

National Petrochemical Company (NPC) Managing Director on Sunday Said the 14th Iran Petrochemical Forum (IPF) Focusing on Value Chain and New Opportunities Will Revolve Around Eight Topics

IRAN NEWS

In a Statement, Iran Foreign Ministry Said the Final Phase of Evacuation of the 65 Nationals Was Successfully Completed as They Safely Entered Iran Early Sunday Morning

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U.S., Israel Must Leave Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy says his forces will resolutely "protect and safeguard" the Persian Gulf and its resources, urging the United States and the Israeli regime to immediately leave the strategic waterway.

Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri made the remarks in an interview on the occasion of the National Persian Gulf Day on Saturday. "The Persian Gulf is our home. We will resolutely protect and safeguard the Persian Gulf and its resources. We will not allow any act of aggression against its resources," he said.

Tangsiri also noted that "the illegitimate presence of the aggressive United States and the child-killing Israeli regime in this region has endangered the stability and security of the Persian Gulf," calling on Washington and Tel Aviv to leave the area as soon as possible "so that this sensitive region becomes safer."

The senior Iranian commander further said the Persian Gulf features some of the most vital maritime borders of Iran and its geographic location has influenced the country's geopolitics and international relations throughout history.

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EU's True Face Exposed in Terror Ringleader's Sentence

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's top human rights official has rebuked EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell for his meddlesome comments over a death sentence handed to the ringleader of a U.S.-based terrorist group.

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights and the Judiciary chief's deputy for international affairs, said in a tweet on Saturday that Borrell's comments exposed the true face of Europe as opposed to its ostensible support for human rights.

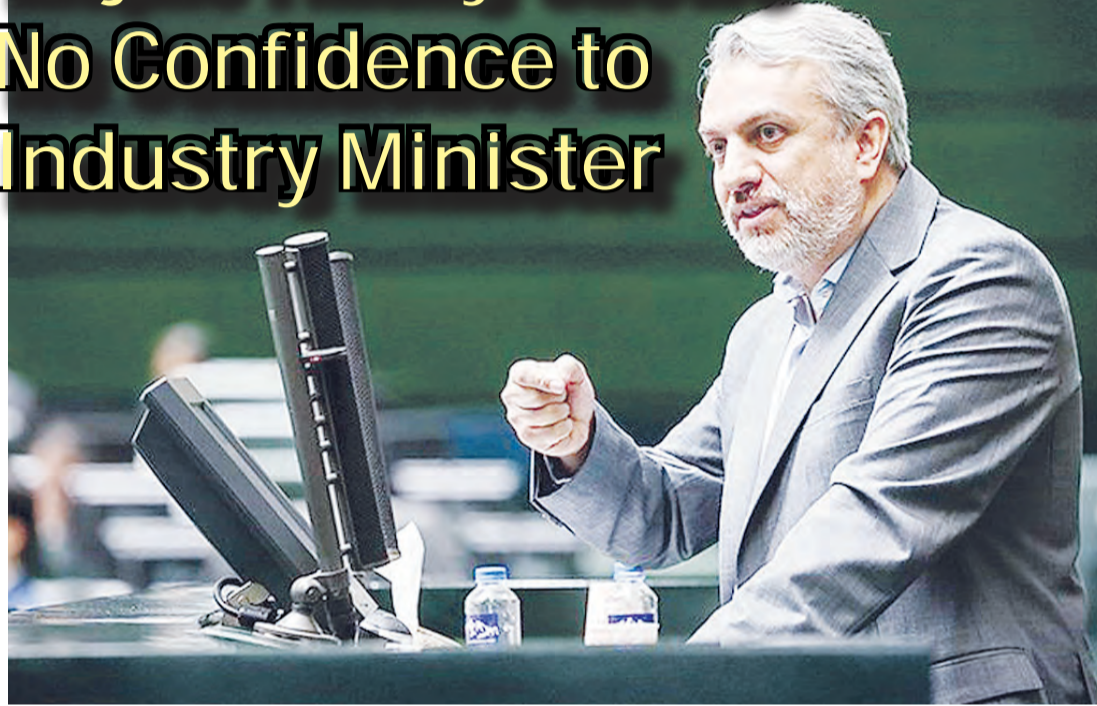
The remarks came a day after Borrell said the bloc "strongly condemns" the death penalty given to jailed German-Iranian citizen Jamshid Sharmahd.

The EU foreign policy chief also called on Tehran to "refrain from executing the death penalty" and repeal Sharmahd's sentence.

"They provided safe haven and supported an Iranian terrorist in Europe and the United States. Now that he has fallen in the clutches of justice, instead of condemning his terrorist actions and distancing themselves from terrorism, they are still defending the terrorist and the rights of the victims have no place with them!" Gharibabadi wrote, referring to Western countries.

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Majlis Finally Shows No Confidence to Industry Minister



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade finally yesterday showed up in Majlis to attend his impeachment session but he failed to survive the impeachment scare as lawmakers agreed his impeachment with 162 votes against 102 and he is the first minister of President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi who loses Majlis confidence vote.

In his impeachment session, Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Reza Fatemi Amin in defense of his performance said: "Today we need unity, we compensate with empathy."

Referring to the false news published in recent days about handing over the car to the MPs during his previous impeachment, the minister said: "Fatemi Amin is not infected with corruption!"

He added: I am in the position of execution and your representatives are in the position of supervision, and if my answers are not convincing, I will hand over the position to the next soldier.

Referring to the issue of cars Fatemi Amin said: The car industry of the country is in bad condition, we are now in the middle of the way and we have reached good places.

Fatemi Amin said: "The car industry has many problems, but today its price is more noticeable. Car production has decreased and increased at times due to sanctions, which means that the enemy knows that cars have wide economic dimensions."

In defense of Fatemi Amin and addressing the Majlis, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi said that his presence at the parliament signals that the impeachment is not the manifestation of difference and deep disagreement but the sign of responsibility.

The President said that his presence is because of the fact that the impeachment of a given minister might be interpreted by some groups as the manifestation of deep disagreement.

Raisi went on to stress that he is grateful to those who saw the impeachment as part of their responsibility. He added: "We agree with the Parliament on some issues."

He noted: The point of agreement between the parliament and the government is that the situation of the car industry in the country needs to be changed.

Meanwhile in the impeachment session, lawmaker Jalil Mirmohammadi Meybodi spoke out against the impeachment of the Minister of Industry.

Meybodi argued that the impeachment does not send a message of empathy to solve the country's problems, but instead creates further division and polarization in the Iranian political arena.

During his speech, Meybodi expressed concern about recent discussions regarding the government's automobile, mining, and production statistics, as well as export data. He stressed that the impeachment of the minister does not solve the country's problems.

Other lawmakers also defended the minister's policies and measures, emphasizing the need for empathy between the government and parliament.

Representative Seyyed Mohammad Reza Mirtaj al-Dini warned against fomenting further division in the Iranian political arena, stressing the importance of unity to move the country forward.

Uzbeks Go to Polls for Historic Referendum

BY: F. TAHERPOOR

TASHKENT - Millions of people of Republic of Uzbekistan on Sunday went to the polls to cast their ballots to decide on various amendments to the constitution in a historic referendum which if approved will change the Central Asian country's political, economic and social development aspects in many ways.

According to the Central Election Commission of Uzbekistan, the country of some 36 million people has about 19.72 million registered voters.

Polls are also being conducted in 55 places overseas while in Uzbekistan it involves 10,758 centers.

Those 18 and above were eligible to cast their votes answering a simple question of "Do you accept the constitutional law regarding the constitution of the Uzbekistan Republic, with a 'yes' or 'no' answer.

Around 500 foreign guests including as well as foreign journalists were in Uzbekistan for the coverage of this historic referendum.

In the historic city of Samarkand, Head of Commission of 7th Samarkand referendum district Farmon Toshev told media that the referendum will enhance the reputation of Uzbekistan in the eyes of world.

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Iran Raises Natural Gas Supply To Iraq by 3-4 Times

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's exports of natural gas to Iraq have increased three to four times to nearly 40 mcm per day.

Iranian exports of natural gas to Iraq increased significantly in April compared to earlier this year, according to regional oil and gas analytics firm.

In a report published on Saturday, the MEES quoted as saying a senior official in Iraq's Electricity Ministry that imports of gas from Iran for use in Iraqi power plants had reached an average of 30-40 million cubic meters per day per day in April.

Ali Ahmad, who leads Iraq's state electricity generation company, said that Iranian gas supplies to Iraq had increased by three to four times in April compared to early months of 2023.

The increased supply comes as Iraq is bracing for a hot summer when demand for cooling will reach record highs across the country.

Iraq relies on Iran for a significant part of the gas supply it needs to run its power plant. The Arab country has received rounds of waivers from US sanctions on Iran to be able to continue energy imports from its eastern neighbor.

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Iran Pursuing Further Expansion of Ties With China

BUSHEHR (IRNA) - Chairman of Iran-China Friendship Association Alaeddin Borujerdi has said that Tehran's policy is to further expand relations with Beijing while reiterating that conditions are already ripe for big changes in ties between the "two friendly countries."

China is also pursuing the policy of developing relations with Iran in all fields, Borujerdi said on Saturday. He made the comments in an interview with IRNA on the sidelines of his meeting with Iranian businessmen of the southern Bushehr Province. The meeting was held in the provincial capital Bushehr.

He said that the recent opening of the Chinese consulate general in Bandar Abbas, the capital city of the southern Hormozgan Province, was an effort in line with that Chinese policy.

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It Is High Time to Build Iran-Pakistan Gas Pipeline

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The political developments in the region show the time has come for the construction of the Pakistan-Iran gas pipeline, Pakistani Senator Syed Mushahid Hussain said on Saturday.

Hussain made the remark at the farewell dinner for the outgoing ambassador of Iran to Islamabad Mohammad Ali Hosseini. Senator Hussain who is also the chairperson of the Senator Standing Committee on Defense, recalled that Pakistan and Iran had historical ties and said that Iran was the first country to recognize Pakistan on the world map, the Dawn Newspaper reported.

He added, "Before the arrival of the British, the Persian language was not only popular in the subcontinent but was the court language of many states including the Sikh empire of Maharaja Ranjit Singh."

The Senator said that during his tenure as ambassador, Mohammad Ali Hosseini was highly successful in all spheres as defense, security, intelligence, trade and cross-border trade increased in both countries.

"For the first time, delegations of the chiefs of intelligence services and the armed forces of two countries were exchanged."

Iran's gas pipeline to Pakistan called "Peace Pipeline" is Iran's export gas pipeline to India and Pakistan. According to the memoranda of understanding (MoUs) inked between the parties, Iran undertakes to supply its gas to India and Pakistan at an agreed price for a period of 25 years.

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Iran Expects Iraqi Initiatives on Repaying Its Debts

TEHRAN (IFP) – Majlis Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has called on the Iraqi government and parliament to take initiatives aimed at countering US sanctions that have made it difficult for Baghdad to repay its debts to Tehran. During his meeting with the visiting Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid on Saturday, Qalibaf referred to Iraq's debts to Iran over its electricity and natural gas imports, saying that the Islamic Republic of Iran "clearly asks the Iraqi government and parliament to take better initiatives regarding US cruel sanctions and repaying debts to Iran." The US is the prime enemy of both Iran and Iraq, which is opposed to the deepening of relations between the two neighbors, the top Iranian lawmaker said, adding that the US spares no effort to reach its goal.

Presence of Even One American Soldier In Iraq Too Much

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the United States is not a friend of any country, and that the presence of even one American soldier in Iraq is "too much."

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with Iraqi President Abdul Latif Rashid in Tehran on Saturday. Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi was also present in the meeting. "Americans are not friends with anyone and are not even loyal to their European friends," the Leader said. The Leader said the progress, prosperity, independence and development of Iraq are "of high importance" to Iran. "Expansion of bilateral cooperation and implementation of agreements are beneficial to the two countries." "There is fierce enmity toward expansion of relations between Iran and Iraq and if there were no strong historical and religious bonds between the two countries, the state of relations would perhaps return to that of Saddam's era," Ayatollah Khamenei stated. The Leader hailed the Iraqi people's hospitality toward Iranian pilgrims during the annual Arba'een commemorations and other religious rituals despite eight years of war between the two countries (in 1980s).



"The meaning of such a very important issue is that there are unifying factors between the two nations and the two states foreign political factors cannot influence. So this opportunity should be used to further deepen relations and there should be serious care and vigilance for their continuation," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader said the current satisfactory situation in Iraq's government is the outcome of unity among the people and political groups.

The Iraqi president, for his part, said his country enjoys continuous and strong relations with Iran in various fields.

Pointing to his talks with Iranian officials in Tehran, Rashid said Iraq is making utmost efforts to strengthen relations with Iran and implement the remaining issues between the two countries.

He also appreciated support of the Iranian government and people for Iraq in its fight against terrorism at different times.

Felicitation Message On Occasion of Labor Day

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – On the occasion of the Labor Day, the CEO of Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company (AKPC) sent a felicitation message.

In his message, Dr. Saeed Sadeqi congratulated the day to all workers and especially workers of Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company. He said on the occasion of the day it was a good opportunity through this message express his gratitude to all sincere services of the noble and patient workers Islamic Iran and to thank their round-the-clock efforts of these dear people.

He added that undoubtedly major part of the successes and progresses and achievements in the country are because of the non-stop endeavors of these dear people as the Supreme Leader properly and wisely touched upon the value of workers and said that working is vital for the society as a means for meeting all demands and required equipment of the people.

He then touched upon the important role of petrochemical sector and termed its products the strategic ones and hailed workers, technicians and engineers of this industry who have kept hoisting the flag of this industry in an uneven economic war with enemies.

He once again congratulated the day especially to his colleagues in the company and called the day an opportunity for reinforcing commitment for construction of the Islamic Iran.



FAO Take Steps To Curb Red Palm Weevil in Iran



TEHRAN (MNA) - The Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) has taken a positive step towards curbing the spread of red palm weevil (RPW).

FAO has taken a positive step towards curbing the spread of red palm weevil (RPW), a highly destructive transboundary pest that can cause serious damage to date palm trees, leading to the death of the infested trees.

The outbreak and uncontrolled spread of the RPW pose a significant threat to the country's date palm trees industry and the livelihood of farmers who depend on it for income.

The FAO's recent response to the governmental request to assess the situation and advise on solutions is a positive step towards curbing the spread of this destructive transboundary pest.

Dispatching two international experts to infested areas in Fares and Kerman Provinces has helped to assess the current situation and highlighted the need to bolster the current efforts to control the pest. This can be achieved by enhancing monitoring and preventive efforts, improving the country's Red Palm Weevil strategy to increase its effectiveness, and working closely to improve the use of the FAO-developed application "SusaHamra".

The FAO's experts have evaluated the current integrated pest management strategy and identified possible improvements in the system. They have also met with relevant stakeholders and private sector entities involved in date production to develop solutions that would reduce the impact on date production. A proposal for an action plan has been developed by FAO and will be shared with the Plant Protection Organization of Iran for implementation.

Early response and effective management of resources can help avoid potential outbreaks and minimize the impact of the Red Palm Weevil on the country's date palm trees, relevant food industries and the livelihood of relevant farmers. It is crucial to continue efforts to address this issue and ensure the sustainability of Iran's date production industry particularly since it is ranked as the third producer of dates in the world.

Iran-Turkey Transactions Hits \$1.3b in 3 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) Iran and Turkey traded \$1.379 billion worth of goods in the first three months of 2023 to register a 14% year-on-year decrease.

The latest data released by the Turkish Statistical Institute show that the value of bilateral trade between Iran and Turkey stood at \$1.379 billion in the first three months of 2023, down 14%, with Turkish exports at \$702 million, up 2%, and Iranian exports at \$677 million, registering a 27% decline.

The European Statistical Office (Eurostat) also reported exports of 1.567 billion cubic meters of Iranian gas to Turkey in the first three months of 2023, which shows a 17% decrease compared with the same period of the year before.

Earlier, the spokesman for the Trade Promotion Commission of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade, Ruhollah Latifi said that China, Iraq, Turkey, the UAE, and India have been the top five destinations for the exports of Iran's goods over the last year.

Iran Celebrates National Persian Gulf Day

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran is once again commemorating National Persian Gulf Day, a day that dismisses the futile efforts of regional countries to rename the strategic waterway.

The Persian Gulf, which spans a whopping 251,000 square kilometers, is bounded by the Arvand River in the north, forming the boundary between Iraq and Iran, and the Strait of Hormuz in the south, linking the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean. The sea is a crucial international trade route that connects Africa, India, China, and the Middle East.

Since the establishment of the Achaemenid Empire in

modern-day Iran, historians and ancient texts have referred to the waterway as "Persian." On the 10th of Ordibehesht, the second month of the Persian calendar, Iranians commemorate Persian Gulf Day, which usually falls on April 30. The date coincides with the successful military campaign by Shah Abbas I of Persia in 1622 that drove the Portuguese navy out of the Strait of Hormuz.

Despite historical documents that show the waterway is known as the Persian Gulf, certain Arab states and their allies continue to refer to it as the fictitious "Arabian Gulf." Iran celebrates this day with the hope for peaceful co-existence with its neighbors.

Solving Yemen's Humanitarian Issues Must Be Prioritized

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister's Senior Advisor for Special Political Affairs Ali Asghar Khaji has said that resolving Yemen's humanitarian issues should be a priority.

Khaji made the comments in a meeting with Sweden's special envoy for Yemen Peter Semneby in Tehran on Saturday. The two sides discussed the latest political and humanitarian developments in Yemen, especially with regards recent peace talks held between warring sides in the Yemeni capital Sanaa.

Expressing satisfaction over the progress of the talks, they hoped that the initiative would ease the suffering of the Yemeni people and establish lasting peace in the country.

Khaji said one of the significant current issues raised in the Yemeni case is lifting of the economic blockade from the Yemeni people and establishing a ceasefire in the country, noting that resolving Yemen's humanitarian problems should be a priority.

U.S. Public Opinion Towards Israel Regime Changed Tangibly

TEHRAN (MNA) - Public opinion in the United States and polls show the attitude of the Americans towards the apartheid regime of Israel has changed in a tangible manner, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman says.

According to the latest survey of the University of Maryland, 20% of Republicans and 44% of Democrats consider Israel to be racist, and support for the movement to boycott the Zionist regime has also increased, Nasser Kanaani tweeted on Sunday.

Public opinion in the United States and polls show a tangible change in the attitude towards the apartheid nature of this regime, Kanaani noted.

He added that if the American people find enough freedom of expression to express their opinion about the Zionist regime, more amazing results will be obtained.

Americans are entitled to know why the US regime sacrifices the interests of its people and other countries for the sake of the usurping, apartheid, undemocratic, and decaying regime of Israel, he added.

Senior Police Officer Shot Dead

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Chief of the Iranian Police Criminal Investigation (CID) Department in Saravan County, Sistan and Baluchestan Province, southeastern Iran, was shot dead in an armed attack on April 30, 2023.

A senior Iranian police officer has been killed in an armed attack in the country's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan after unidentified assailants launched a surprise attack on him. Colonel Alireza Shahraki, chief of the Iranian Police Criminal Investigation (CID) Department in Saravan County, was fatally shot after unknown gunmen sprayed bullets on his car in an early morning ambush at a crossroad, Iran's

Tajlili, told IRNA that Shahraki's wife was also seriously wounded in the incident and was transferred to the hospital to receive medical treatment.

The gunmen fled the scene in a car after the driving-by shooting. A thorough investigation is underway to look into the circumstances surrounding the deadly attack and capture the perpetrators.

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

Nour News reported on Sunday. Governor of Saravan, Saeed

CIS Tourism Group Enters Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The scientific-tourist tour of the countries of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS) arrived in Razavi Khorasan, northeastern Iran on Saturday morning from Turkmenistan.

On the sidelines of the welcoming ceremony of the CIS tour, Mehdi Alamdar, head of the international affairs department of the Islamic Republic of Iran Tourism and Motoring Center (TACI) said: Today, 22 road managers and officials from 10 different nationalities from the CIS countries entered the country on a six-day-trip with a special bus hosted by the (TACI).

CIS encompasses some independent republics of the Soviet Union, which were formed in a security and economic cooperation agreement including the republics of Armenia, Uzbekistan, Belarus, Tajikistan, Russia, Kyrgyzstan, Kazakhstan, Moldova, and Azerbaijan.

Since 2005, Turkmenistan has participated as an associate member of the Commonwealth of Independent States.

There are border crossings between Iran and Turkmenistan. Most of the commercial traffic is carried out by rail and road between the two countries through Sarkhas, Inche Borun, and Lotfabad crossings, respectively.

Creation of 150,000 job opportunities by Basij

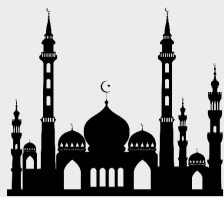
IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN (IP) - According to Iran's Basij construction organization, twelve employment plans are on Basij's agenda, which will lead to the creation of 150,000 job opportunities.

Mohammad Zahraei, the head of the Iran's Basij Construction organization, on the sidelines of the gathering of Iran's army officers and in an exclusive interview with Iran Press, pointed to the ten-year promotion document of the Basij Construction organization.

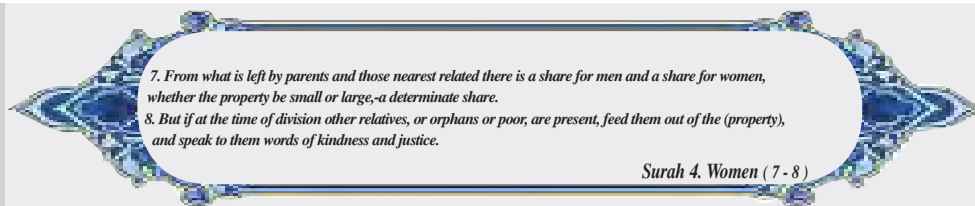
Zahraei said: The document is divided into two five-year documents, the first five years are related to removing restrictions and the second five years are planned with the focus of progress and leap. Pointing out that since the beginning of the year, the quantitative goals of the Basij Construction Organization have been defined, he said: the role of the people, donors, Basij and the government in the program has been defined.

Mohammad Zahraei added: In this two-day conference, the methods, processes and timetable will be developed, and we will meet again in six months to review the results. In the end, he pointed out that last year 19,000 deprivation removal projects were carried out by the Basij Construction Organization, and said: "By the end of this year we plan to deliver 20,000 deprivation removal projects to the people."



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:09
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:37
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:11



Tehran Calls for Increased Cooperation With Belarus

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Gholam- Hossein Shafei urged the need for more enhanced cooperation between private sector actors of Iran and Belarus, particularly in the area of agriculture and techno-engineering.

Shafei called for boosting economic cooperation with Belarus in meeting with Belarusian Ambassador to Iran Dmitry Koltsov meet in Mashhad, on Sunday.

Shafei called for the need for more enhanced cooperation between private sector actors of Iran and Belarus, particularly in the area of agriculture and techno-engineering.

He said that it is a top priority of Iran to expand trade ties with Belarus as the country has made significant growth in its GDP and other economic indicators.

Development of Belarusian infrastructure, including roads, bridges and dams has been on the agenda of the country over the past years, Shafei said, adding that Iran enjoys good techno-engineering potentials which can be used for further cooperation between the two nations.

He also said that a recent visit to Iran by the Belarusian president opened a new chapter in relations between the two countries when they sign seven cooperation documents.



The Iran Chamber of Commerce also renewed the call for forming a joint committee of commerce between Iran and Belarus.

Shafei also pointed to the exceptional geographical location of Khorasan Razavi Province and termed it one of the provinces with high potentials for broadening economic ties with Belarus.

He also announced readiness of the chamber for exchanging trade delegations especially for broadening bilateral cooperation with Khorasan Razavi.

The Belarusian ambassador, for his part, referred to longstanding relations between the two countries, adding that both sides have been exchanging different delegations over the past years.

Ambassador Koltsov said that transportation is of special significance in Tehran-Minsk trade ties, adding that given its geographic position, the northeastern Iranian province of Khorasan Razavi has huge potentials for promotion of transportation.

He also invited the president of Iran Chamber of Commerce to pay a visit to his country to discuss forming a joint committee of commerce.

Noting that trade exchanges between Iran and Belarus more than tripled last year, the ambassador underlined the need for further economic cooperation between the two countries.

IME Witnesses Over 2.m Tons of Weekly Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,132,240 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$536m on its physical market.



According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 1,746,214 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$332m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,225,414 tons of cement, 360,435 tons of steel, 145,000 tons of sponge iron, 7,995 tons of aluminum, 7,120 tons of copper, 1,200 tons of zinc, 300 tons of cast iron and 190 tons of molybdenum concentrate.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 374,903 tons of commodities worth more than \$198m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 110,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 107,989 tons of polymeric products, 68,184 tons of bitumen, 43,000 tons of lube cut, 37,156 tons of chemicals, 5,528 tons of base oil, 2,366 tons of petroleum products, 1,800 tons of sulfur, 200 tons of insulation and 130 tons of gas feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 11,122 tons of commodities on its side market.

HOSCO one of the Honors of National Steel Industry

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) believes Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) as an exporting company of products with value added is a provincial and national brand in the steel industry and despite restrictions in energy supply in the country last year, the performance of the

company in the field of production and setting various records as well as attention to the production growth is appreciable.

According to reports, the meeting for studying ways for provision and efficient consumption of energy was held at Hormozgan Steel Company with presence of Deputy Head of IDRO Mr. Farshad Moqimi.

In the meeting Moqimi pointed to the capabilities of HOSCO in producing different grades of steel slabs and meeting the demands of the domestic and exporting markets and stated that Iran has one of the highest rate of energy consumption in the world and therefore the country should move towards optimizing energy consumption especially in the household sector but since steel industry is the main target for cutting the energy consumption during the unbalanced energy consumption in the country, the industry should move towards efficient energy consumption.

He said that electromotors are one of the equipment which is used massively in the steel units and with their renovation and improving their energy consumption, the energy consumption in the steel industry would be reduced to some considerable extent.

He also criticized the approach of energy managers towards steel industry and said that one of the problems of the national industry is lack of understanding of these managers regarding the importance of the steel industry.

Moqimi said that steel industry is one of the most energy consuming but important industries for other industries and any disrupt in steel production would affect some other related industries. He also pointed to the successive considerable records set by HOSCO especially surpassing its nominal capacity last year and termed it an epic despite restrictions in energy supply for the industry.

Moqimi reiterated that HOSCO is considered a provincial and national brand in the steel industry and hailed the performance of the company.



1620 Industrial Units Need Reconstruction, Renovation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Deputy Head of Industrial Development and Renovation Organization (IDRO) says according to the early assessments, some 1620 industrial units in the country need reconstruction and renovation.



According to IDRO News, Farshad Moqimi during his visit to Ard Morvarid flour mill in Bandar Abbas said that 1620 industrial units need reconstruction and renovation that 134 units of them are in the evaluation stage. He added that Hormozgan Province's share is 17 industrial units which need renovation that 13 of them are in the evaluation stage.

Moqimi further said that to implement renovation there needs required financial credits, adding that 50% of the budget from the Note 18 of the budget law has been earmarked to the field of renovation and reconstruction and it was decided that some credit from the Central Bank's special budget is to be earmarked to this project.

He reiterated that renovation and reconstruction has been defined as one of the important projects of the ministry of industry, Mine and Trade and expressed hope they would soon witness some tangible achievements in this field.

Moqimi concluded that 1,890 industrial units in the country have applied for reconstruction and renovation.

Ceremony for Promoting Easy Marriage Based on Simple Life Held

The ceremony for promoting easy marriage based on simple life in strengthening the family foundation was held by donating 8000 sets of step-by-step dowries in 1402 in the presence of the Vice President for Economic Affairs, the Vice President for Women and Family Affairs and the Vice President for Communications

The marriage and dowry ceremony of 113 newly-wed brides from Khuzestan was held in the presence of Mohsen Rezaei, Vice President of Economic Affairs, Ansieh Khazali and Vice President of Women and Family Affairs, under the auspices of the International Abshar-e Atefaha Foundation. According to the reports, in the marriage and dowry ceremony of 113 newly wed brides Mohammad Javad Fouladpour, CEO of Abshar-e Atefaha Deprivation Center, Fatemeh Choupani, Director of Central Deprivation Center, and a group of national and military officials were also present in this event which was organized by the Abshar-e Atefaha International Foundation. As per report, Rezaei, the Economic Vice President of the President, at the beginning of this ceremony, stated that the Abshar-e Atefaha provides significant services to the needy and said: it can be said that it provides services to the needy persons equal to dozens of charities. He offered counseling to young couples. He enumerated a new work of this international foundation and stated: Good work is not only cash

up, considering that Khuzestan province was the first destination of his trip, we considered donating 113 sets of dowries to the Khuzestan family members of Abshar-e Atefaha on this day. Our plan is to donate 8,000 sets of dowries with the aim of promoting easy marriage with a simple lifestyle to strengthen the family foundation, and in the first step, we donated 113 sets of dowries to young couples in Khuzestan and surrounding cities. We considered the presence of women in this trench. Women have the ability to work better in the Islamic society and move more sincerely towards cultural and social issues. It is these women who can create a constructive role for the country and this is a sign of the empowerment of women in the country. Abshar-e Atefaha is a jihadi, provincial and revolutionary foundation that steps in the path of revolution and martyrs. In the following, Fatemeh Choupani, the director of the Central Deprivation Center, said about the dowries donated to the people of Khuzestan: the dowries that are intended for these loved ones include 15 Essential items of life such as:



aid, but helping to form a good life is also a good work. For example, the issue of youth counseling is an important issue that can help couples. Referring to the role of women and mothers in raising children, the economic deputy of the president said: "The problem of motherhood is not only having children, it is the affection, affection and peaceful environment that the mother provides in the family. There is the greatest cradle of raising children. Experience has shown that children who grow up in peaceful families are more self-confident, without depression and far from abnormalities, and this all comes back to the position and dignity of the mother. Pay more attention to cultural and other activities. Cascade of emotions has taken good measures in the discussion of entrepreneurship and production in recent years, but the point that should be paid attention to is the discussion of marketing for home businesses, which unfortunately is a problem in some provinces. Cascade said: In the meeting we had with the president in the middle of the holy month of Ramadan, the proposal of his provincial trips was brought

refrigerator, washing machine, TV, carpet, heater, gas, vacuum cleaner, Teflon service, porcelain service, iron, plastic service, blanket, fan, spoon and fork service, kettle and teapot, all of these products are produced in the country and it was prepared with the efforts of benefactors, especially benefactors of Tehran and Khorasan Razavi. He added that the approximate value of each series of dowries is more than 70 million tomans and added that the value of each series of these dowries is about 70 million tomans, which is close to 8 billion Tomans cost 113 series of dowry. At the end, Khazali, the vice president for women and family affairs, also expressed her satisfaction at this event and said: I am happy to be present in a group whose intentions are good and who are trying to help others. It is a great and valuable thing to help young people to solve some of their problems with joy and to calmly start a life of dignity." He further added: "I hope that by expanding this good tradition and avoiding luxury in the new year, we will see many young people go home to fortune."

75% Rise in Shipping Containers of Exporting Goods

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Khazar Sea (Caspian Sea) Shipping Line says the company has full readiness for shipping exporting products of exporters adding that ships of the company are travelling regularly in shipping exporting goods from Iran to the ports in Russia, Azerbaijan, Daghestan, Kazakhstan and Turkmenistan.

Kambiz Jahanbani said that Khazar Sea Company and other shipping lines are seeking marketing for attracting exporting and transiting of goods for completing its fleet capacity and currently the number of fleet is more than the number of demands for transporting exporting goods. He said that due to the activities of his company, exporting goods are easily loaded and currently the shipping fleet capacity lacks enough demand for shipping goods.

He called on the owners of the goods to come to the company for shipping their goods and announced readiness of the company for serving the exporters.

He added that the company in terms of container shipment has registered 75% growth, adding that \$10m of container logistic has joined the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) container network via the Khazar Sea Shipping Company. He then pointed to the joint cooperation with IRISL for shipping exporting and transiting goods, adding with the measures taken by Khazar Sea Company in the sea sector of North-South Corridor we have seen 360% growth in transporting goods by the company.

He announced readiness of IRISL for offering different models of transporting services to its customers in the form of the North-South Corridor.



North Korea Says U.S.-South Korea Agreement Will Worsen Insecurity



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea's Kim Yo Jong, the powerful sister of leader Kim Jong Un, said a U.S.-South Korea agreement this week about the need to shore up South Korean security will worsen the situation, according to state media KCNA.

North Korea is convinced it must further perfect a "nuclear war deterrent" as a result, Kim said. The statement did not elaborate.

Kim's statement is North Korea's first comment on the meeting, and suggests its cycle of military shows of force and weapons development will continue.

Japan PM Kishida To Visit South Korea



TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida is expected to visit South Korea in coming weeks and meet with President Yoon Suk Yeol, officials said, reciprocating a Tokyo visit by the South Korean leader last month.

A Japanese government official and another official from a Group of Seven government said the meeting was expected before Kishida hosts a G7 summit from May 19.

Japan's Kyodo news agency said the two will meet around May 7 or 8, citing multiple unnamed Japanese and South Korean diplomatic sources.

Crimea Fuel Depot on Fire, Russian-Held Towns Shelled in Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - A huge fire erupted in Moscow-annexed Crimea after a suspected drone attack hit an oil depot, as fighting intensified on the southern Ukrainian front and shelling deprived Russian border villages of power.

The attacks came one day after Kyiv said preparations for a long-awaited counteroffensive were nearly complete, having vowed to expel Russian forces from territory they seized in the east and south following their 2022 invasion.

On Friday, a Russian strike on a bloc of flats in the central Ukrainian city of Uman killed 23 people, including a baby boy.

On Saturday, officials in Moscow-controlled Crimea, towns under Russian occupation in southern Ukraine and a governor of a border region reported attacks.

Fears of Ukrainian reprisals more than a year into Moscow's offensive have grown in Russia, where a range of cities have cancelled traditional May 9 celebrations to mark Soviet victory over the Nazis at the end of World War II in 1945.

In Sevastopol, home to Russia's Black Sea Fleet, clouds of smoke rose high into the sky as a fuel reserved burned.

The port city has been hit by a series of drone attacks since Moscow's invasion of Ukraine began more than a year ago. Russian-installed authorities said the fire was caused by a suspected drone but sought to downplay the incident, amid rising security fears on the peninsula.

The Kremlin said nothing about the attack.

It came less than 24 hours after Russia struck a typical Soviet-era housing bloc in the historic city of Uman, killing more than two dozen of its residents.

Kyiv identified five children killed in the attack as an 18-month-old boy, three girls aged eight, 11 and 14, and a 16-year-old boy.

"One woman is considered missing. The search continues," Ukrainian Interior Minister Ihor Klymenko said.

Ukraine did not claim the Crimea attack, but military intelligence implied it was revenge for Uman.

Andriy Yusov, from the defense ministry's intelligence unit, said it was "God's punishment, in particularly for the civilians killed in Uman."

He warned people in Crimea to "avoid being near military facilities and facilities providing the aggressor's army in the near future."

On the Russian-annexed peninsula, the governor of Sevastopol, Mikhail Razvozhayev, urged Crimeans to "remain calm" and said "nobody was hurt."

He estimated the fire was "around 1,000 square metres" (10,764 square feet).

Razvozhayev insisted that the peninsula's reserves were not impacted and that authorities had enough fuel for all civilian needs.

Earlier this week, Moscow said it had repelled a drone strike on Crimea -- annexed by Russia in 2014 and used as a launchpad for its invasion.

In southern Ukraine, Russian occupation authorities said a key city they control -- Novaya Kakhovka -- had come under "intense shelling" and had been cut off from power.

Fighting in Sudan Enters Third Week With Air Raids



KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Warplanes on bombing raids drew heavy anti-aircraft fire over Khartoum as fierce fighting between Sudan's army and paramilitaries entered a third week, despite a renewed truce.

Sudan has plunged into chaos and lawlessness since the fighting erupted on April 15 between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his number two Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Burhan and Daglo have agreed to multiple truces since the start of the conflict, but none has effectively taken hold, with each side blaming the other for breaching them.

The latest three-day ceasefire was agreed Thursday after mediation led by the United States, Saudi Arabia, the African Union and the United Nations aimed at securing a more lasting truce.

"We woke up once again to the sound of fighter jets and anti-aircraft weapons blasting all over our neighbourhood," a witness in southern Khartoum told AFP.

Another witness said fighting had been ongoing since the early morning, especially around the state broadcaster's headquarters in the capital's twin city of Omdurman.

Residents across Khartoum -- home to five million people -- have largely sheltered at home despite supplies of food and water dwindling to dangerously low levels, and a lack of electricity.

Some managed to sneak out only during brief lulls in fighting to buy desperately needed supplies.

As battles raged on the ground, the two rival generals took aim at each other in the media, with Burhan branding the RSF a militia that aims "to destroy Sudan", in an interview with US-based TV channel Alhurra.

He also claimed "mercenaries" were pouring over the border from Chad, Central African Republic and Niger to exploit the chaos.

Daglo denounced the army chief in an interview with the BBC, saying he was "not trustworthy" and a "traitor".

Thousands Protest Against French Government's Migration Plans

PARIS (Dispatches) - Thousands of people, including many undocumented migrants, marched in Paris and other French towns today, protesting against planned changes to the immigration law and evictions from the Indian Ocean island of Mayotte.

In the French capital, demonstrators marched behind a banner proclaiming "No to the Darmanin law. Against repression, imprisonment and deportations, for a welcoming migration policy", in a reference to Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin. The immigration bill, which the government has just postponed until the autumn, "is a racist law, which aims to criminalise foreigners" and lead to "more deportations", said Aboubacar, 31, an undocumented Malian.

"The problem is not immigration, it's exploitation and rogue bosses," added the post office sub-contractor who, with colleagues, has been fighting for 17 months to obtain his official documents to live and work in France.

The protesters also took aim at Operation Wuambushi (Take Back) being carried out by the authorities on the French Indian Ocean Island of Mayotte to send back illegal immigrants, most from neighbouring Comoros, currently housed in unsanitary shanty towns.

"The way undocumented Comorans are treated is unworthy of a country like France," said Marie-Christine Vergiat, vice-president of the French Human Rights League and a former member of the European parliament.

The Darmanin bill and the operation in Mayotte are linked, said Mhamadi, a Comoran civil leader, said in the southern port city of Marseille, where up to 300 people demonstrated.

The controversial bill, entitled "Controlling immigration while improving integration", is aimed, among other things, at providing greater scope for deportation, especially for foreigners who commit crimes. It also stipulates a minimum level of French be required before a multi-year residence permit is granted and allows for mandatory fingerprinting as well as tightening requirements for the renewal of long-term permits.

5 Dead in Texas Execution-Style Shooting

AUSTIN (Dispatches) - Five people are dead after being shot in a Texas home by a suspect armed with an AR-15 style rifle in a horrific series of "execution style" shootings, police said.

A manhunt is currently underway for the suspect, identified by police as 39-year-old Francisco Oropeza, according to ABC station KTRK in Houston.

A judge has issued an arrest warrant for Oropeza and assigned a \$5 million bond. Authorities believe Oropeza left by walking or on a bicycle and is currently within a two mile radius of the scene, KTRK reported.

Police said the incident occurred at 11:31 p.m. local time on Friday when officials from the San Jacinto County Sheriff's Office received a call about harassment in the town of Cleveland, about 55 miles north of Houston.

When authorities arrived at the location, they found several victims shot at the property, police said. Three of the deceased were females and two were males, including the youngest, an 8-year-old boy.

Two female victims were discovered in the bedroom lying on top of two surviving children, authorities told ABC News.

Three minors were located uninjured, but covered in blood. They were transported to a local hospital.

Police said they believe the massacre occurred after neighbors asked the suspect to stop shooting his gun in the front yard because there was a baby trying to sleep.

"My understanding is that the victims, they came over to the fence and said 'Hey could [you not do your] shooting out in the yard? We have a young baby that's trying to go to sleep,' and he had been drinking and he says 'I'll do what I want to in my front yard,'" San Jacinto County Sheriff Greg Capers told KTRK.

Capers told KTRK the case went from harassment to a shooting very quickly. He said that authorities believed some of the victims were trying to shield their children -- with bodies found on top of children who were unharmed.

"In my opinion, they were actually trying to take care of the babies and keep them babies alive," Capers told KTRK.

Authorities said Oropeza is armed with an AR-15 style rifle and was believed to be intoxicated. Deputies describe Oropeza as a Hispanic man who is 5-foot-8. He was last seen wearing jeans, a black shirt and work boots. Investigators said he has a goatee and short black hair, according to KTRK.

Police said the suspect "has been known to shoot his .223 out in his front yard, which is evident by the shell casings that are laying in the front yard."



Canadian PM Slams Rise of Authoritarianism



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau has given a speech denouncing the rise of authoritarianism around the world and calling on democracies to live up to their ideals through trade and foreign policy.

"If we don't step up, other forces will step in. As like-minded democracies, as major economies, we need to work together to meet this moment," Trudeau said in remarks on Friday to the Council on Foreign Relations, a think tank based in the United States city of New York.

His speech took swipes at countries like Russia and China, while encouraging Canada and its allies to strengthen their commitments to human rights through economic incentives.

"We can't just push back or punish or single out bad actors. We can't just say, for example, that we want our companies to restrict the amount of critical minerals they buy from China specifically," Trudeau said.

"Instead, we should simply commit to sourcing our critical minerals from places that ban forced labour. That have safety standards. That pay their workers a living wage."

He later noted: "The lithium produced in Canada is going to be more expensive because we don't use slave labour."

China is one of the biggest producers of lithium -- a metal used in mobile phones and electric batteries -- in the world, behind Australia and Chile.

Trudeau also added that, while his administration hopes to cooperate with China on issues like the environment, the Asian country has become "an increasingly disruptive global power" in his estimation.

Tensions have been high between the two countries. Ottawa has accused China of election meddling and establishing overseas "police stations" in Canada, claims a foreign ministry spokesperson denied as "smears".

In November, video also circulated appearing to show Chinese President Xi Jinping chiding Trudeau for alleged leaks to the media about the contents of their private discussions. The Chinese foreign ministry refuted claims that any criticism had passed between the two leaders, calling their conversation "normal".

World's Apparel, Sneakers Hub Vietnam Struggles

HANOI (Dispatches) - Tighter U.S. rules to ban imports from China's Xinjiang are compounding pressure on Vietnam's apparel and footwear makers, hitting a sector that has already shed nearly 90,000 jobs since October in the global manufacturing hub as demand slowed.

Among garment exporters, Vietnam has faced the worst hit from the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act (UFLPA), a Reuters review of official U.S. data showed. The law, in place since June, requires companies to prove that they do not use raw material or components produced with Xinjiang's forced labor.

The U.S. clampdown hurts as it comes on top of a drop in clothing demand from richer nations that has already dented industrial output and exports from the Southeast Asian manufacturing powerhouse, a major supplier to big brands such as Gap, Nike and Adidas.

Of the \$15 million worth of apparel and footwear shipments held up for UFLPA checks more than 80% were from Vietnam, and only 13% of its cargoes were cleared for entry, U.S. customs data up to April 3 showed.

Many U.S. importers are still sanguine, but their supply chains could still be disrupted as Vietnam's apparel makers depend on China for about half of their input materials, according to the country's industry association.

Vietnamese manufacturers, trade associations and the industry ministry did not reply to Reuters questions about the impact of UFLPA.

The value of shipments from Vietnam that have been denied entry to the U.S. exceeded \$2 million, three times more than those from China - with the sanctions having increased exponentially in the first months of this year.

While U.S. controls have been far more frequent for the electronics industry, especially for solar panels which could be made with polysilicon from Xinjiang, only 1% of electronics cargoes checked were denied entry, as opposed to 43% of apparel and footwear shipments.

In total, customs checked nearly 3,600 shipments worth more than \$1 billion from a range of countries to ascertain they did not carry goods with input from forced labor in Xinjiang, U.S. customs data showed.

While the halted shipments represent a tiny portion of the \$27 billion worth of garments and footwear Vietnam exported to the U.S. last year, compliance risks may lead to more painful adjustments for Vietnam.

That, in turn, will hit U.S. consumers as Vietnam is their main source of cotton apparel, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce.

"Vietnam's heavy reliance on cotton textile materials from China poses a significant risk of containing Xinjiang cotton, as the province produces over 90% of China's cotton," Sheng Lu, Director at the Department of Fashion and Apparel Studies at the University of Delaware, told Reuters.



He said it was unlikely Vietnam could drastically reduce this dependence, also because many manufacturers there are owned by Chinese investors.

An industry and a government official familiar with the matter confirmed that some Vietnamese suppliers may find it hard to comply with the new rules, either because they import cotton from Xinjiang or because they are unable to prove they do not.

The Federal Maritime Commission, the U.S. agency responsible for international ocean transportation, warned earlier this month of potential supply chain disruptions caused by UFLPA checks.

In a survey last year, nearly 60% of U.S. fashion industry managers said they were exploring countries outside Asia for their supplies as a reaction to the forced labor law.

Sheng Lu said it would be hard for U.S. firms to rapidly find alternative suppliers, therefore more checks on Vietnamese cargoes are to be expected.

Western companies should "make more significant efforts to map their supply chain, figure out where production at each stage happens and demonstrate adequate due diligence", he said. Weaker demand has forced the industry, Vietnam's biggest employer after agriculture, to shed nearly 3% of its 3.4 million workers since October, and contributed to an 11.9% drop in the country's exports and a 2.3% decline in output in the first quarter of this year from a year earlier, slowing growth.

Roughly one in every three pairs of shoes that Nike and Adidas sell globally and 26% and 17% of their clothing, respectively, is made in Vietnam.

However Nike has significantly reduced its output of apparel and footwear in Vietnam despite the country remaining its main manufacturing hub, according to its latest annual report updated to May 2022. It did not reply to questions about UFLPA.

Adidas did not comment on UFLPA either, but said downsizing at its Vietnamese suppliers would respect local law.

"Vietnam continues to be among our major sourcing countries," an Adidas spokesperson said.

Gap said it had no shipments detained.

Two officials from U.S. footwear and apparel industry trade associations said the new rules have had no major impact so far on Vietnam and blamed recent job cuts on lower global demand.

One of World's Oldest Newspapers to End Daily Print Run

VIENNA (Dispatches) - One of the world's oldest newspapers still in print, Austria's Wiener Zeitung, will primarily move online, after a decision by the country's parliament.

The development marks the final step in a years-long dispute between the Austrian government and the newspaper about the future of the state-owned daily.

Founded in 1703 under the name Wienerisches Diarium, and later renamed Wiener Zeitung in 1780, the formerly private bi-weekly paper was nationalised by Emperor Franz Joseph I of Austria in 1857, becoming the country's official gazette.

"It is adopted with a majority," Norbert Hofer, the third president of the parliament, said of a new law to primarily move the publication online from July 1.

The paper will maintain a minimum of ten print publications per year, depending on the funds available.

The Wiener Zeitung was in 2004 ranked as one of the oldest newspapers still in circulation, the World Association of News Publishers told AFP.

The newspaper's role as official gazette, its main source of revenue, will move to a separate state-owned online platform.

The government argued that this was in line with a European directive to centralise and publish official information online.

Meanwhile, the Wiener Zeitung will establish a media hub, a content agency, and a training centre for journalists.

"Some fear that the government just wants to keep the Wiener Zeitung brand with its 320-year-old history, while nobody knows what the future publication will look like -- whether it will still be serious journalism," its vice managing editor Mathias Ziegler told AFP.

Almost half of the newspaper's over 200 employees -- 40 of whom are journalists -- could be laid off, according to its trade union.

The Wiener Zeitung has a circulation of about 20,000 on weekdays and about twice as much on weekends.

EU Commission Vice-President Vera Jourova told Austrian news agency APA that she was "not happy with the situation".

"I think the Wiener Zeitung played a good role in informing people over the years".

Several hundred people took to the streets in Vienna on Tuesday to protest the government's move.



Native Language Might Shape Musical Ability



LONDON (Dispatches) - Native speakers of tonal languages have enhanced melodic perception but at the cost of rhythm, a study suggests.

Your mother tongue may modify your musical ability.

Speaking a native language that requires tones appears to boost perception of melody, but at the cost of rhythm, researchers report April 26 in *Current Biology*. The massive global study hints at how language skills seep into other areas of cognition.

Tonal languages use pitch to distinguish words that otherwise might sound the same. In Mandarin, for instance, mā means horse whereas mǎ means mother. Nontonal languages like Spanish sometimes include pitch changes to suggest emotion, for example, but not to change a word's meaning.

As a Mandarin speaker and flutist, Jingxuan Liu wondered about the crossover between language and music. While studying psychology as an undergraduate at Duke University, Liu helped analyze the musical abilities of nearly half a million people from 203 countries. Her colleagues had launched an online game in which participants completed several musical tasks, including identifying matching melodies at different pitches and finding beat tracks that fit songs' rhythms.

On average, native speakers of the 19 represented tonal languages were better at the melody task compared with speakers of 29 nontonal languages. And the effect wasn't small — a tonal first language enhanced melodic perception by about half the amount that music lessons did, which was also surveyed. But tonal language speakers tended to be worse at the rhythm task.

Low-Cost Contact Lenses to Tackle Color Blindness

LONDON (Dispatches) - Scientists used 3D printing and an inexpensive ink to make colored contact lenses that could improve color distinction in color-blind people.

Imagine ordering a pair of contact lenses customized to fit the curvature of your eye. Now imagine that they also correct your color blindness. Bingo!

According to a recent study published in *Macromolecular Materials and Engineering*, this is not far from becoming a reality. Ahmed Salih, Haider Butt, and their collaborators at Khalifa University in the United Arab Emirates used advanced 3D printing and an economical dye to manufacture contact lenses that filter light to improve color blindness.

Color blindness is a hereditary condition with no cure that hinders people from distinguishing colors, shades, or brightness. It occurs in two out of every 100 people and is more frequent in men than women.

Everyday activities can be challenging as color blind people may have difficulties selecting food and clothes, identifying transport signals, and detecting changes in skin color, amongst others. This can also be difficult for certain professions that require color distinction, such as designer, pilot, or doctor.

Electromagnetic waves are the essential stimulus for color-based vision, but the eye does not respond to any wave, such as microwaves used for cooking or X-rays used in medical imaging; it specifically detects wavelengths of light that range from 400 to 700nm, which make up the visible spectrum.

With normal vision, the eye can observe the colors in the whole visible spectrum thanks to photoreceptors or cone cells. The human eye only has photoreceptors for blue (400 nm light), green (500 nm light), and red (700 nm light), while other colors are detected by a combination of two or more photoreceptors, such as red and green cones for perceiving yellow. In color-blind people, photoreceptors are either missing or defective, leading to an inability to observe certain colors or a distortion from what others would see.

As a strategy to manage color blindness, patients use tinted glasses or contact lenses that absorb light of specific wavelengths. "Blocking a range of wavelengths can help in color distinction by filtering



out the problematic colors making patients see those colors in shades more perceivable for them," explained Salih.

Although patients report improvements with these wearables, these modified

glasses can be expensive and, in some cases, may still prevent some patients from passing color vision tests used to diagnose color blindness.

Due to these limitations, the team tried an alternative method to manufacture color blind contact lenses that maintain high quality and functionality but with decreased production costs.

To build the lens structure, the scientists used a mix of biocompatible materials that come together in a solid network that retains water called a hydrogel. They also added a pink ink that absorbs light in the problematic wavelengths for red-green color blindness — the most common form of color distortion.

To shape the lenses, the team used an advanced 3D-printing technology called mask stereolithography apparatus (MSLA) that produces high-quality items quickly and at low cost. "Compared with traditional contact lenses fabrication techniques (thermoforming and injection molding), 3D printing is relatively less tedious in terms of post processing, much more efficient in mass production, and allows simple customization of the lenses and to target [...] several ophthalmic and medical diseases," said Butt.

After printing, the team measured light transmission in the pink lenses and confirmed that they block light between 525 and 575nm — the range where the pink ink absorbs. Importantly, they demonstrated that the pink lenses preserve this light-filtering property over time, even when stored in water or contact lens solutions commonly used for disposable lenses.

Compared with a commercial model that also helps red-green color blindness, the pink lenses showed a similar dip in light transmission and water retention, but the key feature is that the pink ink is 700 times cheaper than the dye used in the commercial lenses.

The low cost is not the only benefit of the pink ink: it also improved the mechanical resistance and the lens' surface wettability, which is the ability of a liquid to spread over a material's surface. Better wettability avoids dehydration and build up of lipids and proteins from tears, which cause blurred vision and discomfort.

Horn of Africa Drought Not Possible Without Climate Change



LONDON (Dispatches) - The drought that has left some 4.35 million people in the Horn of Africa in dire need of humanitarian aid - with 43,000 in Somalia estimated to have died last year - would not have been possible without climate change, according to an analysis released.

Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia have endured five failed consecutive rainy seasons since October 2020, with aid groups labeling it 'the worst drought in 40 years'. But while the drivers behind the drought are complex, a team of international climate scientists with World Weather Attribution (WWA) group found rising greenhouse gas emissions made it at least 100 times more likely.

"Climate change has made this drought exceptional," said Joyce Kimutai, a climate scientist with the Kenya Meteorological Department who worked with WWA to tease out climate change's role. She and her team found that in a 1.2C degree cooler world, the combination of low rainfall and evapotranspiration "would not have led to drought at all".

Unlike with extreme heat and heavy rainfall, scientists have a harder time pinning down climate change's contribution to droughts around the world.

Using computer models and climate observations, the WWA team determined climate change had made the Horn of Africa's long rains from March through May twice as likely to underdeliver, and the short rains from October through December wetter.

But the nearly 3-year drought has also coincided with a La Nina, an ocean phenomenon resulting from unusually cold water in the equatorial Pacific known to cause below average short rains in East Africa. This ultimately counteracted the excess moisture added from climate change.

Yuan Overtakes Dollar to Become Most-Used Currency

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - The yuan became the most widely-used currency for cross-border transactions in China in March, overtaking the dollar for the first time, official data showed, reflecting efforts by Beijing to internationalize use of the yuan.

Cross-border payments and receipts in yuan rose to a record \$549.9 billion in March from \$434.5 billion a month earlier, according to Reuters calculation based on data from the State Administration of Foreign Exchange. The yuan was used in 48.4% of all cross-border transactions, Reuters calculated, while the dollar's share declined to 46.7% from 48.6% a month earlier. The volume of cross-border transactions covers both the current and capital accounts.



Persian Gulf Economies to Grow At Much Slower Pace in 2023

BENGALURU (Reuters) - Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) economies will grow at a much slower pace in 2023 than last year as expectations for muted gains in crude prices and oil production cuts take a toll on revenues, a Reuters poll found.

Oil prices have spiked nearly 20% since they hit this year's low of about \$70 a barrel on March 20, largely driven by the Organization of Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC+) decision to reduce oil output by about 1.16 million barrels per day and China's reopening.

But further gains will largely be subdued over the coming months on slower global demand - not good news for the bloc which is heavily dependent on oil.

Saudi Arabia, the world's largest oil producer, will expand 3.2% this year, less than half 2022's decade-high pace of 8.7%, according to the April 6-25 Reuters poll of 16 economists.

The growth rate was expected to be the same next year.

"Oil output cuts will drive a sharp slowdown in GDP growth in Saudi Arabia this year...In the rest of the Persian Gulf, the double whammy of lower oil production and oil prices will impact upon both oil and non-oil GDP," said James Swanston, emerging markets economist at Capital Economics.

The United Arab Emirates (UAE), the second biggest economy among PGCC members, will grow 3.7% in 2023 and 4.0% next year, significantly lower than 7.6% last year.

Both Qatar and Bahrain were expected to grow at a slower pace of 2.7% this year. While Oman was seen growing 2.6% in 2023, Kuwait's economic growth was forecast at a much slower pace of 1.5%.

They are not the exception as growth in most major economies was also expected to slow this year as dual threats of aggressive rate hikes seep into economic activity and persistently high inflation affects consumer demand.

But the inflation outlook for the Persian Gulf countries was more muted compared to what is expected in many major economies.

Inflation in the region was expected to be between 2.1% and 3.3% this year and fall lower in 2024.

Most PGCC economies were still expected to enjoy double-digit current account surpluses in 2023 despite worries about slower oil production, with only Oman and Bahrain predicted to post surpluses in single digits.

Countries in the bloc have already shown intent to reduce their dependence on fossil fuels - their major source of income - as the world transitions towards green energy.

To bolster economic growth through non-oil revenues, countries such as Saudi Arabia, UAE and Qatar have hosted major sporting events and exhibitions, and started building large infrastructure projects to attract tourists.

"Tourism revenues will likely outpace GDP growth in 2023," said Ralf Wiegert of S&P Global Market Intelligence.

"Saudi Arabia will continue to invest massively into projects connected with Vision 2030, keeping the budget close to balance; eventually, with oil prices not rising any longer, we see a modest (fiscal) deficit emerging in 2024 and 2025."

Egypt's Economy Seen Growing 4% This Fiscal Year

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egypt's economy will grow 4.0% this fiscal year and 4.5% next even as it endures a continuing depreciation in its currency, a Reuters poll showed, in line with a government forecast for the current year.

The country's already vulnerable economy was shaken further by Russia's invasion of Ukraine last year, which rocked tourism, raised commodity prices and prompted foreign investors to pull about \$20 billion out of its financial markets.

Those troubles pushed Egypt to seek a \$3 billion, 46-month financial support package from the International Monetary Fund that was signed in December. "The Egyptian economy is currently in the midst of some turbulence, with a very uncertain outlook," with inflationary pressure, a drop in household purchasing power and a slowdown in major infrastructure programmes dragging down growth, BNP Paribas said in a note.

Median forecasts in the April 6-26 Reuters poll of 13 economists was for growth of 4.0% in the fiscal year ending on June 30, 4.5% in 2023/24 and 5.0% in 2024/25.

That forecast matched the 4.0% government predictions in a Nov. 30 letter of intent to the IMF. The presidency said in March Egypt was targeting growth of 5% in its budget for 2023/24.

The poll forecast annual urban consumer price inflation averaging 24.0% in 2022/23 and 20.9% the following year before sinking to 9.3% in 2024/25. That would be above the central bank's target range of 5%-9% by the fourth quarter of 2024 and 3%-7% by the fourth quarter of 2026. Egypt's annual inflation soared to 32.7% in March, just short of its highest on record six years earlier, official data showed this month.



Debt Assessments Should Reflect Growing Share of Domestic Debt

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Debt sustainability analyses carried out by the World Bank and International Monetary Fund should reflect the growing share of domestic debt in many developing countries' overall debt levels, World Bank President David Malpass said.

Malpass called for urgent measures to jump-start sovereign debt restructuring efforts for the many countries that are in or near debt distress, after years of glacial progress under the Group of 20 Common Framework.

Speaking at a World Bank event entitled "Breaking the Impasse in Global Debt Restructuring," Malpass said it was critical to get a better understanding of countries' total debt levels, including both domestic and external debt.

Pablo Saavedra, the World Bank's vice president for equitable growth, finance and institutions, noted that domestic debt now accounted for about 20% of the gross domestic product of low-income countries, up from 9% a decade ago.

For middle-income countries, that percentage was "north of 45% of GDP," he said, adding that the current debt analyses did not give adequate weight to such domestic debt, which was also often less transparent.

Overall, he said the last decade had seen the fastest growth of debt in the last 50 years - a concerning development given lower growth potential and higher inflation.

Carmen Reinhart, the World Bank's previous chief economist, told the event that there were ongoing concerns about "hidden debt" and the transparency of external debt levels, including "severely underreported debt levels" owed to China, now the world's largest bilateral creditor.

IEA Urged to Be Very Careful About Undermining Key Oil Investments

DUBAI (Dispatches) - OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais said the International Energy Agency (IEA) should be "very careful" about discouraging investment in the oil industry, which was vital for global economic growth.

Such comments could lead to oil market volatility in future, he said.

Al Ghais also said that the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) and its allies including Russia, a group known as

OPEC+, were not targeting oil prices but focusing on market fundamentals. Finger pointing and misrepresenting the actions of the oil exporters and their allies was "counter-productive", he said.

Fatih Birol, executive director of the International Energy Agency, has been critical of the OPEC+ group's surprise announcement earlier this month of production cuts of 1.66 million barrels per day (bpd) from May until the end of 2023.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman had said only two weeks prior to the decision that the group would stick to production cuts it had agreed in October until the end of the year.

Oil prices rose above \$80 a barrel on the back of the decision, having fallen as low as \$70 per barrel last month.

Birol, in an interview with Bloomberg on Wednesday, said OPEC should be careful about pushing oil prices up as that would translate into a weaker global economy.

On Thursday, Al Ghais said blaming oil for inflation was "erroneous and technically incorrect" and that the IEA's repeated calls to stop investing in oil is what would lead to market volatility.

"If anything will lead to future volatility it is the IEA's repeated calls to stop investing in oil, knowing that all data-driven outlooks envisage the need for more of this precious commodity to fuel global economic growth and prosperity in the decades to come, especially in the developing world."

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

Saudi Arabia, OPEC's de-facto leader, has also blamed the Paris-based IEA and its initial predictions for a 3 million barrel per day (bpd) fall in Russian production on the back of the Ukraine invasion last year for Washington's decision to sell oil from its reserves.

Prince Abdulaziz described the prediction as "screaming and scaring".

OPEC+ decided last year it would stop using data from the West's energy watchdog when assessing the state of the oil market.

U.S. Economy Slows Sharply In Jan-March Quarter

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The U.S. economy slowed sharply from January through March, decelerating to just a 1.1 percent annual pace as higher interest rates hammered the housing market and businesses reduced their inventories.

Thursday's estimate from the Department of Commerce showed that the nation's gross domestic product (GDP) - the broadest gauge of economic output - weakened after growing 3.2 percent from July through September and 2.6 percent from October through December.

But consumer spending, which accounts for about 70 percent of United States economic activity, remained resilient, growing at a 3.7 percent annual pace, the fastest such rate in nearly two years. Spending on goods, in particular, was solid: It rose at its fastest pace since the second quarter of 2021.

Economists had been expecting overall GDP to grow at a 1.9 percent pace in the January-March quarter. Behind much of the quarter's weakness was a sharp reduction in business inventories, which subtracted roughly 2.3 percentage points from overall growth. Companies typically slash their inventories when they anticipate a coming downturn.

The economy's slowdown reflected the impact of the Federal Reserve's aggressive drive to tame inflation, with nine interest rate hikes over the past year. The surge in borrowing costs has been expected to send the economy into a recession sometime this year. Though inflation has steadily eased from the four-decade high it reached last year, it remains far above the Fed's 2 percent target.

The housing market, which is especially vulnerable to higher loan rates, has been battered. And many banks have tightened their lending standards since the failure last month of two major American banks, making it even harder to borrow to buy a house or a car or to expand a business.



"The economy had less forward momentum at the start of this year than previously thought," Andrew Hunter of Capital Economics wrote in a research note. "We continue to expect the drag from higher interest rates and tightening credit conditions to push the economy into a mild recession soon."

Many economists have said the cumulative impact of the Fed's rate hikes has yet to be fully felt. Still, the central bank's policymakers are aiming for a so-called soft landing: Cooling growth enough to curb inflation yet not so much as to send the world's largest economy tumbling into a recession.

There has been widespread scepticism that the Fed will succeed. An economic model used by the Conference Board, a business research group, puts the probability of a US recession over the next year at 99 percent.

Argentina Looks to Tame Inflation With Biggest Rate Hike



BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina's central bank hiked its benchmark interest rate 10 percentage points to 91%, as it tries to tame high inflation and steady the peso currency, which has tumbled in black market trading.

The hike, the biggest since a market meltdown in August 2019, comes after the central bank (BCRA) had already lifted the rate last week by 300 basis points to 81% in an effort to control inflation running at 104% annually.

The central bank formally confirmed the latest hike in a statement.

News of the sharp rate hike lifted the peso currency in the black market, which strengthened 1.3% to 463 per dollar on Thursday, although it was still over 100% off the official exchange rate of 222 per dollar.

A higher interest rate offers more incentives to savers to keep their funds in pesos, strengthening the local currency, but weighs on borrowing and economic growth.

"The rate increase is a promising measure, but late," said Sergio Chouza from the Sarandi consultancy.

Analyst Leonardo Chialva said the move would be a "patch" that could bring calm to the markets for now but would not fix the root issues, especially with the government under pressure to spend ahead of general elections in October. "The underlying problem is the fiscal one, and the cure needed is difficult to pull off in an election year," Chialva said.

Argentina, a major global grains and beef supplier, is battling inflation that topped 104% in March, with analysts predicting prices will rise this year by some 110%-130%. The peso currency is also quickly losing value against the dollar.

The South American country has a \$44 billion loan program with the International Monetary Fund (IMF), which includes targets to have a positive real interest rate, rein in inflation and build up its scant foreign currency reserves.

Iran Wins Title of 2023 IBSA Judo Asian Championship

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian judo athletes won the championship title of the 2023 Asian competitions for the blind and the visually impaired (IBSA) in Astana, Kazakhstan. The Iranian judokas won 3 gold and 2 bronze in the tournaments. Mousa Gholami of Iran defeated his opponent from Kazakhstan in the J1-90kg final match and claimed a gold medal. Ali Navaie in J1-90kg lost the match to his Mongolian opponent in the second round of the competition and in the next round, he faced his well-known opponent from Uzbekistan, and by defeating him, he snatched the bronze medal.



Unable to Process Venezuela's Heavy Oil, Cuba Turns to Russia, Mexico

HOUSTON (Dispatches) - Cuba increasingly is turning to Russia and Mexico for oil to ease an acute shortage of diesel and gasoline and supplement dwindling supplies of Venezuelan crude and fuel, according to shipping data and sources.

Venezuela for more than two decades has been Cuba's main political ally and largest provider of crude and fuel to the island nation, delivering fuel oil for power generation, gasoline, diesel, jet fuel and cooking gas.

But the U.S.-sanctioned South American nation's struggle to produce enough fuel for its own needs have left it unable to fully feed its Caribbean neighbor. Venezuela's oil exports to Cuba so far this year have dropped to 55,000 barrels per day (bpd) from almost 80,000 in 2020.

Under President Andrés Manuel Lopez Obrador, Mexico has sent a rising volume of fuel to the communist-run nation, according to Refinitiv Eikon vessel tracking data.

Cuba has also imported since November at least five cargoes from Russia, a long-time supplier, as well as fuel from Caribbean terminals and Europe, the data shows.

A tanker owned by Mexican state oil firm Petroleos Mexicanos (Pemex), the Bicentenario, since April has discharged twice at a Cuban refinery in Havana, among the few that produce gasoline on the island, according to the Eikon data and TankerTrackers.com.

The ship was seen as recently as Sunday departing from Havana Harbor.

A separate, independently-owned vessel, the Panama-flagged Fortunato, has also twice visited Cuban ports since January from Mexico's Salina Cruz terminal carrying liquefied petroleum gas (LPG), typically used for cooking, the data showed.

The fuel, though not enough to meet demand, may prove a lifeline for the crisis-plagued administration of Miguel Diaz-Canel, which has imposed rationing, prompting days-long lines for gas, diesel and propane across the Caribbean island.

Lidia Rodriguez, commercial director of Cuban state oil company Cupet, this week told local media Cuba had low stocks of diesel and gasoline, and particularly low inventories of crude that its refineries are able to process.

"We are trying to avoid total fuel scarcity in the country," she said, referring to the rationing.

Cuba's government said last week its traditional fuel suppliers had fallen short on their commitments. Officials also blame U.S. sanctions, which complicate the financing and transport of fuel to Cuba, for the crisis. "We are aware that Cuba purchases oil from a variety of countries, both sanctioned and non-sanctioned, to combat the island's current energy crisis," a U.S. State Department spokesperson told Reuters.

The Russian and Mexican supplies appear to be compensating, in part, for an insufficient volume of Venezuelan finished fuels and deliveries of heavier Venezuelan crude, which are more difficult to process and produce less gasoline, said Jorge Piñon from the University of Texas at Austin.



Venezuela's state oil company PDVSA and oil ministry, Pemex, and Mexico's foreign ministry did not reply to requests for comment.

A Pemex source, who was not authorized to speak publicly and asked for anonymity, said the company has recently supplied crude to Cuba, without providing details.

Mexico, which has previously shipped oil and other aid to Cuba under emergency situations, receives doctors from Cuba and recently signed a deal to import Cuban raw material for a train project. Venezuela sent a crude cargo over the weekend to the island and plans to ship more oil and gasoline in the coming days, according to PDVSA's schedules.

While Cuba scrambles to find new sources of fuel, daily life grows complicated.

On Tuesday, Cuban officials said its Workers Day parade on May 1, a hallmark of national pride, would be "reformulated" due to fuel limitations. Several universities have also announced online classes as fuel for transportation has dried up. Food production and transport are also beginning to suffer.

Cuban officials say they are negotiating with foreign oil suppliers but have not provided details, leaving some island residents feeling helpless. At a crowded bus stop Tuesday morning in Alamar, just 15 minutes east of Havana, Ruben Infante, a 37-year old tobacco worker, said he waits as many as three hours daily - each way - for a ride to the nearby capital.

"Look at the number of people here, all of them waiting for a car to Havana," Infante said, noting he still gets to work late every day. "And there's no choice, because if you don't (work), you don't eat."

Iran Designates 12.3m Bank Accounts as Business-Related

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Central Bank of Iran (CBI) has identified some 12.3 million bank accounts held by individuals and companies in the country as having links to businesses amid its efforts to prevent tax evasion and money laundering.

CBI's head of software engineering department said on Saturday that some 10 million bank accounts held by individuals and another 2.3 million held by legal entities had been designated as business-related since January when the Iranian government launched a plan to distinguish between business and non-business bank accounts.

Hassan Mirzapour said Iran's tax administration is responsible for analyzing turnovers and transactions of a bank account before flagging it as a business account.

Mirzapour said that the CBI then orders private and state banks to designate the bank accounts as business-related and apply new regulations to the accounts.

He said business bank accounts will enjoy privileges in the new banking laws, including discounts and lower restrictions on withdrawals and transfers.

The official said some 15 banks in Iran have yet to join the scheme to identify and report their business-related accounts.

Iran says new laws on bank accounts are meant to prevent tax evasion and money laundering in the country. Under the new system, non-business accounts held by an individuals in various banks will be designated as business accounts if deposit transactions of the accounts exceed a certain cap within a month.

Iran Exports to Oman Up 52%

TEHRAN (Dispatches)- Iran's exports to Oman stood at 3.34 million tons worth \$1.08 billion in fiscal 2022-23 (ended March 21).

According to the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, Iran's exports to Oman stood at 3.34 million tons worth \$1.08 billion, registering a 29% and 52% growth in terms of weight and value respectively compared with the year before.

The value of exports stood at \$716.22 million, the news portal of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Industries reported.

Imports amounted to 942,202 tons worth \$800.47 million.

The imports' value stood at \$619.42 million in the fiscal 2021-22.

The value of trade between the two countries in the last fiscal year increased by 41% to \$1.88 billion compared with \$1.33 billion in the previous year.

China's Small Steps on Offshore Use of Yuan Are Starting to Add Up

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - China's yuan currency is slowly but surely being adopted for more international payments, which analysts say could lay foundations for a trade system running parallel to the dominant U.S. dollar.

In the past day alone, data showed that more cross-border transactions with China were settled in yuan in March than in dollars for the first time, and that Argentina said it aims to regularly pay for Chinese goods in yuan and not dollars.

While the dollar dominates world trade settlements, the news comes amid a steady drumbeat of more and more bilateral deals arranging yuan payments with China -- from Chinese oil purchases in the Middle East to trade with partners from Brazil to Russia.

True global yuan adoption is unlikely, given expectations that Beijing will want to keep a tight grip on the currency. But incremental progress is already fashioning a new trade architecture and is gaining pace, particularly as Russia's expulsion from much of the West's payment systems has accelerated the development of alternatives.

"The world's largest commodity exporters and importers - China, Russia and Brazil - are now working together on using renminbi for cross-border payments," said Chi Lo, senior investment strategist at BNP Paribas Asset Management in Hong Kong.

"Their cooperation could draw other countries to renminbi payments over time and cumulatively, this group could lift the renminbi at the expense of the dollar," he said.

China has long sought to increase the yuan's undersized 2.2% share of global payments, but seemingly without being willing to open its capital accounts and allow the sort of free-flowing movement



that makes dollars, euros and yen so convenient.

Russia's war on Ukraine, and the resulting Western sanctions, has given substance to the push. Suddenly, Russia has come from virtually nowhere to become the fourth-largest yuan-trading hub outside China.

The yuan's share of Russia's currency market has leapt to 40% to 45%, from less than 1% at the start of last year. Its share of world trade financing, according to SWIFT, has increased to 4.5% in February from 1.3% two years ago. The dollar's is 84%.

"It will not replace the U.S. dollar globally, but it is already starting to replace the dollar in some of China's trade relationships," said Gerard DiPippo and Andrea Leonard Palazzi, economists at Washington's Center for Strategic and International Studies, in an article last week.

"This kind of renminbi internationalization may achieve Beijing's goals, including reducing China's exposure to exchange rate fluctuations and mitigating China's vulnerabilities to U.S. financial sanctions."

World trade flows are dominated by dollars, euros, sterling and yen because those currencies are freely available and connected to open economies in ways the capital-controlled yuan is not. To be sure, there are no signs that is changing.

"In most trades, importers have a comparative advantage in determining the terms of trades, such as pricing and settlement currency," says Zhang Yu, chief macro analyst at Huachuang Securities in Beijing.

"Therefore, if exporters want to use yuan to settle trades, they must persuade foreign importers to pay in yuan, which often takes a long time."

China itself needs time to create depth in a limited

Uzbeks Go to...

FROM PAGE 1

"The purpose of the referendum is to enhance the quality of life of the Uzbek people. It united the whole nation," he added.

The draft constitution for the referendum touches on various aspects of the Islamic country such as women empowerment, youth rights, health and education.

Dilfuza Khalikova, a referendum official at the 147th referendum district in Samarkand city said some people had started arriving as early as 7.30 am to vote, reflecting their eagerness to participate in the referendum.

More than 200 amendments and additions to 64 Articles of the country's constitution is being proposed. There was a nationwide discussion held about the proposed amendments with more than 220,000 proposals received from the people.

In the preparation of the draft constitution, foreign experiences - the constitutions of 190 countries including Malaysia were taken into consideration.

The people-centric referendum is also taking into consideration the aspirations of

the younger generation as the country's population is expected to reach 50 million by 2040, with more than half of them being young people, thus in order to provide them the conducive environment, among others a stable economy and social guarantees are necessary, as stated in the draft constitution.

One key aspect of the draft constitution touching on human rights, stated that "ensuring the human and civil rights and freedom is the highest goal of the state".

Majority of the eligible voters had cast their votes before preparing this report and the election council was expected to announce the full results in at most 10 hours after the end of the election. The referendum on the amendments to the constitution is part of various broad reforms being implemented by President Shavkat Mirziyoyev since becoming interim President in September 2016, elected in an open election with huge majority in the 2016 presidential election, following the death of Uzbekistan's long-time leader Islam Karimov.

U.S., Israel...

FROM PAGE 1

Tangsiri also warned that the presence of foreign naval vessels in the Persian Gulf poses a serious threat to its ecosystem and marine life.

"In the event of any accidents involving these vessels, which are primarily nuclear-fueled, the Persian Gulf's ecosystem could be impacted for decades," he said.

The Persian Gulf — which spans some 251,000 square kilometers — is bounded by the Arvand River in the north, which forms the frontier between Iran and Iraq, and the Strait of Hormuz in the south, which links the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

The inland sea is an international trade route connecting the Middle East to Africa, India, and China.

It has been referred to by historians and ancient texts as "Persian" since the Achaemenid Empire was established in what is now modern-day Iran.

Every year, Iranians observe the Persian Gulf Day on the 10th of Ordibehesht, the second month on the Persian calendar, which usually falls at the end of April.

The date coincides with the anniversary of a successful military campaign by Shah Abbas I of Persia in 1622, which drove the Portuguese navy out of the Strait of Hormuz.

EU's True Face...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran's Supreme Court on Wednesday upheld the death penalty for Sharmahd after the top court had found "no reason or evidence" to reverse the ruling for the terrorist ringleader.

In February, the Iranian Judiciary sentenced the German-Iranian citizen to death on charges of "corruption on earth" by planning and orchestrating a series of terrorist acts against the Islamic Republic.

Sharmahd, a US resident, was the ringleader of the Tondar (Thunder) terrorist outfit. He was accused of planning a series of attacks, including a 2008 attack against a religious congregation center in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz, Fars Province, which killed 14 people and wounded hundreds.

Sharmahd and his Tondar group were also behind a 2010 terrorist bombing at Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini's mausoleum in the Iranian capital, which left several people injured.

The 67-year-old was also accused of working with US intelligence and spying on Iran's ballistic missile program.

Iran Raises Natural Gas...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian gas supplies to Iraq dropped significantly in 2021 when the Arab country failed to pay its energy arrears to Tehran.

The supplies had remained at low levels until early this year when Iranian authorities announced that the Iraqis had found a way round the US sanctions to pay for gas imports.

Senior Iraqi government officials have travelled to Iran in recent months to discuss increased energy cooperation between the two neighbors.

President Abdul Latif Rashid was in Tehran on Saturday for a first official visit since he took office in Baghdad in October.

Iran Pursuing Further...

FROM PAGE 1

On his meeting with the businessmen in Bushehr, the official told IRNA that they demand the establishment of a direct shipping line and flights between Iran and China, adding that the projects need to be assessed.

He also spoke about a plan on a sisterhood agreement between Bushehr province and "an important coastal province in China."

The Iranian official did not name the Chinese province, but said that the agreement would pave the way for China's financing of Iranian projects including the one to construct a railway between Bushehr and Iran's southern city of Shiraz.

He also said that the agreement would help strengthen economic relations between the two countries.

Azerbaijan Stays on F1 Calendar Until '26

BAKU (Dispatches) - The Azerbaijan Grand Prix in Baku will remain on the Formula One calendar until at least 2026 after a three-year extension was announced.

The country pays significant hosting fees to commercial rights holders Liberty Media but the fast city circuit is also a challenge for drivers and has a reputation for crashes and excitement since its debut in 2016.

Baku is hosting the first sprint race of the season this weekend. To date no driver has won more than once in Azerbaijan.

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Yates Edges Pinot For Romandie Lead

THYON (Dispatches) - Adam Yates edged Thibaut Pinot after a mountain-top battle in the fourth stage of the Tour de Romandie rday to take the overall race lead.

The 'Queen' stage of this 75th edition of the race scaled five peaks over 161.6 km from Sion to the ski resort at Thyon.

British rider Yates of Team UAE launched his attack 4km from the finish, on the long final climb on high roads hemmed by walls of snow, the peloton's first taste of high Alpine passes this season.

Perez Wins Baku Sprint As Verstappen Sees Red

BAKU (Dispatches) - Sergio Perez won today's sprint race in Baku to maintain Red Bull's perfect start to the season, but teammate Max Verstappen was in no mood to celebrate.

Red Bull's double world champion was seething over a first lap incident when he was muscled out of third place by the Mercedes of George Russell.

Perez won from pole-sitter Charles Leclerc of Ferrari with Verstappen, whose car picked up some damage, eventually getting his third place back off Russell.

The British driver apologised to Verstappen, saying his car had no grip but the Dutch driver snapped back: "Mate, we all have no grip, we all need to leave space!"

Verstappen added later: "I just don't understand why you need to take so much risk in lap 1, understeer in my side pod and create a hole, we all have cold tyres, it's always easy to lock up."

"But in this beautiful way of explaining mate, locked up, or look at the onboard, it doesn't make sense. We still got into P3, got some good points, but it is what it is."

Russell stood his corner, remarking: "I was surprised why he was so angry to be honest, he still finished the race in P3."

"I was still quite surprised he was trying to hold it round the outside, you know we're on a street circuit, he's got a lot more to lose than I have. None of the contact was intentional."

That mini storm on the banks of the Caspian Sea took some of the gloss off Perez's win.

The Mexican was adding this first of six sprint races in 2023 to his win in the Saudi Arabian Grand Prix, with Verstappen taking the season-opener in Bahrain and last time out in Melbourne.

Leclerc is on pole again tomorrow for the fourth round of the season but judged on this display he will have his work cut out again to clip the Red Bulls' wings.

In the drivers' championship Verstappen leads on 75 points from Perez on 62 with Leclerc picking up seven points — more than he's earned in the three races run so far.

Leclerc fended off Perez in the short run to the first corner as Russell overtook Verstappen at turns two and three.

Yuki Tsunoda's AlphaTauri then lost a rear tyre which nonchalantly rolled its way down the straight, coming to a stop eventually at turn 16 as the safety car came out.



The safety car came in on lap six of 17, Leclerc keeping his lead on the restart, with Verstappen taking back third from Russell.

With 10 laps to go Perez picked off Leclerc, Red Bull's straight line speed helping the Mexican sweep past the Ferrari.

Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez steers his car during the sprint race ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on April 29, 2023. — AFP pic

Red Bull Racing's Mexican driver Sergio Perez steers his car during the sprint race ahead of the Formula One Azerbaijan Grand Prix at the Baku City Circuit in Baku on April 29, 2023. — AFP pic

Perez picked his way safely around the tricky circuit over the closing laps for a comfortable win.

"It was good, with these tricky sessions it's been a lot of pressure on us, our team, our engineers, mechanics and drivers, so to get away with maximum points today was the main objective but obviously we know that tomorrow is the main race," said the sprint winner.

Leclerc was encouraged Ferrari had taken "a step forward".

"We are still not where we want to be but as I said, if winning is not possible then we just need to take the maximum points," he said.

"And today there wasn't anything more. Happy with the second place and we will try and go for the win tomorrow."

Ibrahimovic's Season at Risk After Calf Injury



ROME (Dispatches) - Zlatan Ibrahimovic's injury-hit season could be at an end after AC Milan said that the Sweden international has picked up a knock to his right calf.

Milan did not specify for how long Ibrahimovic would be out but said that there a "small hope" that he could play before the end of the season, which in Italy finishes on the first weekend in June.

The veteran striker picked up the injury during the warm-up before Milan's 2-0 win over Lecce last weekend.

Ibrahimovic, a key figure in Milan's resurgence to the top of Italian football, has hardly featured for Stefano Pioli's side all season, returning in February following surgery on his left knee in May.

The 41-year-old has only started one match for Milan all season, in a 3-1 win at Udinese in March in which he became the oldest goal-scorer in Serie A history.

He isn't on the list of players eligible for Milan's Champions League campaign so he will not feature in the derby semi-final with Inter Milan next month.

Ibrahimovic's latest injury casts doubt over whether he will retire at the end of the season, with his contract expiring in June and no news regarding an extension.

German FA and Referee Admit Crucial Error in Dortmund Draw

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Both the German FA (DFB) and the referee in question admitted a mistake in not awarding a penalty to Borussia Dortmund as they dropped potentially crucial points in a 1-1 draw at Bochum.

Dortmund forward Karim Adeyemi was brought down in the box by Bochum defender Danilo Soares midway through the second half on Friday, with the scores locked.

Dortmund came into the weekend one point ahead of Bayern Munich but will now drop to second if the Bavarians win at home to last-placed Hertha Berlin on Sunday.

Referee Sascha Stegemann waived play on and declined to use the VAR system to review the contact.

Speaking with German tabloid Bild on Saturday, Stegemann said he was "really annoyed" and "feels crappy", admitting he made a mistake on watching the footage.

"If I had doubts about my decision, then that would have been an option. But I didn't have that chance," Stegemann said, explaining that the VAR did not tell him to consult the screen and review the play.

"In retrospect, I have to say that I would have been happy (to award a penalty) if I had watched it again."

The German FA's referee department agreed with Stegemann's assessment, saying on Saturday "the TV pictures prove" the incident was "a foul and a penalty."

"The defender throws himself from behind to the side with both legs and did not compete for the ball."

"He (Soares) does not play at the ball and instead hits the opposing player, knocking him down."

Dortmund manager Edin Terzic said after the match the decision was a "key moment" in the draw, which may deny his side a chance to win their first title in 11 years.

Dortmund sporting director Sebastian Kehl said after the game "today, the referee decided the outcome of the match."

"With the German championship at stake, to not look at this situation, is negligent, cowardly and completely wrong."

Cavaliers Confident Despite Quick NBA Playoff Exit



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) — Despite an early exit from the NBA playoffs, the Cleveland Cavaliers are confident they are on the way back to becoming a title contender for the first time since the departure of LeBron James.

Koby Altman, the Cavaliers' president of basketball operations, said the team won't be making major adjustments after being eliminated from the NBA playoffs by the New York Knicks on Wednesday.

"There's no sweeping changes. No one is going to panic off this first-round loss," Altman said.

"We can be both disappointed about our playoff results and at the same time largely excited about our future."

The Cavs went 51-31 and made their first playoff appearance since James departed

for the Los Angeles Lakers in 2018 but lost their best-of-seven series to New York in five games.

"We accomplished a lot this year and really put this franchise back on the map," Altman said. "The 51 wins from a hyper-competitive NBA, there's a lot to learn from that as well."

The Cavaliers, who reached the NBA Finals five times with James and won the league title in 2016, have not won a playoff series without James since 1993.

Donovan Mitchell led Cleveland with 28.3 points a game and added 4.3 rebounds and 4.4 assists a contest while Darius Garland had 21.6 points and a team-high 7.8 assists a game and Jarrett Allen grabbed 9.8 rebounds a game, 12th-best in the NBA.

The Cavs, who have improved their record every year since James left for the Lakers, came up short but learned a great deal from a playoff debut together, Altman said.

"The pain and agony we've felt the last couple days is part of it and we will get better for it, but it doesn't change how we feel about this group. Incredibly proud," said Altman.

Palace Beat West Ham In Thriller



LONDON (Dispatches) - Brighton crushed Wolves 6-0 to improve their prospects of qualifying for Europe, while Crystal Palace effectively sealed their Premier League survival with a 4-3 win against struggling West Ham.

Beaten on penalties by Manchester United in the FA Cup semi-finals last weekend, Brighton can erase that painful loss if they make it into the Europa League or Europa Conference League.

The eighth-placed Seagulls remain in contention to do just that after recording their biggest win of an impressive season that already includes victories over Manchester United, Liverpool and Chelsea.

Roberto De Zerbi's side went ahead in the sixth minute at the Amex Stadium through Deniz Undav's close-range effort for his first Premier League goal.

Pascal Gross struck in the 13th and 26th minutes, the second of his goals a spectacular volley that arched into the top corner.

Danny Welbeck's header gave Brighton four first-half goals for the first time since 2016.

The former Manchester United player scored again shortly after the restart and Undav's second was dinked finish in the 66th minute.

Medvedev Sees off Vavassori to Reach Madrid Open Third Round



MADRID (Dispatches) - World number three Daniil Medvedev saw off Andrea Vavassori 6-4, 6-3 to reach the third round of the Madrid Open.

Vavassori battled his way past Andy Murray in the first round but could not oust another former world number one in the Spanish capital.

The Italian, ranked 164th, held his own against the second seed but eventually succumbed, even though his serve and volley game troubled Medvedev.

"I think I played a very good match, solid, and saved some break points," said Medvedev after his first match at the tournament.

"I managed to use my opportunities, I felt good and I'm looking forward to my next matches." The Italian forced two break points in the first game but Medvedev held and the players stayed on serve until the 2021 US Open winner broke for 6-4 to take the first set.

There was a brief rain delay before the second set, in which Medvedev broke to love for 5-3, sealing a fine return game with a drop shot which left Vavassori scrambling.

The Russian, who often struggles on clay, clinched victory when Vavassori sent a backhand long. "I felt very good on the court, when we had rallies I felt I was in control of the game and that's very important on clay, and hopefully I can continue this way," added Medvedev.