

Regarding the Recent Reports About The Relations Between Tehran and Cairo, Foreign Ministry Said That Iran's Government Is Determined to Develop Relations With Its Neighbors and Islamic States

IRAN NEWS

Ahmad Mortazavi Moghadam, The Head of Iran's Supreme Court, Arrived in Moscow on Monday Evening in a Bid to Talk and Exchange Views With the Judicial Authorities of the Russian Federation

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Iran Hopes for Settlement of Afghan Water Dispute This Year

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's special envoy on Afghanistan affairs says government departments are pursuing the country's water rights from the Helmand River in Afghanistan (also known as Hirmand), expressing hope that the long-running dispute between the two neighbors will be settled this year.

Speaking during a TV program on Monday, Hassan Kazemi-Qomi urged the ruling administration in Afghanistan to implement the 1973 Helmand River Treaty. "The issue of the treaty is a legal issue, to which the Afghan government is committed and declared its adherence. It must also implement the treaty," Iranian president's special envoy on Afghanistan affairs said.

"The Islamic Republic's government departments, specifically the Foreign Ministry, are following up on the people's rights. I hope that this year the issue will be resolved."

The Helmand River, the longest water course in Afghanistan, rises in the Hindu Kush Mountains west of Kabul and flows in an arc southwest until it empties out into the Hamoun wetlands, located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

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Iran Has Always Been a Place For Different Religions

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - In a meeting with the Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III, the Iranian parliament speaker said that the followers of different religions have peacefully lived together in Iran throughout history.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf received the visiting Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa III in Tehran for a meeting on Monday afternoon.

Patriarch Mar Awa III was in Tehran for the fourth round of the dialogue between Islam and the Assyrian Church of the East in order to strengthen bilateral relations with Iran.

In the meeting, Qalibaf noted that the Christians are living peacefully with their fellow Iranians in Iran.

He added that the Christians are represented in the Iranian parliament and the Iranian laws protect them.

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Iranian Victims of Chemical Weapons Suffering From Sanctions



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - An Iranian deputy foreign minister says the Islamic Republic is the biggest victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history, stressing that Western sanctions have deprived the country's victims of such weapons of access to essential drugs and medical items.

Reza Najafi, Iran's deputy foreign minister for legal and international affairs, made the remarks in the fifth session of the Review Conference of the States Parties to the Chemical Weapons Convention in The Hague, the Netherlands, on Monday.

Najafi pointed to the importance of the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) and a universal treaty on prohibition of chemical weapons, saying, "The Islamic Republic of Iran, as the biggest victim of chemical weapons in contemporary history, regards any sanctions against independent members of this organization by some member states to be against international law and the Chemical Weapons Convention."

The Iranian diplomat also underlined the illegality and inhumane nature of the sanctions imposed by the West on the country and called for their immediate removal.

The sanctions have deprived Iranian veterans who have fallen victim to chemical weapons of access to "needed drugs and medical items," Najafi said.

"It is unfortunate that these loved ones ... have fallen victim to the actions of some Western governments twice," he noted.

"Once because these governments sent materials to and [shared] the technology to produce chemical weapons with the [former Iraqi dictator] Saddam [Hussein]'s regime during the imposed war [against Iran], and once again due to the sanctions [imposed] by these governments," he added.

Referring to the Israeli regime's weapons of mass destruction, Najafi described the illegal entity as the main threat to the peace and security in the West Asia region and called for pressure from the international community to force the regime to join the Chemical Weapons Convention "without any preconditions or delays."

The Iranian deputy foreign minister also demanded the destruction of chemical weapons in the US as the only State party to the Chemical Weapons Convention to still maintain its arsenal "within a set deadline," and rejected any excuse for further delay in the matter.

During the imposed war on Iran in the 1980s, the Iraqi army continuously employed chemical weapons against Iranian combatants and civilians, leaving tens of thousands dead on the spot and many more suffering for years to come.

The June 1987 chemical attack on the western Iranian city of Sardasht killed over a hundred civilians and injured another 8,000 people. The chemical bombardment of Halabja town in Iraq's Kurdistan region also left some 5,000 civilians dead and around 10,000 others injured.

After three decades, many of the survivors of the chemical attack still have to live with the long-term respiratory and even psychological effects of inhaling mustard gas used in the attack.

IRGC Busts Daesh-K Network in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps intelligence forces smashed a network affiliated with the Daesh Khorasan Province terrorist group (also known as Daesh-K or ISIS-K) in Iran's southern province of Fars.

The IRGC Intelligence Department busted the "operational and media network of Daesh-K" in the Fars Province of Iran and arrested the network's main element.

The ringleader, who was being monitored by the IRGC forces for four years, was in charge of detecting and recruiting extremist elements in a number of Iranian provinces, including Tehran.

The network has been smashed following a fatal shooting attack on a religious site in Iran's southern city of Shiraz in October 2022, claimed by the Daesh terrorist group.

The terrorist attack on the Shah-e Cheragh shrine in Shiraz on October 26, 2022, killed 15 pilgrims and injured at least 40 others. Meanwhile Iranian security forces have dismantled an arms smuggling gang in the southern province of Hormozgan, according to a local official.

Hormozgan prosecutor general Alireza Ahmadimanesh said that two members of the gang were arrested in an operation on Sunday in which 18 pistols and 550 war bullets were seized.

The official added that efforts are underway to find the whereabouts of other members of the gang.

Tehran, Riyadh Reach Agreements

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian minister of economic and financial affairs gave explanations on Monday about Iran's agreements with Saudi Arabia on the sidelines of the recent Islamic finance forum in Jeddah.

The Islamic Development Bank Institute hosted its 17th Global Islamic Finance Forum on the sidelines of the 2023 IsDB Group Annual Meeting in Jeddah on 12 May.

Speaking to reporters after attending the Jeddah finance forum, the Iranian Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi said, "Good agreements were achieved with the Islamic Development Bank, and the implementation of construction and investment projects, which had been delayed for several years, was decided to speed up."

"Also, we benefited from the opportunity of economic diplomacy and pursuing President Ebrahim Raisi's administration's neighborhood and regional policy during the trip and we were able to enter into constructive negotiations with our economic partners. In the meeting, bilateral negotiations were held between Iran and Oman, Iran and the UAE, and Iran and Iraq," the economy minister said.

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Shell Linked to Iranian Company Power Payments in Iraq

LONDON (Dispatches) - Greenpeace has raised concerns about a Shell joint venture in Iraq, which could provide benefits to a company linked to the Iranian regime.

The group, which carries out investigative reporting for Greenpeace, said Basra Gas supplies to a power plant benefit Mapna Group, an Iranian technology company.

Basra Gas, a joint venture involving Shell, signed a deal with an Iraqi company, Shamara, in 2019. Under this agreement, the joint venture offtakes electricity from the Rumaila power plant, via the Ministry of Electricity (MoE).

Mapna built the power plant, Unearthed reported. The Iranian company receives 78% of the proceeds from the plant.

Unearthed based its claims on documents it had seen from the deal. The Financial Times corroborated the claims, citing three people involved in the contracts.

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UN Commemorates Palestinian Nakba Day for First Time

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - For the first time in its history, the United Nations has commemorated the 75th anniversary of Nakba Day or "Day of Catastrophe," when Israel was created at the expense of the forced expulsion of about 750,000 Palestinians from their homeland.

According to the official Palestinian news agency Wafa, the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) organized a high-level special meeting on Monday from 10 a.m. to 12.30 p.m. (New York time).

The event, which was held at the UN's New York headquarter, was the first of its kind in the history of the world body pursuant to the General Assembly mandate of November 30, 2022.

It was presided over by the chairman of the committee, Ambassador Cheikh Niang of Senegal, and will include a keynote address by Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas.

Senior UN officials and representatives of regional groups and civil societies also made statements to commemorate Nakba.

President Abbas called for Israel to end its "aggression" against Palestinians or otherwise be suspended from the United Nations during his speech to mark the Nakba Day.

Abbas went on to lambast Israel for having "never fulfilled its obligations and the prerequisites for its membership" of the United Nations.

The Palestinian president said there have been "around 1,000 resolutions" adopted by the UN General Assembly, Security Council and Human Rights Council related to Israel.

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Iran Hails High Voter Turnout in Turkey

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has congratulated Turkey over presidential and parliamentary elections, saying the high voter turnout demonstrates that "democracy has prevailed" in the neighboring Muslim country.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks on Monday after the results suggested that Turkey's fiercely contested election will go to a runoff.

He congratulated the Turkish people and organizers of the elections as well as the political parties and wished them all the best. "The high voter turnout in Turkey's presidential and parliamentary elections on Sunday and the successful holding of the votes are a sign of victory for democracy in the neighboring and Muslim country," Kanaani added.

Navy Commander Urges Promotion of Maritime Cooperation With China, Russia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani has warned of enemies' plots to disrupt maritime cooperation between Iran, China and Russia, saying the three allied countries need to take more steps to strengthen their cooperation.



In a Monday meeting with Commander-in-Chief of Russia's Navy Admiral Nikolai Yevmenov in Tehran, Irani said the presence of Russian naval forces in three joint drills with Iran and China conveyed a "very important" message to their common enemy.

Back in March, the naval forces of Iran, China and Russia held maritime drills, dubbed "naval security belt combined war game 202," in the Sea of Oman, as the three countries have doubled their efforts to deepen cooperation among their navies.

Iranian naval forces, together with their Chinese and Russian counterparts, have held several joint war games in recent years with the purpose of improving the security of international maritime trade, exchange of information in naval rescue and

relief operations, exchange of operational and tactical experiences, as well as countering piracy and maritime terrorism.

Irani hailed efforts of Russian naval forces to stage joint drills with Iran and China and stressed the importance of forming a joint committee to boost interaction in different sectors, particularly in educational and technical fields.

The Russian admiral, for his part, stressed the significance of increasing ties between the Iranian and Russian naval forces and expressed hope that his trip to Iran would lead to further improvement of cooperation between the two countries' navies.

Yevmenov added that the Russian Navy is ready to reach an agreement with Iran on further promotion of bilateral interaction.

Iran Recalls 3 Cultural Attachés Over Poor Performance

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of Iran's Islamic Culture and Relations Organization (ICRO) says the government body has recalled three of its cultural attachés from other countries because of poor performance.

Mohammad-Mehdi Imanipour said on Sunday that the three cultural attachés had been recalled to Tehran before the end of their mission because they were not active enough to perform their duties.

The ICRO is responsible for appointing Iran's cultural representatives in other countries.

Imanipour said the government body would seek to choose cultural attachés who have a good command of foreign languages and are familiar with international relations issues.

Majlis Delegation Off to Bahrain

TEHRAN (MNA) - An Iranian parliamentary delegation left for Manama Monday to participate in a meeting of the Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) in Manama.

Ali Alizadeh, a member of the National Security and Foreign Policy Commission at the Iranian Parliament, left Tehran for Manama, the capital of Bahrain, on Monday morning at the head of the parliamentary delegation of the Islamic Republic of Iran in order to participate in the meeting of Asian Parliamentary Assembly (APA) Standing Committee Meeting on Economic and Sustainable Development.

In addition to the Islamic Republic of Iran, 21 other important Asian countries including China, India, Russia, Saudi Arabia, Turkey, Pakistan, Kazakhstan, Indonesia, Iraq and the United Arab Emirates also participate in the meeting in Manama.

The Manama meeting will discuss issues including energy, water, employment, poverty, food, education, environment, and health and the participants in the meeting will present their suggestions and ways of working for the progress of the APA member states in different fields.

Iran Hits Back at U.S. Baseless Accusation

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Ministry spokesman strongly condemned Washington's latest accusations against Tehran, saying the United States is just trying to justify its own meddlesome presence in the region.

Nasser Kanaani made his late Monday remarks in response to recent allegations by John Kirby, who currently serves as the Coordinator for Strategic Communications at the National Security Council in the White House.

On May 13, Kirby said the US "will work to bolster" its "defensive posture" in the Persian Gulf after Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC)'s Navy seized two invading foreign oil tankers in the country's territorial waters in the Strait of Hormuz in recent weeks.

Kirby used the oft-repeated refrain that Washington will not allow foreign or regional powers to jeopardize freedom of navigation through regional waterways.

Responding to Kirby's remarks, Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman said the Islamic Republic has played the most effective role in ensuring safe naval traffic in the Persian Gulf as well as other regional and international waters, and "has always guaranteed secure passage of ships and other vessels through the Strait of Hormuz."

"The recent measures taken with regard to the two seized ships were due to their violations and taken through the court verdict. The goal was to prevent behaviors and moves that are against international navigation regulations," Kanaani noted.

He added that the United States "continues to accuse Iran while its interfering and destructive policies throughout long decades have fomented and exacerbated instability and insecurity in the Persian Gulf region."

"The new accusations leveled against Iran are mere excuses, which are aimed at justifying the continuation and further bolstering of [the United States'] meddlesome presence in the region," Kanaani said.

The Foreign Ministry spokesman noted, "The Islamic Republic of Iran considers the continued presence of foreign military forces in the Persian Gulf waters as a threat against security of marine traffic in this body of water and believes that regional countries are capable of safeguarding peace and security of navigation without [any need to] the presence of foreigners."

"Contrary to what American officials allege, the US government endangers security of navigation and international trade by resorting to measures that violate the law of the sea and seizing some Iranian oil shipments in the high seas. It then outrageously accuses Iran," he added.

Kanaani said Iran considers itself responsible for maintaining security of the Persian Gulf region and the Strait of Hormuz, adding, "The presence and destabilizing measures of American forces [in the Persian Gulf] double Iran's responsibility to guarantee security of the region and the Strait of Hormuz and to deal with all lawbreakers."

Developed World Suffering From Lack of Ethics, Spirituality

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has said that many countries in the developed world are suffering from a lack of "ethics and spirituality," adding that efforts should be made to create societies that embody those values.

"The needs of human beings are not limited to development and prosperity," President Raisi said in a meeting with the leader of the Assyrian Church of the East, Mar Awa Royel II, and his accompanying delegation, in Tehran on Monday.

"One of the most essential needs of humanity in those societies is spirituality, ethics, and connection with God, which have been neglected," he added.

The president stated that the foundation of civilization and humanity, as heralded by divine prophets, is based on reasoning, spirituality, morality, and justice.

President Raisi maintained that the stark contrast between two opposing camps -- those espousing ethics and morality versus those bereft of those values-- has never been more evident than in the fight against terrorism.

"The Takfiri terrorists that committed atrocities in our region under the false pretext of religiosity were not in the least devoted to religion and morality," he pointed out.

"However, those who stood up to those criminals and rid the region of their scourge, including martyrs Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, were armed with genuine faith and ethics," he continued while making a reference to Iranian top general and his Iraqi companion killed in a US air strike in Iraq in January 2023.

Awa III, in turn, expressed his appreciation for the Islamic Republic of Iran's commitment to interfaith dialogue and respect for monotheistic religions.

The leader of the Assyrian Church of the East said he hoped that these shared values would continue to foster friendship and goodwill between different religious communities.

Western States Have Turned Into Safe Haven for Terrorists

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's top human rights official says Western countries have turned into a safe haven for terrorist groups but accuse Iran of supporting terrorism.

Kazem Gharibabadi, the deputy chief of the Iranian Judiciary and secretary of the High Council for Human Rights, made the remarks in a Monday meeting with Catholicos-Patriarch of the Assyrian Church of the East Mar Awa Royel.

Gharibabadi pointed out that the Iranian people are victims of terrorism as 17,000 people have lost their lives in terrorist attacks across the country.

"Three years ago, the Americans overtly assassinated [General] Qassem Soleimani, the greatest commander in the fight against terrorism," he said. "While Western countries have turned into a safe haven for terrorist groups, they accuse Iran of supporting terrorist groups."

He hastened to add that the concept of human rights is rooted in monotheistic religions, yet Western countries exploit such concepts to impose their lifestyle on other countries.

Referring to the cruel Western sanctions targeting the Iranian nation, Gharibabadi said Iran is an independent country that has not invaded any country or violated the rights of other countries, but Western countries have committed gross human rights violations by imposing unilateral sanctions against Iranians.

Elsewhere in his comments, the top rights official said religious minorities in Iran enjoy "special rights" and are well-represented in the parliament.

"According to the latest statistics, there are about 400 churches for Christians in Iran, most of which are active, while it is almost impossible to build a mosque in countries that claim to champion human rights," he said.

FM Pursues Enhancement of Ties With Different Countries

TEHRAN (IFP) - The head of Iran's Strategic Council for Foreign Relations says it is the Iranian Foreign Ministry's job to enhance relations with other countries.

Kamal Kharrazi made the remark when asked by Tasnim news agency about speculations that Iran and Egypt are in talks to resume their relations.

"The Foreign Ministry is always prepared to hold talks with different countries to help enhance regional and extra-regional relations," Kharrazi said.

"Naturally, if Iran's conditions are accepted in these talks, and the more Iran's relations are boosted with neighboring and regional countries, it is to everyone's benefit." He said he had not been briefed about the details of the efforts to reestablish ties with Egypt but said as a general rule, the Foreign Ministry would pursue the boosting of ties with other countries.

Iran reestablished relations with Saudi Arabia in March after seven years of a hiatus. That rapprochement set off speculations that the other Arab countries that had severed relations with Iran would follow suit. Bahrain is reportedly in talks with Iran regarding its own ties with Tehran. Kharrazi's comment comes as an Iranian lawmaker, sitting on the Parliament's National Security and Foreign Policy Committee, has said the embassies of Iran and Egypt will resume activities in both countries in the near future.

He went on to say that the followers of divine religions, along with Muslims, indeed constitute a majority in Iran, arguing that they are not regarded as religious minorities in the country.

Royel said for his part that both Islam and Christianity emphasize human dignity and human rights.

He said Assyrians are the loyal children of Iran.

Today, the terms human rights and freedom are not understood correctly in international forums, but we believe that in the theology and philosophy of the religion of Christ, freedom brings us closer to God not away from Him, he said.

This freedom is defined incorrectly in Western countries, and it is defined as avoiding God, he added.

Four Arrested Over Inflicting Damage To Iran's Dublin Embassy

LONDON (Dispatches) - Four men have been arrested for causing damage to the Iranian embassy in Dublin, according to a report in the Irish media.

The Irish Examiner newspaper said in a Monday report that the four had been arrested just after 11 p.m on Friday for inflicting damage to the property of the Islamic Republic of Iran Embassy in Dublin.

They were held overnight in Garda (Irish police) custody and appeared at Dublin District Court on Saturday when Garda agreed to bail with restrictions.

The four are charged with inflicting damage to the exterior walls of the Iranian embassy at Mount Merrion Ave, Blackrock, Co Dublin, on May 12. They possessed a screwdriver to use it or permitted another to use it to damage property by removing the embassy plaque from the wall and trespassing at a private residence in Blackrock.

The four men were ordered to obey curfews, sign on three days a week at their local Garda stations, and stay out of Blackrock and away from the embassy.

Judge Hughes remanded them on €500 bonds to appear at Dún Laoghaire District Court on June 1 for directions from the Director of Public Prosecutions.

Commemorating Ferdowsi Will Promote Iranian-Islamic Identity

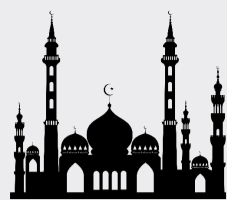
TEHRAN (PressTV)- President Ebrahim Raisi says the great "open-hearted and free-thinking" Iranian poet Abul-Qasem Ferdowsi revived the Persian language and the history of Iran, noting that his commemoration will help promote the Iranian-Islamic identity.

Raisi made the remarks in a message on Monday on the commemoration day of the prominent Iranian poet and the preservation of the Persian language. "Undoubtedly, commemorating this prominent poet and introducing his precious personality and works to the society, especially the young generation, will greatly help promote the Iranian and Islamic identity and self-confidence, develop and deepen common language and national empathy as well as regional solidarity," he said. He added that the greatness of Ferdowsi is in his heroic perseverance in creating the national epic of the Islamic Iran.

The president described Iran as a "cultural and spiritual truth in the heart of the ancient continent of Asia", which connects the East to the West. The administration supports researchers and professors in the direction of institutionalizing the thoughts of great figures like Hakim Ferdowsi in order to promote the rich Iranian culture, he added.

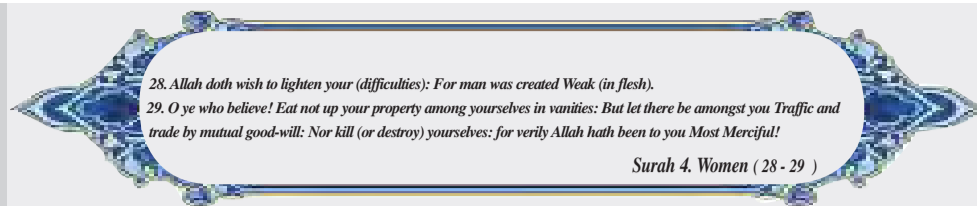
Ferdowsi was born in 940 CE in a small village near Tous in Iran's eastern Khorasan Razavi Province.

He is best known for his magnum opus, Shahnameh (Book of the Kings), which is a classic in epic Persian poetry and recounts Iran's mythical and historical past.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:23
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:17
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:57



Iran, Persian Gulf States Discuss Closer Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of roads and urban development met with senior officials of the Persian Gulf countries during his visit to the UAE.

Iran Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Mehrdad Bazrpash, met with Sheikh Mansour Bin Zayed Al Nahyan, the Deputy Prime Minister, the Minister of the Presidential Court, and also the Vice-President of the UAE on the sidelines of the 17th annual exhibition and conference of 'the Middle East Rail' in Abu Dhabi.

"Iran seeks to increase the development of relations with the UAE in various sectors of transportation and welcomes investors to participate in transportation projects," he added.

"The meetings of the joint commission between the two countries have not been held for some time, and it is necessary to hold the meetings of this commission again in order to examine the various aspects of transportation," Bazrpash noted.

He emphasized the signing of a strategic document between Iran and the United Arab Emirates.

Sheikh Mansour bin Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, for his part, expressed satisfaction with the presence of the Iranian minister and the accompanying delegation in Abu Dhabi.

He also pointed to the strategic location of Iran particularly along the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

On the sidelines of the 2023 Middle East Rail in Abu Dhabi, the Iranian minister also met and held talks with the Minister of Transport and Communications of Qatar, Jassim bin Saif bin Ahmed Al Sulaiti.



Referring to the previous MoUs signed between Iran and Qatar, the two ministers emphasized the need to remove the obstacles to the expansion of relations.

The increase in transportation relations, particularly in port and maritime, was also noted by both sides in this meeting.

Bazrpash as the head of 'The Iran-UAE Joint Economic Commission' has travelled to Abu Dhabi at the invitation of the UAE's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Suhail Mohamed Al Mazrouei for attending the 17th annual exhibition and conference of 'the Middle East Rail'.

Bazrpash as the head of 'The Iran-UAE Joint Economic Commission' has traveled to the UAE at the invitation of the UAE's Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Suhail Mohamed Al Mazrouei for attending the 17th annual exhibition and conference of 'the Middle East Rail'.

The visit marks a new beginning for commercial transactions between Iran and UAE following the resumption of political relations between Iran and the Persian Gulf countries.

Annual Trade With OIC Rises By 13% to Over \$59b

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's trade with member states of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) reached 97.33 million tons worth \$59.73 billion.

Iran's trade with the OIC member states, excluding crude oil exports, reached 97.33 million tons worth \$59.73 billion in fiscal 2022-23 (ended March 20), registering a 2.8% fall in terms of weight, but a 13.56% rise in value compared with the corresponding period of last year.

The latest data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration also show that the UAE with 24.35 million tons (up 3.71%) worth \$24.16 billion (up 12.57%) was Iran's top trade partner among OIC member states. It was followed by Turkey with 18.16 million tons (down 6.68%) worth \$13.55 billion (up 19.07%) and Iraq with 27.43 million tons (down 15.81%) worth \$10.5 billion (up 3.84%).

Chabahar New Port To Eurasia, West Asia

BANGLADESH (IP) - Dhaka, the capital city of Bangladesh, is hosting the 6th edition of the Indian Ocean Conference 2023, where the significance of Iran's Chabahar Port was emphasized as the Indian Ocean's new gate to Eurasia and West Asia.

Delivering a speech as a participant in the international event, the director-general of the Iranian Foreign Ministry's West Asia Department said the focus of the regional and international powers on the marine routes and their security could lead to new developments in the oceanic region.

Rasoul Mousavi said that the developments cause new geopolitics to be formed in the strategic straits of the Indian Ocean, among them the Chabahar port in southern Iran would play the role of a gate to Eurasia and West Asia, which directly and independently would provide access to the ocean.

He considered the port important economically and said that in addition to preparing the grounds for port operations, investment, and development, Chabahar can bring development campaigns in the region and facilitate access to Afghanistan, Central Asia, the Caucasus region, Russia, and the Black Sea through the so-called International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), in terms of time and distance.

Chabahar Port is a seaport located in southeastern Iran, on the Gulf of Oman, and serves as Iran's only oceanic port. It consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti, each of which has five berths. Chabahar port is only about 170 km west of the Pakistani port of Gwadar.

Turkey, Not Iran Is Regional Transport Hub

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has been supplanted by Turkey as the region's transport hub despite Tehran's ambitions, an Iranian MP has admitted.

Mojtaba Yousefi said Monday the Persian Gulf countries and also the north of the region look to Turkey as the transportation hub.

Meanwhile Iran suffers from poor infrastructure that make a mockery of its ambitions in recent years to be the leader.

Yousefi said: "Out of more than 60 airports in Iran, less than 40 airports are operational and only one is an economic airport."

The country's roads and railways are in need of significant upgrades, while the ports are not equipped to handle the large volumes of cargo that would be necessary for Iran to become a regional hub. Furthermore, the airports are not up to international standards, most of the airplanes suffer from technical issues, and the air traffic control system is inadequate.

Iran, EAEU May Sign Free Trade Zone Deal By End of 2023

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) has completed a substantive discussion of all the provisions of an agreement to set up a free trade zone with Iran so that the document can be signed by the end of 2023, according to Andrey Slepnev, the EAEU minister of trade.



Slepnev was quoted by Belarus Today that the date for the signing of the agreement to set up a free trade zone with Iran will be determined by the presidents of the EAEU members.

He said, however, that negotiations on the agreement have been completed and it will be available for signing in the coming months.

"We are now polishing the document and I hope the process will be completed within a month. We then plan to report the results to the prime ministers in Sochi in early June [during the summit of the CIS and EAEU heads of states] ... and I think there is a very high probability that we will sign an agreement with Iran this year," he said.

Slepnev explained that the agreement on a free trade zone with Iran can multiply the volume of mutual trade.

"We expect that the signed document will enable us to increase our trade from the current \$6 billion in a mid-term period of 5-7 years to \$20 billion; these are quite real figures. Iran is a very serious partner, it is a big country."

Iran Expects Major Surge in Electricity Demand This Summer

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran expects a major surge in demand for electricity this summer amid efforts to control rising consumption in the country's household and manufacturing sectors.

A spokesman for Iran's state electricity company Tavanir said that peak consumption of electricity in Iran could reach as much as 73 gigawatts (GW) this summer, up more than 10% compared to figures reported last year.

Mostafa Rajabi said that maximum output of electricity in Iran would reach 62.5 GW this summer, adding that the country will try to fill the gap in demand and supply of power through consumption control measures in household and manufacturing sectors.

Rajabi said a government decision in March to stop using daylight saving time could lead to an increase of 1 GW in demand for electricity this year. He said temperatures are also expected to rise to record levels this summer, causing a record surge in demand for cooling.

Iran's Energy Ministry said earlier on Monday that the government would order a change in normal working hours of its departments and offices as of May 22 to control demand for electricity in the country.

Iran-India Trade Value Hits \$510m in 3 Months

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - India's Ministry of Commerce and Industry put the country's value of trade with Iran in the first three months of 2023 at \$510 million.

In this period, India's import of non-oil products from Iran registered a 12 percent growth, the ministry added.

The trade exchanges between Iran and India, meanwhile, showed a 24 percent decline compared to last year's corresponding period.

The total value of trade exchanges between Iran and India in the first three months of 2022 had exceeded \$678 million.

India's export slump to Iran has been cited as the main reason behind the reduced value of trade exchanges



between the two sides from January to March 2023.

In this period, India exported \$322 million worth of goods to Iran, showing a 37 percent decline compared to a year earlier.

India had exported \$510 million worth of products to Iran from January to March 2022.

Meanwhile, India imported \$188 million worth of non-oil goods from Iran in the first three months of the current year, showing a 12 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period.

Oil products accounted for the main part of exports from Iran to India from January to March 2023. India imported \$65 million worth of oil products from Iran in this period.

Iranian, Omani Ministers Stress Implementing Custom, Investment MoUs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian and Omani economy ministers in a meeting in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, stressed the need to execute the agreements reached between the two countries in custom and investment fields.

Iranian Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi and his Omani counterpart Sultan al-Hassabi met on the sidelines of the Annual Meetings of the Islamic Development Bank Group (IsDB) in Jeddah on Sunday.

During the meeting, Khandouzi pointed to a recent visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Oman, which he said was important to relations between Iran and Oman while declaring Iran's full preparedness to welcome the Sultan of Oman in Tehran.

He also said that relations between Iran and Oman is currently at a level which is beyond normal official relations.

During the meeting, the two ministers called for setting up joint committees to expedite the implementation of the custom and investment agreements already signed between the two countries.



No African Currencies for China Oil Exports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian Oil Ministry has denied a report suggesting that it is being paid in African currencies for oil exports to China, saying the claim is just an attempt to undermine Iran's success in ramping up oil exports in recent months despite the continued pressure of U.S. sanctions.

An unidentified Oil Ministry official told the ILNA news agency that Iran has accepted the use of alternative currencies to settle payments related to its oil exports.

However, the official rejected claims Iran had received payments in currencies of Angola, Zambia and Kenya for oil shipments supplied to China.

The source said the claims are part of a campaign of psychological warfare against Iran to undermine the country's continued success in selling oil despite pressure on the buyers from United States. A report earlier this week by Oil Price quoted a European Union energy security source as saying that China is using the currencies of Angola, Zambia and Kenya to pay Iran for shipments.

The source claimed China uses those currencies to pay for Iranian oil to induce Iran to buy goods from the three countries so that these countries, in turn, can service their loans to China.

Statements by Iranian government authorities suggest exports of oil from the country have nearly doubled since August 2021 when a new administration took office in Tehran.

Reports by international tanker tracking services also confirm there has been a major surge in Iranian oil exports to China in recent months.

NIOC Unveils 16 New Exploration Blocks

TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) managing director unveiled 16 new exploration blocks.

Mohsen Khojastehmehr, who paid a visit to NIOC's Exploration Directorate, said 10 exploration blocks had been earlier offered and the figure has now reached 26.

He added some 2.5 billion barrels of oil equivalent (boe) have been added to the country's hydrocarbon reserves since the 13th (Raeisi) administration took office.

Exploration projects are the strategic foundations the oil and gas industry rests on, said the NIOC CEO and continued plans have been outlined to award the development project of the 16 new exploration blocks to the private sector, contractors and exploration companies and invest about \$1.2 billion to implement it.

Khojastehmehr stated that \$1.5 billion have been allocated for the development of exploration blocks in the 7th Plan, adding, "To me, the country's private sector can afford it and make such an investment."

Kenya and Somalia Agree to Phased Border Reopening

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Kenya and Somalia have agreed to reopen their common border after more than a decade, Kenya's interior minister said on Monday as ties warm between the two neighbors following years of tensions.

The announcement came after a high-level joint ministerial meeting in Nairobi on cooperation including on security, as well as trade and the movement of people.

The frontier had been officially closed in October 2011 because of attacks on Kenyan soil by the radical Islamist Somali group Al-Shabaab, which has been waging an insurgency against the central government in Mogadishu for more than 15 years.



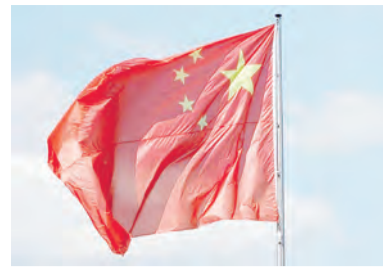
China Jails U.S. Citizen for Life on Espionage Charges

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China has sentenced a 78-year-old US citizen to life in prison for espionage, a court statement said.

John Shing-wan Leung, an American passport holder and Hong Kong permanent resident, "was found guilty of espionage, sentenced to life imprisonment, deprived of political rights for life", said the statement from the Intermediate People's Court in the eastern city of Suzhou.

Suzhou authorities "took compulsory measures according to the law" against 78-year-old Leung in April 2021, it said, without specifying when he had been taken into custody.

The U.S. embassy in Beijing did not immediately reply to an AFP request for comment.



Turkey Presidential Poll Set for May 28 Runoff



ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's presidential election will be decided in a runoff, election officials said Monday, after incumbent Recep Tayyip Erdogan pulled ahead of his chief challenger, but fell short of an outright victory that would extend his increasingly authoritarian rule into a third decade.

The May 28 second-round vote will determine whether the strategically located NATO country remains under the president's firm grip or can embark on a more democratic course promised by his main rival, Kemal Kilicdaroglu.

While Erdogan has governed for 20 years, opinion polls had suggested that run could be coming to an end and that a cost-of-living crisis and criticism over the government's response to a devastating February earthquake might redraw the electoral map.

Instead, Erdogan's retreat was still less marked than predicted — and with his alliance retaining its hold on the parliament, he is now in a good position to win in the second round.

The uncertainty drove the main Turkish stock exchange BIST-100 more than 6% lower at the open Monday, prompting a temporary halt in trading. But shares recovered some after trading resumed, and the index was 2.5% lower in the afternoon compared to the market close Friday.

Western nations and foreign investors were particularly interested in the outcome because of Erdogan's unorthodox leadership of the economy and often mercurial but successful efforts to put Turkey at the center of many major diplomatic negotiations. At a crossroads between East and West, with a coast along the Black Sea and borders with Iran, Iraq and Syria, Turkey has been a key player on issues including the war in Syria, migration flows to Europe, exports of Ukraine's grain, and NATO's expansion.

Preliminary results showed Erdogan won 49.51%, Kilicdaroglu grabbed 44.88% and the third candidate Sinan Ogan received 5.17%, according to Ahmet Yener, the head of Supreme Electoral Board.

In the last presidential election in 2018, Erdogan secured 52.6% of the vote in the first round, winning outright.

Even as it became clear a runoff was likely, Erdogan, who has governed Turkey as either prime minister or president since 2003, painted Sunday's vote as a victory both for himself and the country.

"That the election results have not been finalized doesn't change the fact that the nation has chosen us," Erdogan, 69, told supporters in the early hours of Monday.

He said he would respect the nation's decision.

Kilicdaroglu sounded hopeful for an eventual victory.

"We will absolutely win the second round ... and bring democracy" said Kilicdaroglu, 74, maintaining that Erdogan had lost the trust of a nation now demanding change. Kilicdaroglu and his party have lost all previous presidential and parliamentary elections since he took leadership in 2010 but increased their votes this time.

Right-wing candidate Ogan has not said whom he would endorse if the elections go to a second round. He is believed to have received support from nationalist electors wanting change after two decades under Erdogan but unconvinced by the Kilicdaroglu-led six party alliance's ability to govern.

The election results showed that the alliance led by Erdogan's ruling Justice and Development Party looked like it would keep its majority in the 600-seat parliament, although the assembly has lost much of its power after a referendum that gave the presidency additional legislative powers narrowly passed in 2017.

Erdogan's AKP and its allies secured 321 seats in the National Assembly, while the opposition won 213 and the 66 remaining went to a pro-Kurdish alliance, according to preliminary results.

Howard Eissenstat, an associate professor of Middle East history and politics at St. Lawrence University in New York, said those results would likely give Erdogan an advantage in an eventual runoff because voters would not want a "divided government."

As in previous years, Erdogan led a highly divisive campaign. He portrayed Kilicdaroglu, who had received the backing of the country's pro-Kurdish party, of colluding with "terrorists" and of supporting what he called "deviant" LGBTQ rights. In a bid to woo voters hit hard by inflation, he increased wages and pensions and subsidized electricity and gas bills, while showcasing Turkey's homegrown defense industry and infrastructure projects.

Kilicdaroglu, for his part, campaigned on promises to reverse crackdowns on free speech and other forms of democratic backsliding, as well as to repair an economy battered by high inflation and currency devaluation.

But as the results came in, it appeared those elements didn't shake up the electorate as expected: Turkey's conservative heartland overwhelmingly voted for the ruling party, with Kilicdaroglu's main opposition winning most of the coastal provinces in the west and south. The pro-Kurdish Green Left Party, YSP, won the predominantly Kurdish provinces in the southeast.

Thailand's Opposition Parties Strike Stunning Election Win

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Following a stunning election victory in which they together captured a majority of seats in the House of Representatives, Thailand's top two opposition parties began planning Monday for the next stage in their bid to replace the military-dominated government.

The Move Forward Party, led by 42-year-old businessman Pita Limjaroenrat, placed first in the election, surpassing most expectations. It squeaked past the Pheu Thai party, which had been favored to top the polls.

Pheu Thai stumbled despite the star power of Paetongtarn Shinawatra, daughter of Thaksin Shinawatra, the former populist prime minister who was toppled by a 2006 military coup and is the driving force behind the party.

"The overwhelming electoral victory by Move Forward and Pheu Thai is a decisive sign that voters want a polity where the people, not the military, decide their future," said Tyrell Haberkorn, a Thai studies scholar at the University of Wisconsin.

"Voters want a Thailand with free speech, without compulsory military conscription, and where the people's voices are valued, not something to be silenced or bought," she said.

Protests Against Pakistan's Top Judge

LAHORE (Dispatches) - Several thousand pro-government protesters demanded the resignation of Pakistan's top judge for releasing Imran Khan from arrest last week, as the former prime minister went back to court facing yet more legal cases. Khan, who was ousted from power in April last year, was arrested on corruption charges on Tuesday following months of simmering political crisis, prompting his voters to rampage through cities.

His arrest was declared unlawful by the Supreme Court's chief justice and Khan was later released and granted various protective bail applications.

"The chief justice and a few of his cronies are disgracing the judiciary like never before. Their justice seems to be serving one leader only," said Malik Hassam Mehmood, a 36-year-old trader and supporter of Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif's party. "We are here to protest for the rule of law and a non-partisan judiciary."

There was a heavy security presence in the capital on Monday as protesters gathered outside the court in the capital's so-called red zone.

The Supreme Court order said Khan's arrest last week as he arrived at the Islamabad High Court to file a bail application in the graft case "violated the petitioner's right of access to justice". However, referring to the pro-government protesters, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said on Sunday that "people want to come in very large numbers because of a deep sense of anger and anguish".

Analysts say legal hurdles are often used to discourage dissent in Pakistan and Khan dismisses the cases arrayed against him as politically motivated.

Political analyst Mosharrif Zaidi said judges were split down the middle over the political crisis. "The judiciary still makes compromises with both civilians and the military, but on many issues judges have repeatedly demonstrated the ability to take a stand and hold their ground," he told AFP.

Former international cricket star Khan returned to the Lahore High Court on Monday, where his lawyers said they were seeking information on fresh cases linking him to the violence that followed his arrest. The case will continue Tuesday.



Scholz's Social Democrats Win Bremen State Vote

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Chancellor Olaf Scholz's Social Democrats won an election in Germany's smallest state, Bremen, in a vote that could give a modest lift to the centre-left party which has seen its popularity slide nationally.

The state is not deemed a political bellwether for other parts of Germany given its specific characteristics and its small size with around 683,000 inhabitants in Bremen city and its Bremerhaven North Sea port.

By contrast, the states of Bavaria and Hesse, which will hold elections in October, together comprise nearly a quarter of Germany's population of 83.2 million.

Still, the traditional SPD stronghold - a car hub that is turning into a key port for the growing offshore wind industry - is the first federal state to hold a fresh election this year.

Projected results published by the local statistics office put the SPD in pole position on 29.5%, up 4.6 percentage points from the last election in 2019 when it suffered a bitter loss to the conservatives. Despite the defeat four years ago, it was still able to retain the mayorship after forming a coalition with the environmentalist Greens and far-left Left party.

Sunday's result, if confirmed, would be around 10 percentage points better than the SPD is polling on a national level where it has slumped since the 2019 federal election amid a cost-of-living crisis in the wake of the Ukraine war.

"The number one in Bremen - that's us," said Mayor Andreas Bovenschulte, whose popularity contributed to the win.

The conservatives came in second place in Bremen on 25.8%, down 0.9 percentage points on their 2019 result, according to the projected results.

Meanwhile both parties partnering with the SPD in Scholz's federal coalition, the Greens and liberal Free Democrats (FDP), suffered losses in Bremen. The Greens took the worst hit with 11.8%, down 5.6 percentage points.

"We need to look at what we did wrong," said Omid Nouripour, Greens co-chief, saying this was also a reflection on the party's performance at national level.

The party has come under fire in recent months for its energy and climate policies - in particular a law banning most new oil and gas heating systems from 2024 - that critics say will put too great a burden on households and are not sufficiently thought-through.

Lately it has also faced accusations of cronyism in the Greens-run economy ministry, which it rejects.

The pro-business Free Democrats scored 5.2%, down 0.7 percentage points, according to the projected results, and only marginally above the 5% threshold to enter parliament - a hurdle it failed to clear in three state votes.

The Left party scored 11.5% and the right-wing populist party Buerger in Wut (Citizens in Rage) 9.5%.

Support for the Buerger in Wut jumped after the far-right Alternative for Germany (AfD), which has surged in nationwide polls to 15-17%, was absent from the ballot in Bremen due to internal divisions.



Ukraine Hails Gains in Bakhmut as Zelenskiy Wins More Arms in Europe

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine hailed its first substantial battlefield advances for six months as President Volodymyr Zelenskiy won pledges of new long-range drones in Britain to add to a haul of Western arms for a counteroffensive against Russian invaders.

Since last week, the Ukrainian military has started to push Russian forces back in and around the battlefield city of Bakhmut, its first significant offensive operations since its troops recaptured the southern city of Kherson in November.

"The advance of our troops along the Bakhmut direction is the first success of offensive actions in the defence of Bakhmut," Colonel General Oleksandr Syrskyi, Commander of Ground Forces, said in a statement on the Telegram messaging app.

"The last few days have shown that we can move forward and destroy the enemy even in such extremely difficult conditions," he said. "We are fighting with fewer resources than the enemy. At the same time, we are able to ruin its plans."

The battle for the small eastern city has become the longest and bloodiest of the war and has totemic significance for Russia, which has no other prizes to show for a winter campaign that cost thousands of lives.

Over the past half of a year, Kyiv has held its troops on the defensive while Moscow mounted its campaign, sending hundreds of thousands of fresh reservists and mercenaries into Europe's bloodiest ground combat since World War Two.

Kyiv is now preparing a counteroffensive using hundreds of new tanks and armoured vehicles sent by Western countries since the start of this year, aiming to recapture the sixth of Ukraine's territory that Moscow claims to have annexed.

Zelenskiy met British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak in London on Monday, the latest stop in a tour that brought him to Rome, Berlin and Paris over the past three days, pocketing major new pledges of weapons along the way.

Britain, which last week became the first Western country to offer Ukraine long-range cruise missiles, followed that up during Zelenskiy's visit on Monday with a pledge of drones that could strike at a range of 200 km (125 miles).



What You Need to Know About Turbulence

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Countless travelers have experienced the distinct anxiety-inducing sensation of turbulence on flights: eyes squeezed shut, hands clamped to the armrests for dear life, bracing for the roller coaster to come.

Recent incidents have left dozens of passengers with injuries. Last month, seven passengers on a Lufthansa flight from Texas to Frankfurt, Germany, were hospitalized with minor injuries after their plane encountered severe turbulence as it flew over Tennessee. And in December, about two dozen people, including an infant, were hurt on a Hawaiian Airlines flight from Phoenix to Honolulu that hit rough air shortly before landing.

The recent reports raise questions about whether turbulence is getting more frequent and intense.

We spoke to a handful of experts to learn more about the tricky-to-predict weather phenomenon. Here's what they said.

Turbulence is unstable air movement that is caused by changes in wind speed and direction, such as jet streams, thunderstorms, and cold or warm weather fronts. It can range in severity, causing minor to dramatic changes in altitude and air speed.

It's not just associated with inclement weather, but can also occur when skies appear placid. And it can be invisible both to the eye and weather radar.

There are four classifications for turbulence: light, moderate, severe and extreme. In cases of extreme turbulence, pilots can lose control of the airplane, and there can even be structural damage to the aircraft, according to the National Weather Service.

Is turbulence increasing? And if so, why?

Recent research indicates that turbulence is rising and that this change is sparked by climate change — specifically, elevated carbon dioxide emissions affecting air currents.

Paul Williams, a professor of atmospheric science at the University of Reading in England, has studied turbulence for more than a decade.

Williams' research has found that clear air turbulence, which occurs most frequently at high altitudes and in winter, could triple by the end of the century. He said that this type of turbulence, of all categories, is increasing around the world at all flight altitudes.

His research suggests that we could encounter bumpier flights in the coming years, which could potentially result in more passenger and crew injuries.

How is turbulence monitored and measured?

Meteorologists rely on a variety of different algorithms, satellites and radar systems to produce detailed aviation forecasts for conditions such as cold air, wind speed, thunderstorms and turbulence. They flag where and when turbulence might happen.

Jennifer Strozgas, a meteorologist at the weather service's Aviation Weather Center, called turbulence "definitely one of the more challenging things to predict."

Using these forecasts, in addition to guidance from air traffic controllers, pilots attempt to skirt turbulent areas by adjusting their altitude to find the smoothest ride. This means flying higher or lower than the altitude where forecasters predict turbulence and potentially burning more fuel than initially anticipated, an endeavor that can be costly.

Robert Sumwalt, a former chair of the National Transportation Safety Board who now heads a new aviation safety center at Embry-Riddle Aeronautical University, stressed that it was impossible to prevent or predict all turbulence.



Bangladesh Audiences See First Indian Movie In 50 Years

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Thousands flocked to cinemas in Dhaka on Friday as Shah Rukh Khan's blockbuster "Pathaan" hit the big screens, the first Bollywood movie to get a full release in Bangladesh in more than half a century.

The action-packed spy thriller smashed box office records when it opened in India in January and the star has a huge fan following around the world.

But Dhaka banned films from its neighbor soon after its independence in 1971, in the face of lobbying from local movie-makers, despite India backing it in its independence war with Pakistan.

"I am so excited because a Hindi film is being released in Bangladesh for the first time," said Sazzad Hossain, 18, at a cineplex in the capital.

"We are all Shah Rukh Khan fans. For the first time I'll watch Shah Rukh Khan on a giant screen."

Bangladeshi cinemas have gone into steep decline, with poor-quality local films unable to match Bollywood's glitz and glamour or draw audiences, and the ageing Shakib Khan its only bankable star.

Some movie houses even switched to illegally showing pornography to try to remain viable, but more than 1,000 have shut their doors in the last 20 years, many of them to be converted to shopping centres or apartments.

At the Modhumita Cinema Hall, once Dhaka's most luxurious movie theatre, heroin addicts sat outside this week in front of posters for Jinn, a newly released Bangladeshi movie.

"I haven't seen such a poor crowd in many years," said one theatre employee. "Only a few rows have been filled up. Nobody watches these local art movies or films with poor storylines."

Cinemas used to be a mainstay of Bangladeshi social life.

"This hall was like a great meeting place of the Old Dhaka community," Pradip Narayan told AFP at the Manoshi Complex, a 100-year-old movie theatre turned into a market in 2017.

"Women used to come in the night to watch films here. Our mothers and sisters from neighbouring areas would come here, and when the show ended at midnight or 12:30 at night, it looked like a fair here.

"A woman even gave birth to a child in this cinema hall. Such was the craze for movies back then."

Authorities attempted to lift the ban on Indian movies in 2015 when two Bollywood hits -- "Wanted" and "The Three Idiots" -- were screened, but protests by local movie stars forced theatres to stop the shows.

The government finally issued a decree last month allowing the import of 10 movies a year from India or South Asian nations.

"In Pakistan the number of cinemas came down to 30-35 once. Then they allowed importing Indian Hindi films," said information minister Hasan Mahmud.

"The number of cinemas has since risen to about 1,200 and the standard of Pakistani films also improved."

"Pathaan" was released in 41 theatres across the country and many shows in the capital were already sold out, said distributor Anonno Mamun.

Allowing the screening of Bollywood movies would prove to be a "game-changer", he told AFP. "Everyone loves Hindi movies here. Many also love southern Indian movies," he said.

The Modhumita cinema's owner Mohammed Iftekharuddin -- a former president of the Bangladesh Motion Picture Exhibitors Association -- is hoping for a business turnaround.

"I think 200-300 more cinema halls will reopen after this," he said.

"Monopoly destroys business. When there is competition, there will be business."



India Among Top 5 Countries Where Babies Born Too Soon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Every two seconds, a baby is born too soon. Every 40 seconds, one of those babies dies.

Almost half of all pre-term births (babies born before the 37th week of pregnancy) in 2020 happened in five countries — India, Pakistan, Nigeria, China and Ethiopia — according to a new report released by the United Nations (UN) agencies and partners on Tuesday. Together they accounted for 45 per cent of babies born too soon around the world, exposing them to a high mortality risk. This indicates a "silent emergency" for children's survival and health.

An estimated 13.4 million babies were born pre-term in 2020 with nearly one million dying from complications. This is equivalent to around one in 10 babies as per the report titled 'Born too Soon: Decade of Action on Pre-term Birth', put together by WHO, United Nations Children's Fund and Partnership for Maternal, Newborn and Child Health (PMNCH) — the world's largest alliance for women, children and adolescents.

In 2020, Bangladesh had the highest estimated pre-term birth rate (16.2 per cent), followed by Malawi (14.5 per cent) and Pakistan (14.4 per cent). India and South Africa, at an estimated 13 per cent each, were among the top five countries with high pre-term birth rates. The total pre-term birth numbers for the five countries are alarming indeed as India tops the list with 30.16 lakh births, Pakistan is at 9.14 lakh, Nigeria at 7.74 lakh and China at 7.52 lakh. The report includes updated estimates from WHO and UNICEF.

What's causing pre-term births in India? Clearly the infrastructure for neonatal care needs to be more expansive and last-mile. Explaining the findings, Dr Surender Singh Bisht, secretary general of the National Neonatology Forum (NNF), said, "In rural areas, there used to be a common complaint of lack of access to health care but initiatives like special newborn care units, improved labour rooms and efficient deliveries have helped save many pre-term babies. But they are still not as expansive."

The government has launched many programmes such as the India Newborn Action Plan and Rashtriya Bal Suraksha Karyakram and has set up many Speciality Newborn Care Units (SNCUs) across the country.

Dr V C Manoj, president-elect of NNF, said, "Several factors like lifestyle changes, chronic diseases and IVF pregnancies are associated with increased pre-term births in urban centres." Dr Bisht concurred. "Reduced fertility levels and assisted pregnancies are also not without the risk of



pre-term births."

As for the region-wise break-up of pre-term births in India, a report published on June 28 last year in PLoS-Global Public Health showed that West Bengal reported 16 per cent of such births, Tamil Nadu 14 per cent and Gujarat 9 per cent.

Overall, the report finds that pre-term birth rates have not changed in any region in the world in the past decades. The global pre-term birth rate was 9.9 per cent in 2020, compared to 9.8 per cent in 2010.

There was also no change in pre-term birth rates in any region, including

the highest-burden regions (southern Asia logging in 13.3 per cent in 2010 and 13.2 per cent in 2020, and sub-Saharan Africa at 10.1 per cent in both 2010 and 2020). In fact, these two regions collectively account for over 65 per cent of pre-term births globally.

At a webinar, Dr Anshu Banerjee, director for Maternal, Newborn, Child and Adolescent Health and Ageing at WHO, said every woman must be able to access quality health services before and during pregnancy to identify and manage risks and avoid a pre-term birth.

According to Dr Sachin Shah, president, Indian Academy of Paediatrics — Intensive Care (Pune chapter), it is important to encourage quality care at special newborn care units and train mothers in practising kangaroo care for low birth weight infants. This essentially means prolonged skin-to-skin contact with the mother and frequent breastfeeding.

Pre-term birth is the leading cause of child mortality, accounting for nearly one in five of deaths of children under five years. Three of four pre-term babies are still born. According to the report, only a few countries have made progress in reducing their pre-term birth rates, though changes have been modest at five per cent in 10 years, a mere 0.5 per cent per year. The "four Cs" — conflict, climate change, COVID-19 and the cost-of-living crisis — heighten threats for the most vulnerable women and babies in all countries. Helga Fogstad, Executive Director, PMNCH, said that climate change was a big factor in pre-term births and policy changes were needed to mitigate such risks.

Meteorologists Targeted in Climate Misinfo Surge

PARIS (Dispatches) - Once trusted faces on the news, meteorologists now brave threats, insults and slander online from conspiracy theorists and climate change deniers who accuse them of faking or even fixing the weather.

Users on Twitter and other social media falsely accused Spain's weather agency of engineering a drought, Australia's of doctoring its thermometers and France's of exaggerating global warming through misplaced weather stations.

"The coronavirus is no longer a trend. Conspiracy theorists and deniers who used to talk about that are now spreading disinformation about climate change," Alexandre Lopez-Borrull, lecturer in Information and Communication Sciences at the Open University of Catalonia, told AFP.

"These scientific bodies are seen as part of the establishment, so anything they say may get disputed on social networks.

"They are providing evidence against what the climate deniers claim, so the latter try to discredit them."

In a harsh drought and with local elections looming, Spain's State Meteorological Agency (AEMET) spoke out after its members were threatened in Twitter messages, phone calls and emails.

"Murderers", "Criminals", "You'll pay for this", "We're watching you", the messages shouted.

They came from people who believe the widely debunked theory that aeroplane condensation trails are really "chemtrails" sprayed by the authorities to poison people or create weather disasters.

Some referred to the "2030 agenda", a debunked theory that global elites are plotting to subjugate people through Covid and climate policies.

"Do you want us to publish your contact details and those of your family?" read one Tweet aimed at an AEMET employee.

"Crooks! You are destroying nature on the orders of the damned 2030 agenda," said another.

"We have seen an increase in insulting messages as a result of a thread we published about condensation trails" on April 10, AEMET spokesperson Estrella Gutierrez-Marco told AFP.

"What makes no sense is that they are insulting an institution that is constantly watching out for their interests, whose aim is... to contribute to people's safety."

Lopez-Borrull noted a "significant increase" in climate change denial — particularly among far-right supporters who see it as a leftist cause and oppose reforms aimed at curbing its impacts.

"People distrust politicians, judges and the media, and the cost of living is rising," he said.

OPEC Raises China's Oil Demand Growth Forecast

RIYADH (Dispatches) - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries further raised its forecast for China's oil demand growth in 2023 following the relaxation of the country's COVID-19 curbs.

The oil producers' alliance, however, left the global total steady citing potential downside risks for growth in other regions. "Minor upward adjustments were made due to the better-than-expected performance in China's economy, while other regions are expected to see slight declines, due to economic challenges that are likely to weigh on oil demand," OPEC said in the report. World oil demand in 2023 will rise by 2.33 million barrels per day, or 2.3 percent, the organization said in its monthly report. This was virtually unchanged from 2.32 million bpd forecast last month.



ASEAN Spirited to Be World's New Economic Powerhouse

LABUAN BAJO (Dispatches) - The Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) demonstrated its confidence in becoming the world's new economic powerhouse, reflected at a summit held this week in the Indonesian town of Labuan Bajo.

This year's 42nd ASEAN Summit under Indonesia's ASEAN chairmanship is themed "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth". "We have a strong asset as the epicentrum of growth, an economy that grows far above average global economic growth, demographic bonus and a maintained regional stability," Indonesian President Joko Widodo said at the Summit's opening session.

According to Xinhua, in his remarks at the summit, Vietnamese Prime Minister Pham Minh Chinh, as quoted by Vietnam News Agency, highlighted three core factors to ASEAN's characteristics: values, vitality and reputation, which have helped the regional bloc maintain independence and strategic self-reliance, turn into a growth epicentre and better adapt to external shocks.

In an April report, the Asian Development Bank projected that the economies in the Asia Pacific would grow 4.8 per cent this year and next year, up from 4.2 per cent in 2022, noting growth in the region remains resilient.

Leaders and senior officials engaged in productive bilateral and multilateral meetings. For example, Widodo met with Pham Minh Chinh and discussed joint efforts towards a bilateral trade target of US\$15 billion by 2028.

On the same day, leaders from Indonesia and Timor-Leste agreed to form a joint working group for economic development in their border areas. Indonesia proposed immediate talks on a bilateral investment treaty.

"When we talk about Asean being the epicentrum of growth, it is related to opportunities," Indonesian Tourism and Creative Economy Minister Sandiaga Uno said at a press conference on Wednesday, emphasizing opportunities in the sector of electric vehicles (EVs).

Indonesia, the current ASEAN chair, has been on track to promote EV use in the archipelagic country and the region in a new energy transition to reduce emissions.

An outcome document on developing a regional EV ecosystem is expected to be released from the summit to build ASEAN as a global production hub for the EV industry. ASEAN has set the target of raising the proportion of renewable energy in its energy mix to 23 per cent by 2025 for a low-carbon future.

In his opening remarks, Widodo mentioned the implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) as part of the efforts to reinforce inclusive cooperation for ASEAN in the future.

The trade deal comprises 15 Asia-Pacific countries, including the 10 ASEAN member states of Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam, and ASEAN's five trading partners, namely China, Japan, South Korea, Australia and New Zealand.

According to the World Bank, RCEP, the world's largest free trade area, covers 2.3 billion people or 30 per cent of the world's population, contributes US\$25.8 trillion or about 30 per cent of global gross domestic product, and accounts for US\$12.7 trillion or over a quarter of global trade in goods and services.

Argentina Inflation Smashes Past Every Forecast to Hit 109%

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina's annual inflation rate soared to 109% in April, the country's statistics agency said, smashing past analyst forecasts and stoking anger among hard-hit consumers who are increasingly having to skimp and save to get by.

The South American nation, an important grains exporter and the region's no. 2 economy, posted 8.4% monthly inflation in April, well above analyst forecasts of 7.5% and the highest in decades. That took the 12-month rate to an eye-watering 108.8%.

The price spike has pushed one in four people into poverty in a country that has battled for decades with high inflation, along with cyclical debt and currency crises. Dwindling central bank reserves are now imperiling the government's finances. "They've turned us into a country of beggars," Carlos Andrada, a 60-year-old self-employed worker, told Reuters as he searched for cut-price deals at a vegetable stall at a market in the suburbs of capital city Buenos Aires.

"One despairs because after working all your life, you have to fight just to get a tomato or a bell pepper," he said.

The highest analyst estimate in a Reuters poll for April's monthly inflation rate had been 8.3%. "The data exceeded all forecasts," said economist Daniel Artana from consultancy FIEL.

Argentina's fragile economic situation has been aggravated by a historic drought since last year, which has hammered soybeans, corn and wheat exports, draining foreign reserves and hindering the government's ability to fight currency weakness.

Volatility in the foreign exchange market, which saw the peso hit record lows near 500 to the dollar in parallel markets last month, has inflamed prices further and strained Argentina's huge \$44 billion loan deal with the International Monetary Fund.



BRICS Countries Will Contribute Over 50% of Global GDP by 2030

BEIJING (Dispatches) - The BRICS countries – Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa – are all large and diverse economies with varying levels of development, economic structures, and growth rates. However, they are all major emerging market economies and collectively represent a significant share of the global economy.

Here is some general information on the economies of the BRICS countries as of my knowledge cutoff in September 2022:

Brazil: Brazil is the ninth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of around \$2.4 trillion in 2022. The country has a diversified economy, with strong industries in agriculture, mining, manufacturing, and services. Brazil has been struggling with high levels of inequality and political instability in recent years.

Russia: Russia is the eleventh-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of around \$1.7 trillion in 2022. The country is heavily dependent on natural resources, particularly oil and gas, which account for a significant share of its exports. Russia has been facing economic challenges due to international sanctions, falling oil prices, and a lack of structural reforms.

India: India is the fifth-largest economy in the world, with a GDP of around \$3.0 trillion in 2022. The country has a diverse economy, with strong industries in services, manufacturing, agriculture, and technology. India has been experiencing significant economic growth in recent years, but also faces challenges such as high levels of poverty and inequality.

UAE to Focus on Circular Economy to Double GDP Growth by 2031

DUBAI (Dispatches) - The UAE will focus on developing a circular economy as it aims to double its economic growth by 2031, the Minister of Economy said.

The Arab world's second-largest economy aims to move from "linear economy to circularity", with an annual 7 per cent gross domestic product growth target to double its economy in the coming years, Abdulla bin Touq told the UAE Climate Tech forum in Abu Dhabi.

"We introduced 22 policies and we are going to introduce more. There is a new technology that can help us decarbonise."

Last year, the UAE approved 22 policies aimed at accelerating the country's transition to a circular economy, as part of its push towards sustainable economic development.

It also set up the UAE Circular Economy Council, which will create policies focusing on four main sectors: manufacturing, food, infrastructure and transport, the government said at the time.

A circular economy is an economic system that focuses on reducing the extraction of natural resources, minimising waste and regenerating natural systems. Raw materials, components and products keep their value for as long as possible, while renewable energy sources are used to fuel economic activity.

"We created the UAE circular economic policy with the private sector. We brought all the multinational companies and we [discussed] what policies we need to take to help advance technology and help the economy to be more circular," Mr Bin Touq said.

The UAE is also focusing on "circular trade" to reduce its carbon footprint, Mr Bin Touq said, without elaborating.

The UAE is investing heavily in clean energy projects and has announced several initiatives as it seeks to reach net-zero emissions by 2050.

This week, the Ministry of Industry and Advanced Technology signed four preliminary agreements with Adnoc, Edge Group, Kezad Group and Dubai Industrial City to accelerate decarbonisation and digitalisation in the manufacturing sector.

It has also launched initiatives such as the Technology Transformation Programme, Industrial Technology Transformation Index, green financing in partnership with Emirates Development Bank and the Industrial Sustainability Alliance amid efforts to reduce emissions.

Iraq Does Not Expect OPEC+ To Make Further Cuts at June Meeting

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Iraq does not expect OPEC+ to make further cuts to oil output at its next meeting in June, its oil minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani said, in the first indication from an OPEC minister about a potential decision as oil prices slide.

"At the next meeting, which will be held on the 3rd and 4th (of June), there will be no additional reduction, and as for Iraq, we cannot reduce further," Abdel-Ghani said in an interview, his first to foreign media since taking office last year.

In a following statement, he said Iraq is committed to voluntary oil production cuts that started in May and last until the end of 2023, and noted that Iraq was not asked to make any additional such cuts before a June 4 OPEC+ meeting.

OPEC and its allies led by Russia, known as OPEC+, agreed to cut production in late 2022 to support the market as the economic outlook worsened, hitting prices.

Then in a surprise move in early April, Saudi Arabia and other OPEC+ members announced further oil output cuts of around 1.2 million barrels per day.

The announcement helped push oil prices sharply higher, but those gains have since been erased as fears of a global economic slowdown took hold.

OPEC+ members are set to meet in Vienna on June 4 to decide on their next course of action.

"The second cut was voluntary and it has helped us a lot in the stability of the market and boosting prices," Abdel-Ghani said.

The April cuts punished oil short sellers, or those who bet on oil price declines.

Back in 2020, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman warned traders against betting heavily in the oil market, promising that those who gamble on the oil price would be "ouching like hell".

Iraq said it would cut 211,000 barrels per day (bpd) starting May as part of the voluntary cuts.

Turkey halted 450,000 bpd of its northern exports through the Iraq-Turkey pipeline on March 25 after an arbitration ruling ordered Ankara to pay Baghdad Damages of \$1.5 billion for unauthorised exports by the Kurdistan Regional Government between 2014 and 2018.

It is unclear when flows will resume but Abdel-Ghani said on Friday Baghdad had still not heard back on a request to the Turkish state energy company to restart exports.

EU Considers Formally Banning Russian Oil Flows to German, Poland



LONDON (Dispatches) - The European Union is considering formally banning Russian crude flows via the Druzhba pipeline to Germany and Poland, which have already stopped importing Russia's crude, Bloomberg reported, citing documents it has seen.

The Druzhba pipeline is a key artery of oil supply from Russia to Europe. It has two branches – a northern one via Belarus to deliver oil to Belarus, Poland, Germany, Latvia, and Lithuania, and a southern one passing through Ukraine and sending oil to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Croatia.

Flows through the Druzhba pipeline are currently exempted from the EU embargo on imports of Russian crude oil by sea that came into effect on December 5. The EU has exempted pipeline oil flows to landlocked EU member states from the ban.

But Germany and Poland stopped imports of Russian crude via the Druzhba pipeline early this year, despite the exemptions made for pipeline crude flows. Germany and Poland have said they would halt imports of Russian crude via the Druzhba pipeline as of January 1, 2023.

Now the EU is weighing ending the exemption for the northern branch of Druzhba to Poland and Germany, as part of the next round of sanctions against Russia over the invasion of Ukraine, according to the documents Bloomberg has seen.

The pipeline flows via the southern branch to the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, and Croatia would continue to be exempted from the EU embargo on imports of Russian oil.

The proposal for ending the derogation for Germany and Poland would be a symbolic move because Germany and Poland no longer import Russian oil. But a formal ban will need to be endorsed by all 27 members of the European Union. Discussions in the EU on the proposal are still ongoing, and it could still change, according to Bloomberg's sources.

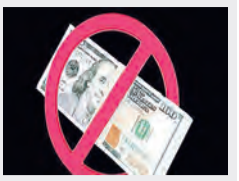
Iraqis Banned From Dealing in U.S. Dollars

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Iraqi Interior Ministry has banned people from dealing in U.S. dollars in the latest move by authorities to control a fluctuating black market exchange rate.

The surprise announcement on Sunday reflects an attempt to close the gap between the official exchange rate and that on the black market, which has fueled high prices and caused anger, The National reported.

“The dinar is the national currency in Iraq,” the ministry said. “Your commitment to transact in it instead of foreign currencies boosts the country’s sovereignty and economy.”

It said dealing in other currencies “is a violation that is punishable by law” and threatened to “hold accountable anyone who attempts to undermine the Iraqi dinar and the economy.”



Germany Announces \$3b Military Aid Package for Ukraine

BERLIN (dispatches) - Germany will provide Ukraine with additional military aid worth more than 2.7 billion euros (\$3 billion), including tanks, anti-aircraft systems and ammunition, the government said.

The announcement came as preparations were underway in Berlin for a possible first visit to Germany by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky since Russia invaded his country last year.

Defense Minister Boris Pistorius said that Berlin wants to show with the latest package of arms “that Germany is serious in its support” for Ukraine.

“Germany will provide all the help it can, as long as it takes,” he said.

Kyiv has long been suspicious of Germany’s reliance on Russian energy and support for the Nord Stream gas pipelines circumventing Ukraine, defended by then Chancellor Angela Merkel.

Her successor, Olaf Scholz, agreed to phase out Russian energy imports after the invasion but initially hesitated to provide Ukraine with lethal weapons, fearing Germany could be drawn into the conflict.

With Washington, Warsaw and London more overtly supportive of Ukraine’s efforts to defend itself, Berlin got the cold diplomatic shoulder from Kyiv.

German President Frank-Walter Steinmeier was disinclined from Ukraine last year, prompting annoyance in Germany, which pointed out that it has given considerable financial aid to Kyiv and taken in more than a million Ukrainian refugees. Scholz eventually visited Kyiv with French President Emmanuel Macron and other leaders in June.

Though slow to provide military aid, Germany has since become one of the biggest suppliers of arms to Ukraine, crucially giving the green light for deliveries of modern battle tanks like its own Leopard 1 and 2, along with sophisticated anti-aircraft systems needed to fend off drone and missile attacks.

The new military aid package, first reported by German weekly Der Spiegel, includes 30 Leopard 1 A5 tanks, 20 Marder armored personnel carriers, more than 100 combat vehicles, 18 self-propelled Howitzers, 200 reconnaissance drones, four IRIS-T SLM anti-aircraft systems and other air defense equipment.



The Ukrainian president would be arriving from Rome, where he will meet with Pope Francis and Italian Premier Giorgia Meloni.

Berlin police confirmed last week that they are preparing for a possible visit by Zelensky and have imposed a security cordon throughout much of the capital’s government district Sunday.

After meeting Scholz and other senior officials at the chancellery, the two leaders are expected to fly to the western city of Aachen, where Zelensky would receive the International Charlemagne Prize awarded to him and the people of Ukraine. Organizers say the award recognizes that their resistance against Russia’s invasion is a defense “not just of the sovereignty of their country and the life of its citizens, but also of Europe and European values.”

Iraq Asks Turkey to Resume Oil Flows



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has officially requested that Turkey restart the pipeline responsible for sending Iraqi crude oil from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region to the port of Ceyhan, a statement from Iraq’s Kurdistan Regional Government said.

Oil flows along the pipeline have been halted for weeks. “Both the Kurdistan Region’s Ministry of Natural Resources and Iraq’s Ministry of Oil are reportedly waiting for Turkey’s response before resuming oil exports,” the KRG statement said.

Iraq’s oil minister said last week that Baghdad and Erbil were set to reach an agreement over crude oil exports from the semi-autonomous Kurdistan Region within the next two weeks. “Regarding the agreement with the Region, we have reached the final stage and hopefully we will reach the final agreement on the exportation of crude oil within a maximum of two weeks,” Iraq’s oil minister Hayan Abdul Ghani said at the time. The only outstanding issue was how Iraq would handle the bank account where Erbil’s oil money is kept.

Kurdistan’s crude oil exports – around 400,000 to 450,000 bpd shipped through an Iraqi-Turkey pipeline to Ceyhan and then on tankers to the international markets – were halted in late March by the federal government of Iraq.

A few days earlier, the International Chamber of Commerce ruled in favor of Iraq against Turkey in a dispute over crude flows from Kurdistan. Iraq argued that Turkey shouldn’t allow Kurdish oil exports via the Iraq-Turkey pipeline and Ceyhan without approval from the federal government of Iraq.

The court ruled that Turkey should pay Iraq compensation of \$1.5 billion for what now appears to be illegal exports of oil over five years. Turkey then shut off the Kirkuk-Ceyhan pipeline in response, which suspended the flow of oil from the Kurdistan region. Kurdistan’s oilfields also shut down due to a lack of storage.

Iran Has Always Been...

FROM PAGE 1

He further pointed to the anti-terrorism campaign by the Iranian government, most notably by Martyr Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani’s campaign in Iraq, especially in Kirkuk and Nineveh to protect the Christian minority against ISIL terrorism, saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran has shown its commitment to defending the religious minority in practice.

The patriarch, for his part, said that Iran is home to a sizeable population of Christians, stressing that “Dialogues between Muslims and Christians will have many benefits for the world today.”

Atomic Energy High School Unveils Remarkable Achievements

TEHRAN (IP) - In a prestigious ceremony attended by the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, the Atomic Energy High School in Tehran showcased its students’ remarkable inventions, books, and achievements.

He further highlighted the Atomic Energy Organization’s commitment to empowering students by giving tangible and practical topics to students, fostering a pathway to their growth, and bolstering their self-assurance. The head of the Atomic Energy Organization emphasized the applicability of the school’s inventions, noting that “our companies have the potential to cultivate and bring these research findings to industrial fruition.”

Also, addressing the gathering, Mohammad Eslami, the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, underscored the vital role of academic institutions in fostering creativity and innovation among students. He emphasized the importance of nurturing scientific talent and expressed admiration for the practicality and applicability of the Atomic Energy High School’s achievements. Eslami further emphasized that Iran possesses extraordinary resources, and by cultivating a comprehensive cycle of scientific and technological advancement, the nation can effectively tackle the challenges it faces.

During the ceremony, the talented students from the Atomic Energy Girls’ High School in Tehran were recognized for their groundbreaking inventions and academic contributions. Among the highlights were the unveiling of two innovative creations and the introduction of two published books.

One remarkable invention by these young prodigies is the “Mahur,” an intelligent feeding device designed to nourish cultivated fish. The device represents a modern and efficient alternative to traditional feeding methods, addressing the high mortality rates of fish due to inadequate nutrition and improper techniques. With its remote programming capabilities, integrated compass, and distance sensors, the Mahur robot ensures optimal feeding practices and contributes to the sustainable development of aquaculture.

Another noteworthy achievement is the development of the “Nano-Fiber Protective Coating Against Radiation.” Given the extensive applications of radioactive materials in various fields, including medical imaging and disease diagnosis, the need for effective protection against radiation exposure cannot be overstated. The students from the Atomic Energy Girls’ High School employed nanotechnology to create advanced coatings that offer superior shielding properties while ensuring user comfort and safety. This breakthrough innovation holds particular significance for medical facilities, where the demand for reliable radiation protection is paramount.

Addressing the gathering, Eslami, the Head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, underscored the vital role of academic institutions in fostering creativity and innovation among students. He emphasized the importance of nurturing scientific talent and expressed admiration for the practicality and applicability of the Atomic Energy High School’s achievements. Eslami further emphasized that Iran possesses extraordinary resources, and by cultivating a comprehensive cycle of scientific and technological advancement, the nation can effectively tackle the challenges it faces.

In addition to the impressive inventions, the unveiling ceremony also celebrated the literary accomplishments of the students. Two books in the field of bionics, authored by five students under the guidance of experienced teachers, were introduced.

Iran, UAE Resume Transport Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) – Following the resumption of diplomatic relations between Tehran and Abu Dhabi, the two countries are now negotiating for expansion of commercial and transport ties.

Iran Minister of Roads and Urban Development, Mehrdad Bazrpash, is attending the 17th annual exhibition and conference of ‘the Middle East Rail’ in Abu Dhabi to expand transport and commercial ties with the UAE and regional countries.

The visit is at the invitation of The UAE’s Minister of Energy and Infrastructure, Suhail Mohamed Al Mazrouei, and marks a new beginning of commercial transactions between Iran and the UAE.

Bazrpash, as the head of Iran, UAE Joint Economic Commission said, “The UAE is one of the three main countries that has significant trade relations with Iran, and we hope to establish

constructive relations with the UAE.”

More than ten transport ministers of the region attend and give speeches at this largest and most established transport event in the Middle East, North Africa and South Asia. Thus, it is a platform for regional negotiations to take place, particularly between Iran and the UAE notably with regards to investments in port and rail sectors.

Resuming political relations between Iran and UAE has facilitated the expansion of transport ties between these two neighboring countries.

On the sideline of this international event, the Iranian transport minister is expected to meet the Secretary General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC).

The Middle East Rail is the region’s leading event for rail innovation, technology and strategy, which is held from 15 to 16 May 2023 in Abu Dhabi National Exhibition Center, UAE.

Iran Hopes for...

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Following more than a century of rifts over Helmand’s water supply, Iran and Afghanistan signed the 1973 treaty, which established a means of regulating each country’s use of the river.

Iran should receive an annual share of 820 million cubic meters from Helmand under the accord, which Afghanistan has grossly violated in letter and spirit.

Afghanistan has largely cut off the Helmand’s flow into Iran, endangering the lives of many Iranians who rely on Hamoun wetlands for drinking water, agriculture, and fishing.

Kazemi-Qomi said that last year, the amount of water that reached Iran was only 27 million cubic meters, compared to the 820 million cubic meters the country is entitled to.

Framers from the Afghan provinces of Nimruz, Helmand, Kandahar and Zabul have been holding protests over water issues, he added.

Tehran, Riyadh...

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He continued, “Also, a constructive meeting was held between my Saudi counterpart and me, in which Saudi authorities emphasized that economic conditions should be prepared quickly amid the resumption of political relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia. In general, both Iran’s presence at this forum and the speech I delivered at the forum were warmly welcomed by the Saudi side.”

Emphasizing that the Iranian economic delegation headed by him discussed with the Saudi side “the facilitation of the Hajj rituals process, with regard to banking issues or the issue of flights, as well as the travel of Iranian business people, and it was welcomed by them,” he added, “It was decided that within the next three months, the delegations of private sectors of both countries and the CEOs of the companies on both sides should have constructive meetings to reach the agreements between the private sectors. In the field of investment, suggestions were made by the two sides and it was decided to be completed in the next follow-ups.”

Khandozi continued, “It was also decided to make joint investments in the oil and gas sector, as well as in fields where Iran’s economy has good export potentials, including knowledge-based products and in the fields of nano-biotechnology, pharmaceuticals, power plants, transit, and road and transportation fields.”

Shell Linked to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran’s Export Guarantee Fund of Iran (EGFI) provided a \$300 million political risk policy, while the Iraqi government guaranteed the power purchase agreement (PPA).

The US imposed sanctions on Mapna in 2018. However, as the Greenpeace unit reported, “Iranian companies working in Iraq enjoy a number of carve-outs from US sanctions due to the close ties between the countries.”

A Shell spokesperson said the company was a shareholder in the “self-operated Basra Gas Company Joint Venture (BGC) which is founded as part of the solution to enhance Iraq’s energy self-sufficiency and reduce dependence on gas imports”.

“The MoE, a sovereign entity of the Government of Iraq, is the sole provider of power in country, supplying all private, industrial, government and international entities in Iraq. Shell cannot comment on MoE’s infrastructure, flow of funds or their commercial arrangements with third party suppliers or off-takers of power.”

Unearthed reported Mapna is close to various prominent figures in the Iranian regime. Iran’s Supreme Leader gave a speech at Mapna in 2014. The company’s CEO trained at a university described as a “training ground for the Revolutionary Guards, an elite force within the country’s military”.

Iraq offers Iran a “power vacuum”, Unearthed said. “Now Iraq pays its neighbour billions each year to be supplied by gas to fuel its beleaguered electricity grid.”

A researcher on the Middle East and international relations at the University of Sussex, Anahita Hosseini-Lewis, said: “Companies like Mapna profit from Iran’s natural resources, and then the money ends up in the hands of the political elite. This story matters for the citizens of Iran and Iraq.”

Shell has a 44% stake in Basra Gas, while South Gas Co. has 51% and Mitsubishi Corp. 5%.

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Eintracht Frankfurt Sign Egypt Forward Marmoush

BERLIN (Dispatches) - German Cup finalists Eintracht Frankfurt have signed Egypt forward Omar Marmoush on a free transfer, the club announced.
The 24-year-old, whose contract with current club Wolfsburg expires in the summer, has committed to 'The Eagles' till 2027. Usually deployed as a winger, Marmoush has scored five goals in 31 league games this season.
Born in Cairo with Egyptian and Canadian citizenship, Marmoush has played 17 times for Egypt, scoring four goals.

Former Winner Daly Withdraws From PGA Championship

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former winner John Daly has withdrawn from the PGA Championship, tournament organisers said on Monday, and will be replaced in the field by German Stephan Jaeger.
The larger-than-life Daly, who won the tournament in 1991, has only played a handful of PGA Tour events in the last two years but is nonetheless a perennial attraction for fans.
The two-times major winner most recently missed the cut at the Zurich Classic last month.

Celtics to Face Heat in Eastern Conference Finals Rematch

BOSTON (Dispatches) - As the Celtics' 112-88 Game 7 rout of the 76ers began to crystallize late in the third quarter, a Boston fan toting a neon pink inflatable flamingo held up a sign that read, "See you in Miami!"

Celtics-Heat: The rematch is now officially set for the Eastern Conference finals. Last season the Celtics had a 3-2 series lead over Miami in the NBA's version of the final four before losing in Game 6. Boston then came within a late missed jump by Miami's Jimmy Butler of seeing its season end in Game 7 before eventually holding on to advance to the NBA Finals.

Following a championship-round loss to Golden State, this season was themed "Unfinished Business" for this latest incarnation of the Celtics as they long to get another shot at the franchise's 18th title.

They're hoping to carry the momentum and lessons from Sunday's blowout win over Philadelphia into what they expect to be another slugfest with the Heat. The teams split their four regular-season matchups.

"We had another opportunity today, as a team and for myself of just to kind of bounce back," said Jayson Tatum, whose 51 points were the most ever in a Game 7. "I was relieved, I was happy about that, just to get another chance because our season could have been over in Game 6. Just being in another Game 7. ... I was really excited, just for the moment."

Tatum's heroics topped the mark set by the Warriors' Stephen Curry in the Warriors first-round win over Sacramento just two weeks ago.

It also silenced critics who began to doubt Tatum following back-to-back games in which he had trouble locating the scoring punch that put him in the MVP conversation this season.

"When he plays a well-rounded game, our team is different," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. Boston entered just 7-9 in its last 16 home playoff games, but outscored Philadelphia 33-10 in the third quarter. That 23-point margin was the largest in any Game 7 quarter in league history.

The Celtics, who have played in more Game 7s than any team in NBA history, improved to 27-9 in those winner-take-all contests.

League MVP Joel Embiid, who became a force for the 76ers in the second half of the season after Tatum had been among the frontrunners in the first half, had



nothing but praise for Tatum and the potential for the Celtics to represent the East again in the finals.

"I think they're probably the best team in the league," Embiid said. "They're so talented and they got a lot of guys who can play great basketball."

What might have been the most impressive about getting past Philadelphia was how the Celtics adjusted to claim the final two games of the series.

First, Boston benefitted from pleas from the players and the ultimate decision by Mazzulla to insert Robert Williams III into the lineup to play alongside fellow big man Al Horford. Then, the Celtics made tactical adjustment to use Williams as a third defender on the pick-and-rolls between Embiid and James Harden, forcing tougher looks for both in Game 7 in particular.

Now the Celtics will look to formulate a game plan to stop a Miami team that has fought its way back to the conference finals thanks to some epic performances by their biggest star in Butler.

It's a challenge Tatum said the team feels ready to embrace. "A team that we're extremely familiar with, third time in four years I think playing them in the playoffs," Tatum said. "Very well-coached team. They compete with the best of them. They play hard. They defend. They make plays. And they figure out a way to win games. It's going to be fun. It's going to be highly competitive. And I'm looking forward to it."



ROME (Dispatches) - World number one Carlos Alcaraz suffered a shock third round defeat in the Italian Open at the hands of unheralded Hungarian Fabian Marozsan, losing 6-3, 7-6 (7/4).

The 20-year-old Spaniard had come into the tournament on the back of wins in Barcelona and Madrid but was outplayed by Marozsan, who is ranked 135th in the world.

Marozsan, 23, won the final six points of the second-set tiebreaker to hand US Open champion Alcaraz a wake-up call with the French Open starting in less than a fortnight.

Marozsan, who next plays Borna Coric for a place in the quarter-finals, had not won a match on the ATP Tour prior to the tournament — indeed this is the first time he has qualified for the main draw at a tournament on the Tour.

"Everything was perfect today, I was doing my job," the winner said. "I cannot imagine this win, even if it was my dream last night."

"I thought I might win a few games or a set. I tried to hit back every ball, I was trying to do my best."

Korean Player Held in China in Bribery Probe

BEIJING (Dispatches) - South Korean soccer player Son Jun-ho is being held in police custody in northeast China in connection with a bribery case, a Korean diplomatic source said on Monday.

Son was detained on Friday, his 31st birthday. Reuters was unable to reach him for comment.

Son plays for the South Korean national team and Chinese Super League club Shandong Taishan, based in the northeastern province of Shandong.

Son was currently in the custody of the Liaoning Public Security Department in connection to a bribery case, according to an official at South Korea's consulate-general in Shenyang.

The official, who requested anonymity due to the sensitivity of the case, said the consulate had requested a meeting with Son as soon as possible and was in contact with his family.

The official gave no further details. Shandong Taishan have not commented publicly on the case but the club posted a message on its official Weibo account on the day he was detained wishing him a happy birthday.

News of his detention was first published by Yonhap News.

When asked about Son on Monday, Chinese foreign ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said he was not aware of the case.

Neither Shandong Taishan nor the Liaoning Public Security Department immediately responded to requests for comment.

Arteta Apologizes for Unacceptable Arsenal Collapse

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta apologized for his side's second-half implosion in a 3-0 home defeat to Brighton on Sunday that put Manchester City on the verge of being crowned Premier League champions.

The Gunners had topped the table for much of the season as they tried to end a 19-year wait to win the title.

But under relentless pressure from City, who have won 11 consecutive league games, the wheels have come off for Arsenal in recent months.



After taking a shot, Pogba immediately pulled up and left the field after 23 minutes hiding his face under his shirt.

Examinations on Monday morning at the club's medical centre "revealed an injury" to the "right femoral muscle of the left thigh," said Juve on their website. This type of injury usually requires a recovery time of about "15/20 days", a club source told AFP.

Pogba Likely to Miss End of Season for Injury

ROME (Dispatches) - Paul Pogba's injury-blighted season is ending as it started with the French midfielder out for two to three weeks after tests Monday revealed a thigh injury.

His club, Juventus, said the 2018 World Cup winner re-injured his left thigh on Sunday against Cremonese, his first competitive start of the season.

Examinations on Monday morning at the club's medical centre "revealed an injury" to the "right femoral muscle of the left thigh," said Juve on their website. This type of injury usually requires a recovery time of about "15/20 days", a club source told AFP.

The Turin club's last Serie A match of the season is away to Udinese on June 4, in 20 days time.

The Juventus timeline suggests Pogba could be fit for France's Euro 2024 qualifiers against Gibraltar on June 16 and then Greece on June 19.

Pogba missed a huge chunk of the season following his return from Manchester United last summer after suffering an injury to his right knee pre-season.

He initially elected to not to go under the knife in a bid to make the World Cup in Qatar. However, despite later changing his mind, Pogba did not recover in time to play for France who lost their crown as world champions in a thrilling final with Argentina.

He returned to club action at the end of February but after two brief appearances off the bench was sidelined with an injury to the right thigh.

He had made brief appearances off the bench in several matches in April before starting on Sunday.

Djokovic Says Big Four Rivalries Made Him Tougher

ROME (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic said his rivalries with Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Andy Murray had helped him become stronger in the face of adversity, after the world number one battled his way into the last 16 of the Italian Open.

The 35-year-old Serb was a set and a break up in Sunday's match with Grigor Dimitrov but was then dragged into a decider, where he raised his level again to close out a 6-3 4-6 6-1 win after more than two hours.

"Luckily for me, in my career, I managed to win more matches than I lost when I was facing difficult circumstances," Djokovic said.

"For a few years, whenever I needed to make that final step or win a Grand Slam, I didn't manage to do that, so I learned a lot.

"I got stronger because of the rivalries, particularly with Federer, Nadal and Murray," he added.

Djokovic, Federer, Nadal and Murray were dubbed the 'Big Four' as they won a combined 67 Grand Slam titles in an unprecedented period of dominance and were involved in some of the most memorable matches over the last two decades.

"Staying the course, staying patient and believing in the process and the journey," Djokovic said. "Understanding what works for you best, what's your winning formula mentally and also physically and emotionally, and then sticking to it."

Djokovic, who is gunning for a men's record 23rd major title at the French Open starting later this month, will face Briton Cameron Norrie for a place in the Rome quarter-finals.



Barca Will Do Everything Possible To Sign Messi

BARCELONA (dispatches) - Barcelona president Joan Laporta said the club will "do everything possible" to bring Argentine superstar Lionel Messi back in the close season.

Saint-Germain forward is set to leave in the summer when his contract expires and new La Liga champions Barcelona are hoping to lure their all-time top goalscorer back, despite strong interest from Saudi Arabia.

Messi has had two lacklustre seasons in Paris after a glorious era at Barcelona where he won four Champions League and 10 La Liga titles, and is still worshipped by the fans there.

Laporta said he has spoken with Messi to try and rebuild the relationship between them, which was damaged when he left in 2021.

Messi wanted to stay at Barcelona but the club could not afford to keep him because of debt of over €1 billion.

"I have spoken to Leo to somehow redirect a situation that occurred, in which I had to put the club ahead of everything, even him, who is the best player in the world," Laporta told Catalan regional public television station TV3.

"The truth is that it was a very affectionate conversation, very pleasant, and we have also been sending each other messages lately — I congratulated him on the World Cup."

In the early hours of Monday morning after Barcelona won 4-2 at Espanyol to clinch La Liga, Laporta said on Twitch that "we will do everything possible" to sign Messi.

However, speaking on TV3, he was more cautious.

"He is a Paris Saint-Germain player and what we will do is improve the team in all areas, we have already worked on that," said Laporta.

