisis.

Weak business investment, greater trade barriers due to Brexit and deficiencies in employee and management skills are among the reasons economists give for the poor performance.



## Brazil Inflation Hits 30-Month Low as Gov't Calls for Rate Cuts

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Brazil's inflation slowed more than expected and reached its lowest since late 2020 in the year to mid-April, a reading the government is likely to see as backing its calls for an interest rate cut even as the central bank maintains a hawkish tone.

The country's IPCA-15 inflation index eased to a 30-month low of 4.16% from 5.36% in the previous month, government statistics agency IBGE said on Wednesday, coming in below market consensus of 4.20% in a Reuters poll of economists.

The latest data comes a day after central bank Governor Roberto Campos Neto ruled out an imminent interest rate cut, saying in a Senate hearing that the current rate was appropriate to address inflation concerns.

President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva has been calling for lending costs to be lowered from their current six-year high of 13.75%, but Campos Neto rebuffed his criticism by saying policymakers needed to ensure inflation expectations were within the official targets.

"Will RCN and his team wait for current inflation to reach 3% before starting to cut interest rates?" Luiz Alves, a fund manager at Versa, questioned in a Twitter post.

Brazil has an inflation target of 3.25% for this year, but a central bank survey showed that private economists expect the official index to reach 6.04% by the end of the year.

William Jackson, Capital Economics' chief emerging markets economist, said he doubts policymakers will pivot to interest rate cuts imminently, considering that core inflation remains strong and the central bank has been striking a hawkish tone.

## German Gov't Slightly Raises 2023 GDP Forecast

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German government has raised its economic growth forecast for this year to 0.4% from a previously predicted 0.2%, according to its spring economic projections published and first reported by Reuters last week.

"A gradual recovery is underway, despite a persistently difficult environment," German Economy Minister Robert Habeck said. He expects stagnation in the first quarter,

followed by an acceleration in growth.

With the new projections, the government is slightly more optimistic than the five economic institutes that prepare the Joint Economic Forecasts, which foresee 2023 economic growth of 0.3%.

Current economic indicators such as industrial production, orders received and business climate point to an economic revival in the course of the year, the report said.

"For next year, we expect the recovery to continue and gain in breadth," Habeck said.

For 2024, the government slightly lowered its growth forecast to 1.6% from the 1.8% foreseen in January.

Inflation forecasts were also adjusted down, with the rate for both 2023 and 2024 now seen 0.1 percentage point lower, at 5.9% and 2.7%, respectively. Inflation stood at 6.9% last year.

Despite government support measures and rising incomes, private consumption will be weak due to inflation-related losses in purchasing power, the report said, forecasting a 0.1% drop in 2023. It will only pick up again later in the year as inflation continues to decline. For 2024, the government sees a 2.1% increase in private consumption.

Given the continuing high demand for labour, employment is expected to continue to grow this year and next, albeit at a somewhat less dynamic pace. The government expects an unemployment rate of 5.4% in 2023 and 5.2% in 2024, following 5.3% in 2022.

Exports are likely to provide impetus but remain at a rather low level by long-term standards. Sentiment among German exporters has rebounded in April to the highest point seen since the outbreak of war in Ukraine last year, according to a survey by the Ifo economic institute released on Tuesday.

The government forecasts export growth of 1.3% in 2023 and 3.3% in 2024.

## ADB Forecasts 5% Growth for Uzbekistan in 2023 and 2024

TASHKENT (Dispatches) - Uzbekistan's growth rate is expected to slow in 2023 as demand in the economy cools, especially in private consumption and services, according to a new flagship report from the Asian Development Bank (ADB).

In the Asian Development Outlook (ADO) April 2023, ADB projects gross domestic product (GDP) growth for Uzbekistan to be 5% in both 2023 and 2024, slightly below last year's growth of 5.7%. Risks remain in the form of continued sanctions on the Russian Federation and how they might impact external demand for Uzbekistan's exports.

"The Government of Uzbekistan took bold and confident steps to quickly restore and further develop the economy," said Officer-in-Charge of ADB's Resident Mission in Uzbekistan Enrico Pinali. "Although growth decelerated following robust recovery from the pandemic in 2021, it showed resilience and remained strong."

Industry is expected to grow by 5.5% in 2023 and 2024, with a modest recovery in textiles, food, mining, and quarrying in response to growing demand for hydrocarbons, and high external demand, mainly from the Russian Federation, for apparel and processed food. Meanwhile, growth in services is expected to edge down to 5.5% in both years as demand reduces for food and accommodation, storage, and transportation services. Growth in private consumption and investment is projected to moderate.

Inflationary pressure is expected to persist, partly from continuing structural reforms and increasing social spending. However, average inflation is anticipated to decelerate to 11% in 2023 and 10% in 2024 as monetary policy remains tight. To help contain food inflation, the government has extended import duty exemptions for edible oils, poultry, wheat, flour, and rice to the end of 2023.

Anticipated high outlays for social protection, education, and health care will maintain fiscal deficit. Gross foreign reserves are projected to increase to \$37 billion in 2023 and 2024, with a rise in gold reserves. Broad money is projected to increase by 25% in both years.

With the population growing 2% a year, Uzbekistan needs more secondary schools and higher-quality education, the report suggests. Secondary education, including vocational schools, absorbed an estimated 72.3% of public spending on education in 2022. To increase school enrollment by an additional 1.2 million students, the government needs to construct an estimated 1,961 schools or shorten school days to allow more double shifts. The quality of secondary education is a concern. Uzbekistan still needs to conduct the Program for International Student Assessment to obtain a comparative measure of the quality of its secondary school education. To diversify the economy, Uzbekistan needs more skilled labor with science, technology, engineering, and mathematics (STEM) skills, the report highlights.

## Bank of Canada Refrained From Rate Hike



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - The Bank of Canada (BoC) did not hike interest rates earlier this month because it wanted to see more evidence of the effects of previous monetary tightening on growth and inflation, according to minutes from the policy-setting meeting released.

On April 12, the central bank left its key overnight interest rate on hold at 4.50% for a second time in a row but struck a hawkish tone, playing down market expectations for a cut this year as the risk of a recession diminished.

The minutes showed that the six members of the governing council noted that growth had been more robust than had been forecast in January, and that they were concerned that lowering inflation toward its 2% target in the second half of this year could be difficult.

"The case to maintain the policy rate at 4.50% reflected Governing Council's view that headline inflation is coming down quickly in line with the Bank's forecast and that more evidence would be needed to assess whether monetary policy was sufficiently restrictive," the minutes said.

Inflation peaked at 8.1% last year and has since come down, reaching 4.3% in March.

The BoC last month became the world's first major central bank to pause its tightening campaign. Governor Tiff Macklem said he wanted to let the eight previous rate hikes sink in and would hold off on further increases as long as inflation came down as forecast.

The BoC sees inflation hitting 3% this summer, but it has said getting to 2% may take time as services costs are proving sticky and wages continue to grow, in part because of a tight labor market and better-than-expected growth in the first quarter.



# FMs of Iran, Russia, Syria and Turkey Likely to Meet in May

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria and Turkey may hold a meeting in May in Moscow, Turkish Foreign Minister Mevlut Cavusoglu said, as part of efforts to rebuild Turkey-Syria ties after years of animosity during the war. Cavusoglu stated on Friday that Iranian, Russian, Syrian and

top diplomat may hold a meeting on issues of the normalization of relations between Ankara and Damascus in early May. “Several dates were suggested and we said which were convenient for us. Now we are waiting for an answer from other countries and then we will wait an invitation from Russia,” he stated in an interview with the TRT television channel.



# India Gorges on Discounted Russian Crude

LAUNCESTON (Dispatches) - As Middle East crude exporters cut output and raise prices, India’s refiners are successfully switching to Russian oil and enjoying the double bonus of cheaper cargoes and higher margins for exported refined products. India’s crude imports from Russia are expected to reach a record high in April as Asia’s second-biggest oil buyer increasingly turns away from its traditional suppliers in the Middle East. Refinitiv Oil Research estimates that India will import 1.94 million barrels per day (bpd) from Russia in April, while commodity analysts Kpler are more bullish, forecasting arrivals of 2.39 million bpd. India’s total imports from the Middle East are estimated by Refinitiv at 1.92 million bpd in April, meaning that for the first time arrivals from Russia will exceed those from all Middle East producers combined. Iraq remains India’s top supplier from the Middle East, with April arrivals estimated at 840,000 bpd, with Saudi Arabia in second place at 640,000 bpd. Before Russia’s invasion of Ukraine in February last year, India was a minor importer of Russian crude, with Refinitiv data showing average arrivals of about 44,500 bpd in the 12 months from January 2021 to February 2022. As Russian oil was increasingly sanctioned and shunned by European buyers and some in Asia, such as Japan, the steep discounts on offer led to India’s refiners buying increasing volumes. By July last year, India’s imports from Russia were up to about 857,000 bpd, and they have steadily increased since then, before sharply accelerating this year. It’s likely no coincidence that India’s refiners have been preferring Russian oil over Middle Eastern grades, which have been becoming more expensive relative to most other crudes as Saudi Arabia raises its official selling prices (OSPs). Saudi Aramco, the kingdom’s oil producer, raised its OSPs for Asian clients for a third-straight month for May-loading cargoes, taking the cost to a premium of \$2.80 a barrel over the regional Oman/Dubai benchmark. Aramco’s pricing moves tend to be followed by other Middle East exporters, meaning that their crude now costs more on a relative basis than not only Russian cargoes, but also from producers such as the United States, which is outside the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries, and its allies in the wider OPEC+ group. While India’s switch to Russian crude is certainly the headline news, it is worth noting that the South Asian nation has also been buying increasing volumes from the non-OPEC+ exporters.



Arrivals from the United States are estimated at 160,000 bpd in April, up from 60,000 bpd in March. India has also secured cargoes from Malaysia and Brunei in recent months, having in the past only been a sporadic buyer from the Southeast Asian producers. The Middle East’s share of India’s imports likely dropped to 39.8% in April, according to Refinitiv, down from the 12-month average of 56%. The discount on Russian Urals grade crude has narrowed from levels around \$30 a barrel in the middle of last year to closer to \$10, but this still offers India’s refiners a massive price incentive, especially if they use the cheap oil to produce fuels for export. While the buying of Russian crude is fairly broad-based among India’s refiners, the biggest buyer is Reliance Industries, which operates a 1.24 million bpd refinery complex in Jamnagar. Kpler data shows that this complex is expected to receive 20.87 million barrels of Russian crude in April, or about 30% of the total volume of India’s imports. The Jamnagar refinery is India’s major export-orientated plant, with Kpler data showing it is on track to ship 10.23 million barrels of diesel, about 83% of India’s total exports, and 4.94 million of gasoline this month, which is about half of India’s total. The opinions expressed here are those of the author, a columnist for Reuters.

## VP Says Submitted Proposal to Iran Gov’t for Legal Talks With U.S. on Damages of Sanctions

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran’s vice president for legal affairs says a proposal has been submitted to the government for legal negotiations with the US on compensation for the damages inflicted as a result of Washington’s sanctions based on a ruling issued against the bans at The Hague-based World Court. Mohammad Dehghan said the best way to determine the amount of the damages caused by US actions against Iran is “via legal negotiations between Iran and the United States in the dispute resolution court between the two sides.” Based on a ruling passed by the International Court of Justice (ICJ) in The Hague, the amount of damages should be determined during two years of negotiations. “Our proposal [submitted to the government] is to pursue these legal negotiations in the Iran-US dispute settlement court, which was established in The Hague 40 years ago. There are three arbitrators from Iran, three from America and three other arbitrators, who are appointed by the Supreme Court of the Netherlands,” he explained. In late March, the ICJ ordered the US to pay compensation to Iranian companies after ruling that Washington had illegally allowed courts to freeze their assets. The United Nations’ top court, also known as the World Court, did not specify the exact amount in its ruling but said it would be determined in a later phase. The case was initially brought by Tehran against Washington in 2016 for allegedly breaching a 1955 friendship treaty.

## President to Travel to Syria to Celebrate Victory of Resistance

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi is to take part in a forthcoming celebration for the victory of the Resistance Front in Syria, an Iranian official has announced. Mohammad Jamshidi, who serves as deputy head of Iranian president for political affairs, made the announcement through a Twitter post on Saturday. “West Asia has undergone a tense period of geopolitical change with 2 results: victory of Iran & failure of the US. This Resistance will be celebrated in the visit of president Raisi to Syria. [Martyred IRGC commander] Qasem Soleimani taught us successful diplomacy is rooted in being powerful in the field,” Jamshidi wrote. According to a Friday report by Syria’s Al-Watan daily newspaper, the Iranian president will soon travel to Syria for a two-day official visit. The report said President Raisi will hold talks with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad on ways to strengthen strategic cooperation between Tehran and Damascus.

## Oil Market Has Absorbed Surprise Production Cut by OPEC+

LONDON (Dispatches) - Oil prices have fallen back after a brief spike triggered by the surprise production cuts announced by Saudi Arabia and other members of OPEC+ on April 2. Front-month Brent futures finished trading at \$81 per barrel on April 25, after hitting a high of \$87 on April 12, though still up from a recent low of just \$73 on March 17. After adjusting for inflation, prices are in the 41st percentile for all months since 2000, down from a high in the 47th percentile two weeks ago, but still up from the 33rd percentile in March. In real terms, prices have fallen almost 30% from the same month a year ago, as fears eased that Russia’s invasion of Ukraine and the sanctions imposed in response would

disrupt global supplies. Instead, real prices have come under pressure from concerns about slowing growth and increasing interest rates, with the decline consistent with a significant cyclical downturn. As traders have become more confident about the continued availability of crude, Brent’s six-month calendar spread has slipped to a backwardation of \$2.40 per barrel (77th percentile for all trading days since 1990). The spread is down from a backwardation of \$3.99 (92nd percentile) on April 12, though still up modestly from \$1.13 (59th percentile) on March 20. Futures prices are signalling a market slightly weaker than normal, while spreads are signalling the opposite, most likely because current consumption is slack but expected to bounce back later in 2023.

## Iran Declares Readiness to...

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The defense minister referred to last month’s joint naval drills between Iran, China and Russia, dubbed Maritime Security Belt exercise 2023, saying, “This showed that the three countries are against the hegemonic views of the West and the United States, and we are ready to expand joint drills and exercises in the fields of sea, land, and air defense quantitatively and qualitatively.” Ashtiani further state, “It will be very useful and productive for both sides to continue the dialogue and engage in exchanges of military defense and intelligence delegations at different levels.”

Ashtiani also lauded shared cultural and historical relations between Iran and China, saying the political will of the leaders of the two countries as well as the understanding and adoption of common positions towards international developments are of strategic value. Li, for his part, underscored existing ties and interactions between Iran and China with respect to the political will of the two countries’ leaders in the midst of critical global developments and the significance of further expanding bilateral military defense cooperation. Lauding the “deep and long-term” ties between Tehran

and Beijing, Li then added, “The two countries enjoy mutual strategic trust and both favor independence and an end to the status quo.” The Chinese defense minister also expressed his appreciation for the Islamic Republic’s principled positions regarding China’s stance on international issues as well as the interests of the two nations, saying, “The two countries have a sincere and effective cooperation against the dominance of some countries.” Li added, “We believe that a good horizon lies ahead of us and that the Islamic Republic of Iran plays a good and constructive role in regional issues.”

## Iran Can Solve...

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If all the Lebanese parties agreed on the election of a Christian president based on the country’s constitution, Iran would support the choice, the foreign minister added. Elsewhere in his remarks, Amirabollahian said Iran and Saudi Arabia will reopen their embassies and consulate generals in the coming days, almost two months after the two regional heavyweights agreed to normalize relations severed seven years earlier. “During the last phone conversation between the Iranian and Saudi Arabian foreign ministers on Eid al-Fitr (April 21), we agreed to open our embassies and consulate generals in the two countries in the coming days,” he said. The top Iranian diplomat noted that the resumption of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia would lead to “positive” outcomes for regional

countries, including Lebanon, and would open new chapters in ties among them. He noted that before Eid al-Fitr, he extended an official invitation to Saudi Foreign Minister Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud to visit Tehran which was accepted by him. The top Iranian diplomat further said that his Saudi counterpart has also invited him to pay an official visit to Riyadh, adding that “the time of the visits will be announced through diplomatic channels.” After several days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran and Saudi Arabia finally clinched a deal on March 10 to restore diplomatic relations and reopen embassies and missions within two months after seven years of estrangement. Iran, Saudi Arabia and China also expressed their firm determination to make their utmost efforts to promote regional and international peace and security.

## Sanctions Turning...

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Of course everybody knows well that if the Islamic Republic of Iran retreats from fighting for its rights suddenly the West will forget all those baseless claims and loosen the sanctions grip, and the strange thing is that the international bodies act just like lookers-on and they help the U.S. to become bolder to continue its sanctions.



The Islamic Republic of Iran through its policy of resistance has made ineffective the U.S. sanctions and it seems this move has encouraged other independent countries to follow Tehran’s policy in fight against the U.S. unilateralism.

Iran has repeatedly criticized the unfair sanctions and urged the international bodies to take some action but they unfortunately have closed their eyes on the U.S. sanctions. Iran’s permanent ambassador to the United Nations last week said unilateral measures taken by the United States are against the UN Charter while threatening multilateralism in the world. Amir Saeed Iravani made the remarks in an address delivered during a UN Security Council debate on multilateralism. “Multilateralism has been recognized as a well-established approach to addressing global challenges and effective multilateralism ... is essential for ensuring international peace and security,” he said. The official, however, warned that the integrity and effectiveness of multilateralism are undermined by the abuse of the UN system and selective application of international law, which pose a serious threat to international cooperation, peace, and security.

The American disease of sanctions has spread to their allies, and Europeans are also suffering from the sanctions disease and they also use it as a tool against other nations especially against Iran. The European Union and the UK last week followed the path of the U.S. and imposed new sanctions on a number of Iranian individuals and entities over alleged human rights violations, despite the fact that the failure of such a policy has been proven many times over the past years.

In another hostile move, the European Union’s Council said in a statement on Monday that it has decided to impose restrictive measures on eight individuals and one entity over an allegation that they were responsible for serious human rights violations in Iran. It added that the Council is sanctioning Arian Tel Communication Company, an Iranian mobile service provider, which contributed to the telecommunications surveillance architecture. The new restrictions also include Iranian lawmakers, members of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the IIRCG Cooperative Foundation, the body responsible for managing the IRGC’s investments. We recommend the U.S. and its Western allies to stop this game of imposing sanctions on other nations because it is getting funny because countries are learning how to skirt them and sanctions are turning to a mere void order by the Western governments especially at the time when a new world order is shaping and nations are awakening against the U.S. unilateralism and any moment the U.S. will be forced to stop sanctions game because even American officials are opposed to it and call it a subject for fun and the Islamic Republic of Iran is a great example for nations in making ineffective sanctions through strong will and resistance.

## Tehran-Baghdad...

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Emphasizing Iran’s exploitation of the Arvand River, he said that Iraq’s rights are also reserved under the agreements. Iraqi President, for his part, said that the purpose of his visit is to emphasize the historical relations between the two friendly and neighboring countries of Iran and Iraq. The relations between Iran and Iraq are strong and unchangeable, Rashid said, adding that this is due to the efforts of the two countries based on common interests. The relations between Iran and Iraq are strong and will become stronger day by day, he also said, noting, “We have to improve these relations in all areas and remove the problems.” Saying that the Iraqi nation is known for its loyalty, he added the Iraqis will never forget the help of the Islamic Republic of Iran in fighting against the former dictatorial regime and giving shelter to the Iraqi people. Welcoming the restoration of ties between Tehran and Riyadh, the Iraqi president said, “We believe that the step will stabilize security in the region and will help the security of our nations and other nations in the region.” Raisi welcomed his Iraqi counterpart, Abdul Latif Rashid, in Tehran on Saturday morning in Sa’ dabad Complex. Heading a high-ranking delegation, Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid arrived in Iran on Saturday morning to meet with Iranian officials.



## Reus Extends With Borussia Dortmund

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bundesliga leaders Borussia Dortmund have extended captain Marco Reus' contract by one year until the summer of 2024, the club announced. The two-time German Footballer of the Year's deal was set to expire at the end of this season. Reus, 33, has scored 161 for Dortmund, 16 shy of the all-time record set by Adi Preissler between 1946 and 1959. Reus has won two German Cups with Dortmund but has never claimed the league, he joined from Moenchengladbach immediately after the 2012 title.

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## Arsenal Not to Surrender in Title Race

LONDON (Dispatches) - Aaron Ramsdale insists Arsenal will not surrender in the Premier League title race despite their calamitous 4-1 loss at Manchester City. The Gunners have ceded control of the title race to City after allowing Pep Guardiola's side to move within two points on Wednesday. With two games in hand, City will lift a fifth title in six seasons if they win six of their last seven games. April has proved a painful month for Arsenal, with three successive draws preceding the chastening defeat at the Etihad Stadium.

# Celtics Hold Off Hawks to Advance in NBA Playoffs

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Jaylen Brown and Jayson Tatum combined for 62 points and the Boston Celtics clamped down late to hold off the Atlanta Hawks in a 128-120 thriller to win their NBA Eastern Conference first-round playoff series.

The Celtics, trying to get back to the NBA Finals after falling last season to the Golden State Warriors, won the best-of-seven series 4-2 to line up a conference semi-final showdown with a Philadelphia 76ers team led by Joel Embiid and James Harden.

Trae Young, hero of the Hawks' 119-117 come-from-behind victory in game five that extended the series on Tuesday, scored 30 points with 10 assists.

But Young ran out of gas in the second half, scoring just five points after the break and finishing the game nine-for-28 from the field.

Brown scored 32 points and Tatum had 30 for the Celtics, who used an 11-0 run in the fourth quarter to finally take control of a game that featured 22 lead changes and was tied 15 times.

"I think in that fourth quarter, four minutes left, we made winning plays," Tatum told broadcaster TNT. "We talked about it before the game -- do whatever it takes."

The lead changed hands seven times in the fourth quarter alone. Former Hawk Al Horford put the Celtics up for good with a three-pointer with 3:35 remaining.

Tatum followed with another three-pointer, Brown produced a block and Tatum slammed home a Horford miss to cap the 11-0 run that had the Celtics up by eight with 2:07 to play.

Atlanta wouldn't get the deficit below five points the rest of the way.

Marcus Smart scored 22 points, Malcolm Brogdon added 17 off the bench and Horford chipped in 10 for the Celtics.

"I thought Smart was tremendous, especially late in the fourth quarter," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "He got us organized and then he was kind of the triggerman. They were blitzing, he made the right plays."

Young, whose 38 points in game five included a game-winning three-pointer, said he just couldn't shake Smart in the second half.



"Marcus was being way more aggressive," Young said. "In the second half he was more just connected to me. They picked up the physicality. It was tough."

In the end, Hawks coach Quin Snyder said, the Celtics were just too much.

"Obviously Tatum and Brown were a handful, which we expect," Snyder said. "We blitzed their pick and roll, we hit them on the dribble, hit them on the pass and when we didn't they were able to make plays. When we did, you're susceptible to the three."

The Celtics made 18 of their 42 three-point attempts, Brown draining six from beyond the arc and every Boston starter making at least one trey.

Even so, Snyder said, "we were right there. It's a tough game."

Added Young: "You've just got to tip your cap sometimes and give credit where it's due."

The second-seeded Celtics, the highest seeds left in the East after the Miami Heat's upset of the top-seeded Milwaukee Bucks, host the third-seeded 76ers in game one on Monday.

## Stones Says Adaptability Key At Man City



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - The ability of Manchester City players to switch between formations and roles has been crucial for the club this season as they enter the home stretch of the campaign, defender John Stones said.

Stones has played at center back for most of his career but City manager Pep Guardiola has deployed him as both a right back and defensive midfielder in recent weeks.

He was back in more familiar territory in the heart of City's defence for their 4-1 win over title rivals Arsenal on Wednesday, with Guardiola tweaking the system with the London side in mind.

"We knew how they were going to play, and we worked on different scenarios in training," Stones said.

"We and the manager thought this was the best way to beat them (Stones playing as a central defender) and it definitely worked. It shows we can adapt and change in a few days in our roles and responsibilities."

A lack of adaptability has left some players out in the cold at times. Kyle Walker was only able to return to the side at right back on Wednesday thanks to a change of system.

## Halep Still Waits On Doping Hearing

PARIS (Dispatches) - Simona Halep has insisted she did not "knowingly" take performance-enhancing drugs, as she waits for a doping hearing seven months since being provisionally suspended.

The former world number one tested positive for banned substance roxadustate after she provided a sample at last year's US Open.

Halep has not played since and is yet to have a hearing about the case.

"Knowingly, I have not taken any banned substance," the Romanian star told tennismajors.com in an interview published yesterday.

"I am a big supporter of clean sports and have always been against doping."

"I had no clue at the beginning about where this substance came from."

Halep, who claims experts found she had accidentally taken a contaminated supplement, said the International Tennis Federation cancelled a planned tribunal in February to do additional testing before postponing another hearing scheduled for last month.

"The next step is a hearing at the end of May, the 28th, but it is very fragile because the ITF said that they might cancel it as well," Halep said.

"If they do that, it will be almost eight months since I've been provisionally suspended for the first time and I believe that it's not fair to spend eight months without even being judged by the tribunal."

"It's been seven months since I've been originally suspended even though I've had all the evidence since December. I'm not asking for special treatment. I just ask to be judged. How much longer is this going to take?"

Halep said after her positive test last October that she would "fight until the end" to clear her name.

"A player that is provisionally suspended is entitled to get an expedited hearing," she said yesterday.

"Everything takes so long. I asked the ITF to lift my sanction to be able to play but they also refused it."

Halep had climbed back into the world's top 10 before she was suspended having dropped out of the top 20 in 2020 following injury problems.

# Verstappen Questions How Long F1 Will Be the Life for Him



BAKU (Dispatches) - Double world champion Max Verstappen raised doubts yesterday about his future in Formula One after his Red Bull contract runs out in 2028.

The 25-year-old Red Bull driver is leading Mexican team mate Sergio Perez in the championship after winning two of three races in 2023 and could clinch a third title with plenty to spare.

This weekend in Azerbaijan sees the first of six sprint races in the 23-round season, with the 100km dash now a standalone event with its own qualifying and unconnected to Sunday's main race.

Next year there will likely be a record 24 races, with China set to return after a four-year break due to Covid-19.

Verstappen is not a big fan of sprints and thought carefully when asked by reporters in Baku about the new format and expanding schedule.

"If we keep expanding the calendar and the whole weekend is that long, at one point you question yourself 'is it worth it?'" said the Dutch driver.

"I do like racing, I do like winning. I know that of course the salary and everything, you have a good life, but is it actually a good life?"

"I think sometimes you get to a point in your career where maybe you want to do other stuff."

"I know that I have a contract until the end of 2028, and then we'll review again. But I do feel that if it's getting at one point too much, then it's time for a change."

Verstappen accepted it might seem odd to those on the outside, who just saw the wealth and the winning, but he was not interested in equalling or beating Michael Schumacher and Lewis Hamilton's record seven titles.

"I want to do other things, other competitions. A bit like Fernando (Alonso) did," he said.

## Man United's Future Still Uncertain

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - The future of Manchester United could be decided today when the deadline passes for a third round of bidding to buy the Premier League giants.

United's owners, the Glazer family, reportedly want a world record £6 billion fee for a sports club before they agree to sell the Old Trafford outfit.

That eye-watering price has so far not been met, raising fear among a discontented fanbase that the Americans could yet prolong their controversial 18-year reign.

Qatari banker Sheikh Jassim bin Hamad bin Jassim bin Jaber Al Thani and British billionaire Jim Ratcliffe are the front runners should the Glazers decide to sell their majority shareholding.

Deeply unpopular with supporters since they saddled the club with debt in a £790 million leveraged takeover in 2005, the Glazers appeared ready to cash out at an enormous profit when they first invited external investment in November.

However, Elliot Investment Management and The Carlyle Group are among the private equity firms in the market for a minority stake that could allow the Glazers to retain control and provide the funding for investment in the club's infrastructure, such as a redevelopment of Old Trafford.

According to reports, executive co-chairmen Avram and Joel Glazer are keen to hold on to their stakes in United, while siblings and fellow directors Kevin, Bryan and Edward Glazer and Darcie Glazer Kasewitz are open to offloading their shares.

Offers from the second round of bidding last month were believed to have been worth around £5 billion.

That would smash the Premier League record of £2.5 billion paid for Chelsea last year by a consortium led by Los Angeles Dodgers co-owner Todd Boehly and private equity firm Clearlake Capital, with a further £1.75 billion promised in investment in infrastructure and players.

The Manchester United Supporters' Trust (MUST) has called for a swift conclusion to the process to allow new owners to be in place for the summer transfer window.



## Murray Hopes to Play French Open Despite Madrid Exit

MADRID (Dispatches) - Andy Murray said he hopes to play at Roland Garros for the first time since 2020 next month after crashing out in the first round of the Madrid Open.

The three-time Grand Slam champion has only played the French Open once since reaching the 2017 semi-finals, losing in the first round to Stan Wawrinka three years ago.

But he said he could return to the Parisian clay, after losing 6-2, 7-6 (9/7) to Italian qualifier Andrea Vavassori in Madrid.

"I would like to play, just purely because I don't know if I'll get another opportunity to play again," Murray said on returning to the French Open, where he was runner-up in 2016.

"Whilst I feel fit and healthy, I would like to give it a go."

"I also have ambitions of competing for Wimbledon titles and that sort of stuff, and I know that sitting here today that probably doesn't sound realistic, but I do believe that that's a possibility. I obviously want to do the right thing there."

"It's impossible to say what the right thing to do is, but obviously it's a Grand Slam. I would like the opportunity to play." World number 164 Vavassori turfed out the former world number one in straight sets in the Spanish capital.

Murray was also knocked out in the first round at the Monte Carlo Masters a fortnight ago, describing it as "demoralising" and "awful".

"Second set started to get into it a bit more. Was playing I think a bit better, some positive signs," Murray said yesterday.

"Some of the errors are hard to explain."

Vavassori broke world number 52 Murray twice to take a 4-0 lead in the first set before serving out, with his opponent unable to force a single break point.

The 27-year-old broke again for 2-1 in the second set but fired into the net to allow his opponent back in to level at 4-4, with Murray celebrating furiously.

Vavassori committed a double fault at match point in the tie-break and then hit the net with another shot, before Murray saved a third match point on serve.

