

14th Int'l Conference on Coast, Ports and Marine Structures (ICOPMAS) Will Be Held in Tehran On May 9-10 With the Presence of State and Military Officials, Foreign Guests and Academics and Experts

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Dropped 3,651 Points to 2.514m on Wednesday, as Reported, Over 26.686b Securities Worth 189.473 Trillion Rials (About \$451m) Were Traded at the TSE

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Iran Deposits With Foreign Banks Grow By 13% in 2022

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The Bank for International Settlements (BIS) announced a 13-percent growth in Iran's deposits with foreign banks and financial institutions during 2022, as compared to 2021, IRNA reported.

According to the BIS's latest report, Iran's deposits with foreign banks and financial institutions at the end of 2022 exceeded \$21 billion.

The Islamic Republic's deposits with foreign banks and financial institutions in Q4 2022 amounted to \$19.804 billion.

According to BIS, Iran's deposits abroad stood at \$17.558 billion at the end of 2021.

As reported, of Iran's total deposits with foreign banks and financial institutions at the end of 2022, \$11.114 billion were with foreign banks and the rest with non-banking financial institutions.

Based on the BIS data, equal to \$8.59 billion of the Islamic Republic's foreign deposits in the mentioned period were in the form of Euros while the share of the dollar was only \$273 million.

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President Hails Syria's Resistance Against Sanctions, Threats



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says Syria has managed to overcome difficulties and emerge victorious in spite of all the threats and sanctions targeting the Arab country.

"The Syrian government and nation have moved past major difficulties and problems. Today we can say that you ... were able to win [the war] despite the threats and sanctions that were imposed against you," Raisi said at a meeting with his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad in Damascus on Wednesday.

Syria has been a target of United States sanctions since 1979. The US and its Western allies imposed more such bans on Damascus after 2011, when the country found itself in the grip of rampant foreign-backed militancy and terrorism.

The sanctions intensified even further with Washington's passing of the Caesar Act in 2019, which targeted any individual and business that participated either directly or indirectly in Syria's reconstruction efforts.

President Raisi also hailed Iran-Syria relations as "rich, fruitful, and full of experiences," adding that the ties remained stable even in difficult periods amid severe political and security turbulence in the Middle East.

He further said that regional and trans-regional changes have failed to affect brotherly relations between Tehran and Damascus.

"The Iran-Syria ties are tied to the blood of our beloved martyrs, especially General Qassem Soleimani, and this is a key to the stability and strength of the relations between the two countries," Raisi noted.

"Today, the legitimacy of the position of Iran and Syria ... has been fully proven. Those who had doubts about Iran's political position are convinced that it was the right and fair stance."

Emphasizing Iran's support and assistance for Syria in achieving lasting peace, stability and tranquility, Raisi noted, "Just as the Islamic Republic stood by the Syrian government and nation in the fight against terrorism, it will stand by its Syrian brothers in development and progress period."

Raisi also stressed that the Islamic Republic will stand by its Syrian brothers in the post-war era of reconstruction and development as it was the case during the fight against terrorism.

The Syrian president, for his part, hailed Iran's support for Syria throughout the Arab country's conflict, and said the Syrian nation won't forget Iran's assistance to them in their hard times.

"Syria-Iran relations are rich and full of experience, as this relationship has been stable even during tough times when there were heavy political and security storms in the Middle East," he said.

President Assad called for Iran to play a bigger role in establishing sustainable peace in the country and reconstructing war-torn parts of Syria.

Assad said "the Syrian-Iranian relations are rich in content, rich in experiences and rich in the insights that constituted them, and therefore, these relations were, during hard times, stable and firm despite of the severe political and security storms which struck the Middle East Region."

Referring to the signing of cooperation documents between the two countries, the two presidents emphasized the importance of the "comprehensive long-term strategic cooperation program between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Syrian Arab Republic" in order to secure the interests of the two nations and other nations in the region.

The two presidents also stressed the importance of Iran-Syria's long-term cooperation plan for advancing the interests of the two nations and other countries in the region.

Talks also dealt with the latest developments in the Middle East region and the reflections of the global changes on the region, and unifying efforts to invest these changes for the benefit of the two countries and the people of the region.

Earlier before his departure to Syria, President Raisi said that the Tel Aviv regime will be destroyed in case it takes the first action against Iran.

President Raisi made the comments in an interview with the Lebanese Al-Mayadeen TV, which is close to resistance groups in the Middle East.

The Zionist regime is angry with Tehran-Riyadh relations, the president of Iran said, describing Iran and Saudi Arabia as two influential countries in the region.

The Zionists are not able to preserve their own security, according to Raisi, adding that while the Israeli regime gets weaker and weaker, the resistance groups are growing stronger and stronger.

He went on to say that "Any Israeli action against Iran would mean the destruction of that regime."

Elsewhere, the president stressed that Americans must leave Syria immediately, "Syria should exercise its sovereignty over all its lands....We are ready to cooperate with the people and government of Syria in reconstructing their country."

He noted that the Americans are not in Syria to fight terrorism, saying "We must reveal the lies of the American fight against terrorism and let the whole world know that they are instead handling terrorism."

ViewPoint U.S. Wants No End to Ukraine-Russia War

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Most analysts and politicians were right to blame the U.S. for the outbreak of Russia-Ukraine war and as the war goes on, the world is realizing that those people have been right because the U.S. fans the flame of war in Ukraine and does not want it to be ended.

With a glance at the contemporary history, one can find the role of the U.S. in many wars in the world or at least a trace of this country in the wars. The U.S. as a superpower has always tried to dictate itself on the nations and wherever it has faced resistance, it has resorted to waging a war either directly or indirectly by involving other countries in the war.

The Russia-Ukraine war has been one of the malicious plots of the U.S. which has been backed by the Western governments and it seems the war will not stop for months or years as some American politicians have predicted so.

The war has covered the weakness of the Biden Administration inside the country and also weakened the European countries by involving in this war either by injecting money or sending weapons.

In between, the arms sellers and arms manufacturing companies mostly the American and European ones have been the winners of this war because they live their lives through wars in the world and selling their products and Ukraine is no exception.

Although the world is suffering from this war and it has led to inflation and economic chaos, and even in Europe, the U.S. and its allies do not try to put an end to it, and everyday Western media fan the flame of war by reporting some news about arms sales by the U.S. and Europe.

Of course the U.S. is much happier than Europe for prolongation of this war because most of arms manufacturers are in this country and they are supporting administrations in the country and any war will lead to making money through arms sales. So it is natural that the U.S. administrations encourage the countries to wars despite pretending they support peace and human values.

On Tuesday some media reports announced the U.S. is to sell more arms to Ukraine as Ukraine prepares for attack on Russia. As per reports, the United States is sending a \$300 military aid package to Ukraine, including, for the first time, short-range air-launched rockets, deepening its involvement in the war in defiance of repeated warnings by Russia.

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Iran Records \$6.7b Worth of Trade

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran recorded a total of \$6.73 billion in trade in the first month of 1402, Farvardin, in the Iranian calendar (March 21-April 21, 2023), customs statistics showed.

The Iranian customs administration's statistics for Farvardin said that 10,471,000 tons of goods worth \$3.645 million were exported to other countries, indicating a 12.93% decrease in value and a 17.76% increase in weight.

The report indicated that in first month of 1402, 1,829,000 tons of goods worth \$3.87 million were imported into the country, showing a 13% and 24.79% decrease in value and weight, respectively.

The figures suggested that China, Iraq, Turkey, United Arab Emirates and India were the five major export destinations for Iranian commodities, while UAE, China, Turkey, Germany and India were the biggest exporters to Iran, respectively.

Liquefied natural gas worth \$523 million, liquefied propane worth \$302 million, liquefied butane worth \$169 million, ingots of iron and unalloyed steel worth \$167 million and methanol valued \$167 million were the five commodities that were exported from Iran. Corn for animal food worth \$223 million, soybeans worth \$152 million, rice worth \$89 million, smart mobile phones worth \$71 million and auto parts for the auto industry valued at worth \$62 million, were at the top of the list of the imported goods into Iran.

IRGC Seizes Foreign Oil Tanker In Strait of Hormuz

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has seized a foreign oil tanker in the Strait of Hormuz.

The U.S. Naval Forces Central Command said the oil tanker is a Panama-flagged merchant vessel.

The foreign oil tanker, which has apparently broken the rules, was captured by the IRGC Navy forces in the Strait of Hormuz waters on Wednesday, the news agency said.

The AP quoted the US Navy's 5th Fleet as saying that the vessel was a Panama-flagged oil tanker identified as the Niovi.

Iran often seizes vessels that break the rules or fail to abide by international maritime law.

Last week, the Iranian Navy seized a Marshall Islands-flagged oil tanker in the Sea of Oman and directed it toward Iran's territorial waters after the tanker hit an Iranian vessel and tried to flee in violation of maritime regulations.

The foreign oil tanker collided with an Iranian fishing boat in the Persian Gulf on the night of April 26, the public relations department of the Iranian Army said on April 27.

"The seizure came after an unknown ship collided with an Iranian vessel last night on Wednesday in the Persian Gulf, causing several Iranian crew members to go missing and get injured," the Army said.

According to international law, in such cases the vessel responsible for the incident is tasked to rush to the help of the crew and provide medical services to the injured.

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Iran Registers Over \$600m Fishery Exports for a Year

KHORRAMABAD (IRNA) - The worth of Iran's fish trade and fishery exports has reached \$605 million during the last Iranian calendar year (ending on March 20), an official announced.

Rajabali Qorbazadeh, the head of planning and budget office of Iran Fisheries Organization, made the announcement at a provincial gathering in western Iran on Wednesday.

As he underlined, the figure shows a nine-percent increase

compared with that of the preceding year, which has been \$540 million.

According to the official, 31% of the country's fishery products is produced in rivers and aquaculture facilities.

Based on the country's development plan, fisheries production should reach 2.6 million metric tons from the current 1.5 million metric tons.

President's Historic Syria Visit Manifests Success of Iran's Regional Diplomacy

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian foreign minister says President Ebrahim Raisi's forthcoming visit to Syria is a clear manifestation of the success of Tehran's policy of initiating regional convergence.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a tweet on Tuesday night, a day before traveling to Damascus as part of a delegation accompanying Raisi on his two-day trip.

"I will soon set off for Syria with Dr. Raisi. In addition to its political, security, and economic dimensions, the visit shows the victory of the political will of the resistance and the success of the Iranian government's diplomacy in completing the regional convergence process," he wrote.

The top Iranian diplomat also posted a picture of General Qassem Soleimani, the most renowned figure in the fight against terrorism in Iraq and Syria, in a meeting with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, paying tribute to the US-assassinated General



and all martyrs "who gifted security to Iran and the region."

Heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, the Iranian president will pay a visit to Syria upon an official invitation by his Syrian counterpart on Wednesday.

It will mark the first trip to Syria by an Iranian president since the Syrian crisis began in 2011.

Army Seeking Access to Sophisticated Equipment

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Army is seeking to gain access to more enhanced equipment and precision-guided ammunition in the near future, according to the Iranian Army's Ground Force Commander Brigadier General Kioumars Heidari.

Heidari made the announcement while addressing a gathering of military attaches of 35 friendly and allied countries in Tehran.

The Iranian Army's Ground Force will enjoy a higher combat power in the near future, he said, adding that smart equipment and the use of precision-guided ammunition is one of the strategies pursued by the force.

He underlined that using smart equipment and precision-guided ammunition, as well as developing effective weapons such as advanced combat and reconnaissance drones, anti-armor weapons, and upgraded helicopters, will be among the strategies and actions used by Iranian army in the future.

During the meeting, military attaches praised the Iranian army's self-sufficiency and its help to regional countries during crises.

Pakistan Stress Solidifying Parliamentary Diplomacy With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Chairman of the Senate of Pakistan said that Pakistan is committed to advancing parliamentary diplomacy to strengthen all-round relations with Iran.

Muhammad Sadiq Sanjrani made the remarks in the farewell meeting of Seyed Mohammad Ali Hosseini, the ambassador of Iran to Pakistan, on Tuesday at the parliament in Islamabad.

Sanjrani appreciated Hosseini's efforts to help synergize the parliaments of the two countries, especially the significant increase in meetings between parliamentary delegations of Iran and Pakistan in recent years.

The Parliament of Pakistan highly values the long-standing and fraternal relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, he said.

Expressing his satisfaction with the decision of the governments of Iran and Saudi Arabia to resume diplomatic relations, the Pakistani official considered the development to the benefit of both countries, Pakistan, the region and the Islamic world.

Hosseini, for his part, appreciated the role of the Senate of Pakistan, especially Sanjrani, in helping to strengthen joint cooperation with Iran, including encouraging the expansion of parliamentary interactions between the two countries. The two sides also discussed the project of opening the border market and the plan to increase Iran's electricity export to Pakistan.

Iran Navy Enjoys Prestige on Int'l Stage

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani hailed the capabilities of his forces, saying the Iranian navy has gained a lot of prestige on the international stage with sailing around the world in international waters.

Rear Admiral Shahram Irani, made the remarks while speaking to reporters before noon on Tuesday, where he also stated that the effectiveness and efficiency of the navy in the high is very high.

Stating that having a presence in the high seas comes with complexities, Rear Admiral Irani said, "There is no one higher than us on the list of capabilities, and when a

navy fleet is present in a country, it shows the high level of Iran's economy, culture, science and knowledge, etc."

Pointing out that the country has a lot to say in various fields, including industrial technologies, Irani added, "The effectiveness of our destroyers is such that when we enter a country, the people of that region after observing the behavior of our forces will realize many issues and are surprised."

Stating that Iran has never been isolated and has prestige on the international stage, he continued, "We visited countries in the region and the world frequently during sea voyages, and these visits have been effective in gaining that prestige."

Japan Transfers Building Retrofitting Experiences to Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the economic cooperation department of the Japanese Embassy in Tehran said that Japan is ready to transfer experiences of retrofitting buildings to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

Hiroki Nishi, in the opening ceremony of the second international conference on improving the resilience of hospitals and main buildings at the Iran Road, Housing and Urban Development Research Center (BHRC) said: "Iran and Japan bear many similarities like being prone to earthquakes."

Hiroki Nishi added: "Japan has been able to increase its capabilities in buildings resilience and dealing with earthquakes and accordingly, seeks to share these experiences with other countries, including Iran."

Pointing to the development of joint programs by Iran and Japan, Hiroki Nishi stated that holding long-term training courses aimed at reducing the risks of earthquakes, and a joint workshop on the strengthening of metallic structures are among these programs.



Iran-China Trade Expanded Since President Raisi Took Office

TEHRAN (IRNA) - China's ambassador to Iran has said that economic relations between Beijing and Tehran have expanded noticeably ever since President Ebrahim Raisi assumed office.

Since President Raisi became the president of Iran, the economic relations between Iran and China have expanded, in a way that at the end of 2022, the volume of trade between Iran and China increased by 7%, Chang Hua was quoted as saying by Navade Eghtesadi.

According to data released by China's customs administration earlier this year, the Islamic Republic and China traded \$15.795 billion worth of commodities in 2022, \$1.035 billion more than the figure for 2021, marking a 7% increase.

Iran and China officially signed a 25-year partnership agreement for comprehensive cooperation in March 2021.

The Chinese ambassador said China has been Iran's largest trading partner for 10 consecutive years.

He also invited Iranian companies to attend more economic and trade fairs in China.



Iran Criticizes UNESCO Over Designating Its Ancient Sport to Azerbaijan

TEHRAN (IP) - The President of Iran's Zurkhaneh Sports and Koshti Pahlavani Federation criticized UNESCO over the registration of Pahlavani Koshti (Wrestling) in the name of the Republic of Azerbaijan.

Mehrali Baran-Cheshme said that UNESCO has registered the culture of zurkhaneh and Pahlavani wrestling in the name of the Republic of Azerbaijan, despite the fact that there is no active wrestling club in this country.

Baran-Cheshme said that Azerbaijan has only two coaches and one referee in Pahlavani wrestling, noting that Iran just enjoys 950 active zurkhanehs.

He reminded the reporters of the internationally recognized fact that Zurkhaneh 'Sports and Koshti Pahlavani' was registered in Iran's name in 2010.

The sport is also known as Varzesh-e Bassani (Ancient sport) and its particular form of wrestling is called Koshti Pahlavani, Traditional Iranian Wrestling.

Biggest Specialized School For Autistic Children Opens

HAMEDAN (IRNA) - The biggest school specializing in educating autistic children was inaugurated in the western Iranian province of Hamedan.

The governor of Hamedan province, the caretaker of headquarters responsible for executing the Order of Imam and a number of provincial officials were present at the opening ceremony of the school.

The school includes 18 classes, a dark room, a playground, and a pool for aquatic treatment.

The construction of such a school, which meets certain students' special needs, is a step taken toward educational justice. Biggest specialized school for autistic children opens in western Iran

Autism spectrum disorder (ASD) is a disability in the brain. People with ASD have often problems with social interaction. The way they pay attention, move and learn are also different from other people. Although ASD can be diagnosed at different ages, its symptoms appear during the first two years of life.

Tehran's Int'l Book Fair To Be Highly Welcomed

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Culture predicted that 5 to 7 million people will visit Tehran's International Book Fair this year.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session on Wednesday, May 3, Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili announced to reporters that the international book fair as the greatest cultural event in the region will kick off next week.

Esmaili said that 500 publishers will participate in the event through the virtual space, with about 3,000 domestic and foreign publishers who will participate in the exhibition, in person.

He added that good subsidies have been allocated for the visitors to buy books.

Iran-Africa Annual Trade Up 2%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of trade between Iran and Africa rose two percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), the vice president of Iran and Africa Merchants Club Ruhollah Latifi announced.

He put Iran-Africa annual trade at 2.545 million tons worth \$1.278 billion.

Iran exported 2.452 million tons of products valued at \$1.183 billion to 49 African countries in the past year, showing one percent fall, and imported 92,898 tons of goods worth \$95.316 million from 23 African countries, indicating 59 percent growth, year on year, according to Latifi.

He said that South Africa with the purchase of \$305.411 million (20 percent growth), Mozambique with \$190.517 million (94 percent growth), Ghana with \$165.014 million (53 percent decrease),

Sudan with \$142.702 million (96 percent growth), Nigeria with \$129.332 million (three percent growth), Kenya with \$53.203 million (31 percent decrease), and Ivory Coast with \$41.605 million (183 percent growth) were the first seven destinations of Iranian goods in the African continent in 1401.

Latifi further announced that Tanzania with sales of \$20.899 million (43 percent growth), Kenya with \$17.277 million (174 percent growth), South Africa with \$16.637 million (158 percent growth), Ghana with \$9.136 million (22 percent growth), Seychelles with \$7.285 million (82 percent growth), Egypt with \$5.727 million (60 percent growth), and Congo with \$4.742 million (1,424 percent growth) were the first seven African sources of imports for Iran in the past year.

Iran Finalizes Car Export to Russia, Belarus

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's SAIPA Automobile Company announced an agreement to export three of its products to Russia and Belarus.

"According to the agreement, Iran is going to export 45,000 Shahin, Quick and Saina to Russia and Belarus within three years," SAIPA announced.

The Total Contract Value of this contract is 450 million EUR.

Moscow, the capital of Russia, holding the 2022 Car-Expo from August 22 to 25, 2022 hosted automobile manufacturers from Russia, Iran, Turkey, China, and some other countries.

The expo was opened with the presence of Iran's ambassador to Russia, Iran's Minister of Industry Mining and Trade, and Russia's Deputy Prime Minister, signing a memorandum of understanding (MoU) worth 700 MEUR in the field of car exports with Russia.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:12
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:33
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:08

12. In what your wives leave, your share is a half, if they leave no child; but if they leave a child, ye get a fourth; after payment of legacies and debts. In what ye leave, their share is a fourth, if ye leave no child; but if ye leave a child, they get an eighth; after payment of legacies and debts. If the man or woman whose inheritance is in question, has left neither ascendants nor descendants, but has left a brother or a sister, each one of the two gets a sixth; but if more than two, they share in a third; after payment of legacies and debts; so that no loss is caused (to any one). Thus is it ordained by Allah, and Allah is All-knowing, Most Forbearing.
Surah 4. Women (12)

Tehran to Host Int'l IRAN EXPO 2023

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The fifth edition of international IRAN EXPO as one of the largest international exhibitions of the country with presence of more than 60 countries will be held on May 17-20 at Tehran's International Permanent Fairground.

Mehdi Safari, the Deputy Minister of Economic Diplomacy of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran, in a press conference about the exhibition said that 750 local companies and companies from more than 60 countries will participate in this exhibition at the level of Minister, Advisor to the Minister and Vice President of Trade.

He emphasized: "We will host 1,500 to 2,000 people in this exhibition."

Pointing out that the policies of the 13th government have always been working with neighboring countries, Africa and Latin America, and emphasizing the export of non-oil goods, Safari said: the leader has always emphasized on economic diplomacy.

Safari further said: "The exhibition has been planned for 8 months ago and all our agencies abroad have been activated."

He added: "The distinguishing feature of this exhibition is the full financial and work support of the government for the exhibition, and the continuation of this movement is very important."

750 reputable domestic companies as well as companies from 60 countries, 15 countries at the level of minister and advisor to the minister and many countries at the level of trade deputies, are to attend the event and China is participating with more than 80 traders.

Safari added: "Considering the resumption of relations with Saudi Arabia,



a delegation from Saudi Arabia will also participate in this exhibition."

He noted: "Businessmen participating in this exhibition from the UAE, Pakistan, Russia, Turkey, Africa, and Latin America will visit 12 different petrochemical sectors and different goods, and it is expected that contracts of up to one billion dollars will be signed between Iran and other countries."

Safari said that one of the characteristics of this exhibition is the services sector like shipping as this sector is a high forex earner and accounts for 70% of forex earning of European countries through services.

He added that to maintain and promote exporting market, the country needs holding such exhibitions.

He said that soon a trade delegation from Saudi Arabia will visit Tehran and in return an Iranian trade delegation will visit Riyadh, adding that Economic Minister is to attend Islamic Banking meeting in Riyadh. He further said that a Saudi trade delegation is to visit IRAN EXPO 2023, too.

On signing agreements during the exhibition on Iran's exporting capabilities, he said that in Russia some agreements worth of \$750m were signed as \$100m of it was implemented while in IRAN EXPO 2023, some 60 countries will possible and signing of \$1b is possible.

Safari went on to say that the country should improve its infrastructures as currently it has improve comparing to the pas and it has extended its shipping line services to the Latin American and West African countries.

He also said that currently the route has been launched in the Caspian Sea for shipping goods to Russia and soon ro-ro ships in Anzali Port will start working and giving services.

Tehran to Host Iran-Kyrgyzstan Business Forum

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in collaboration with Iran-Kyrgyzstan Joint Committee is to hold the business forum on Sunday, May 6.



According to reports, concurrent with the visit of Temir Sariev, President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of Kyrgyzstan, and his 15-man trade delegation, ICCIMA is to hold the Iran-Kyrgyzstan Business Forum.

The event will be held in Sunday afternoon at the ICCIMA and several B2B meetings between the economic activists of both countries are to be held on the sidelines of the event. The Kyrgyzstan trade delegation is comprised of representatives of 15 businesses

Petrchem Output to Rise By 14.2% Until March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has plans to increase its total annual production of petrochemicals by some 14.2% in the calendar year to late March, according to a senior official in the state-run National Petrochemical Company (NPC).

NPC's head of planning and development Hassan Abbaszadeh said that annual output of petrochemicals in Iran is expected to reach 80 million metric tons (mt), up from 70 million mt reported for the year to late March this year.

Abbaszadeh said total production capacity in the Iranian petrochemical industry is around 93 million mt per year, adding that feedstock supplied to plants across the country is around 47.5 million mt of which some 70% is natural gas.

The NPC official said Iran sold some 40 million mt of petrochemical products worth \$27 billion in the year to late March of which some 28 million mt were exported to other countries, generating \$16 billion in hard currency revenues for the country.

He said a bulk of development plans introduced for the Iranian petrochemical sector would focus on increased output of six basic products, including ethylene and propylene.

He said current output capacity of basic petrochemicals in Iran is around 58 million mt, making the country the second largest supplier of those products in the region after Saudi Arabia.

Iran Oil Output Rises in 20 Months, Tops 3 mbd



SHANA (Tehran) – Iran's oil minister said the country's oil production has risen to over 3 million barrels per day (mbd) in the past 20 months ago.

Addressing the 14th Iran Petrochemical Forum (IPF), Javad Owji added the country's crude gas output has exceeded 1 billion cubic meters.

In spite of having 33 trillion cubic meters of gas reserves and 154 billion barrels of recoverable oil, the country is suffering from lack of enough investment in its oil and gas industry, regretted the minister, adding, "Based on the Sixth Plan, the sweet gas production capacity should have reached 1.25 billion cubic meters."

Iran's current oil and gas production capacities is not at all proportional to its recoverable reserves, said Owji, pointing out that Russia is now producing 7.5 mbd while its recoverable reserves are less than Iran's.

The 13th (Raisi) administration and the Ministry of Petroleum have given top priority to the increase in oil and gas production and the setup of petrochemical complexes with the aim of securing the country's energy supply, preventing the selling of raw materials, creating added value, and neutralizing sanctions since they took office, Owji underlined.

"Now, 70 petrochemical complexes are active in the country," said the minister, continuing that more than 80 billion dollars have been invested in domestic petrochemical industry and the same investment is needed to implement 107 underway petrochemical projects.

The ministry will provide petrochemical complexes with a steady supply of feedstock by developing integrated refinery and petrochemical complexes and boosting oil and gas outputs, assured Owji.

Iran Seeks Oil Partnerships to Boost Investment

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran is seeking partnerships with other countries to boost investment in its oil sector, according to a senior aide to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Ali Aghamohammadi, who serves as head of the economic group at Leader's office, said on Monday that Iran is determined to expand its petroleum sector through setting up partnerships between domestic companies and major international energy firms.

"The Leader's order is also this that several big oil companies should be formed for activity at the international level because if we want a promising country we have to cooperate with other countries in the field of oil," said Aghamohammadi. He made the comments in a meeting with top executives of domestic oil and gas companies.

In a speech last week, Aghamohammadi had signaled that Iran would seek to replicate a recent rapprochement with Saudi Arabia in its political and economic ties with the West.

"You should be aware that the situation with the West will change as it changed with neighboring Arab countries," he told a gathering of businesses and government officials in Iran's southern province of Hormozgan on Saturday.

His comments about increased investment in Iran's oil sector come as crude oil production in the country has remained at relatively low levels in recent years mainly because of US sanctions.

Nearly 226,000 Tons of Alumina Powder Produced in a Year

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran has produced 225,942 tons of alumina powder in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

As reported, the figure shows a two percent drop as compared to the output in 1400.

Aluminum oxide, which is commonly called alumina, is an inert, odorless, white amorphous material often used

in industrial ceramics.

Alumina is an important ceramic material for industrial applications. The numerous fields of application range from construction materials, to filling materials, as well as abrasives and catalysts.

In plants and mechanical engineering, alumina ceramics are mainly used for wear and corrosion protection.

The particle size distribution largely determines the application range and the quality of an alumina powder. Reliably identifying the differences in particle size is therefore an essential requirement of the measuring instrument.

KANS to Honor Young Researchers of Islamic World

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Knowledge Application and Notion for Society (KANS) is to honor six young researchers of the Islamic world in 2023 KANS competition

Head of the 3rd KANS Scientific Competition for u-45 competitors Mr. Saeid Sohrabpour in a press conference said that the competition will honor six top young researchers of the Islamic world.

Speaking to reporters, Sohrabpour first pointed to the different activities of the Mustafa Science and Technology Foundation (MSTF) including the Mustafa (PBUH) Prize, STEP (Science and Technology Exchange Program), KANS, and Noor, explaining "Most of the Muslim scientists have great effective collaborations with those in western countries. The Mustafa (PBUH) Science and Technology Foundation aims to foster collaborations among the scientists inside the Islamic countries."

"In this round of the KANS scientific competition a new section is added," he pointed out, stating that "this section, titled 'The Future Scientist,' is devoted to researchers under the age of 30. One individual is selected to receive the award for this section."

In this round of KANS, 'The Future Scientist' is from Azerbaijan.

"The participants had to send 3-5 minute videos. The judges were university professors from around the country," he noted.

According to Sohrabpour, "Among the received works, 20 works from 12 countries reached the final stage. In the final stage, 6 winners were selected."

"The final judgment of these works was carried out online in April 2023 with the virtual presence of the participants," he added.

"The usefulness of the participants' ideas is of great importance in this competition," he emphasized.

The 3rd KANS Scientific Competition ceremony will be held on May 9-12 concurrently with International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX)



2023 in Pardis Technology Park.

Then Gholam Hossein Halvaei, Head of scientific and technological cooperation development at the MSTF, explained details about the event.

He briefly talked about the selection process, stating that 3 rounds of judgement were held. "We had 100 judges during the process," he said.

"In the second round of KANS competition," he pointed out, "we started to contact different organizations. These organizations present some challenges and problems. The KANS winners are linked to them so that their ideas may solve those challenges in real-life."

"In the 3rd round of KANS scientific competition, we received 78 challenges from 16 pavilions," he said.

He further noted that in this round of KANS, 881 works were received overall in 6 areas: "food and agriculture industries", "health and medical equipment", "water, energy and environment", "electricity, electronics and robotics", "information and communication technology and artificial intelligence" and "mining and mining industries."

Halvaei announced that the 6 winners in the areas of the competition are from different countries: in the field of "food and agriculture industries" from Qatar, "electricity, electronics and robotics" from Iran, "information and communication technology and artificial intelligence" from Malaysia, "health and medical equipment" from Iran, and "mining and mining industries" from Malaysia.

The awarding ceremony of the 3rd round of KANS Scientific Competition will be held on the sidelines of the International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX 2023) from May 9 to 12 at Tehran's Pardis Technology Park.

KANS scientific competition is held biannually for researchers and scientists under 45 years of age, with the aim of promoting and developing science and technology for young scientists of the Islamic world.

The first round of this competition was held in 2018. The closing ceremony of the second round was held in May 2022.

Opponents Make Last-Ditch Effort To Stop French Pension Law

PARIS (AP) - Opponents of a law that would raise the retirement age in France from 62 to 64 are making last-ditch plans to prevent the change that is set to take effect in September.

The country's main labor unions on Tuesday called for another round of nationwide demonstrations and strikes on June 6. May Day protests across France on Monday drew either 800,000 people — that's according to French authorities — or 2.3 million people, which was the estimate given by organizers.

France's top constitutional body is expected to rule Wednesday on a request from opposition lawmakers to start a lengthy process that could ultimately lead to a bill or a referendum to restore the minimum retirement age of 62.



China's FM Makes Rare Visit to Myanmar Border

BEIJING (AP) - China's foreign minister called for stability and a crackdown on cross-border criminal activity along the country's border with Myanmar, during an unusual visit to the volatile region.

The 2,129-kilometer (1,323-mile) border runs through densely forested mountains and has long been notorious for drug smuggling into China from the "Golden Triangle" region where the borders of Laos, Myanmar and Thailand meet.

The United Nations says the production of opium in Myanmar has flourished since the military seized power in 2021, with the cultivation of poppies up by a third in the past year as eradication efforts have dropped off and the faltering economy has led more people toward the drug trade.



Russian Defense Chief Wants Wartime Missile Output Doubled



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's defense chief urged a state company to double its missile output, as a possible Ukrainian counteroffensive looms and both sides in the 14-month war reportedly feel an ammunition crunch.

Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu, speaking at a meeting with top military brass, said the state-owned Tactical Missiles Corporation had been fulfilling its contracts in a timely manner.

But, Shoigu added, "right now it is necessary to double the production of high-precision weapons in the shortest possible time." Analysts have been trying to figure out whether Russia is running low on high-precision ammunition, as its missile barrages against Ukraine have become less frequent and smaller in scale.

The U.K. defense ministry noted in an assessment Tuesday that "logistics problems remain at the heart of Russia's struggling campaign in Ukraine."

"Russia does not have enough munitions to achieve success on the offensive," it said.

Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov on Tuesday described Washington's latest estimate of Russia's losses in Ukraine as "spun out of thin air."

The White House said Monday it now estimated that just since December Russia had suffered 100,000 casualties, including more than 20,000 killed, as Ukraine rebuffed a heavy assault by Russian forces in eastern Ukraine.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby said the U.S. estimate was based on newly declassified American intelligence. He did not explain how the intelligence community derived the number.

"Washington doesn't have the opportunity to give any correct numbers. They don't have such data," Peskov said. Ukrainian forces, meanwhile, say they are readying their own counteroffensive — and stockpiling ammunition to sustain it along potentially long supply lines.

Ukrainian Defense Minister Oleksiy Reznikov said Monday that the "key things" for the assault's success were

"the availability of weapons, prepared, trained people, our defenders and defenders who know their plan at their level, as well as providing this offensive with all the necessary things — shells, ammunition, fuel, protection, etc."

"As of today, we are entering the home stretch, when we can say: 'Yes, everything is ready,'" Reznikov said in televised comments. Also Tuesday, Denmark said it was donating 1.7 billion kroner (\$251 million) in aid to Ukraine, including mine clearance vehicles, munition, field bridges and money for air defense that will be needed for a counteroffensive against Russian forces that are dug in behind multilayered defensive lines, including hundreds of kilometers (miles) of trenches.

"We know that the Russians have entrenched themselves in the occupied territories of Ukraine with trenches, minefields and other obstacles to stop a Ukrainian offensive," acting Danish Defense Minister Troels Lund Poulsen said.

"The material in the donation package is important to pave the way for Ukrainian tanks and the armored infantry in the front line."

In recent months, amid winter weather, the conflict has become bogged down in a war of attrition that has depleted ammunition stocks.

The Kremlin's forces took aim at Ukraine's critical infrastructure with long-range strikes, while Kyiv has zeroed in on Russian targets with precision artillery provided by its Western allies.

In February, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg warned that Ukraine was using up ammunition far faster than its allies could provide it.

According to some estimates, Ukraine was at that time firing up to 6,000-7,000 artillery shells each day, around a third of the daily amount that Russia is using almost one year into the war.

UN Leader Slams Taliban Over Women's Rights

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - UN chief Antonio Guterres slammed the Taliban government's "unprecedented" curbs on Afghan women's rights Tuesday as he highlighted international fears over stability in the crisis-stricken country.

After a two-day meeting with leading powers concerned by events in Afghanistan, Guterres did not indicate whether a current review of UN operations would call for a withdrawal because of a ban on women working for aid agencies.

But he said: "To achieve our objectives we cannot disengage and many (in the meeting) called for engagement to be more effective."

Guterres called the Doha talks to seek new ways to pressure the Taliban government after it banned Afghan women from working for UN agencies and NGOs.

That has added to international outrage after they were also barred from almost all secondary and university education and most government jobs. Taliban authorities were not invited.



New Zealand PM Favors Nation Becoming a Republic

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - New Zealand Prime Minister Chris Hipkins said he personally favors his country becoming a republic, but it's not a change he intends to push for as leader.

Hipkins made the comments to reporters hours before he was due to depart for this week's coronation of King Charles III in London.

New Zealand, a former British colony, is self-governing but Charles retains a largely ceremonial role as head of state and king. Charles is represented in New Zealand by a governor-general.

Like many former British colonies, New Zealand continues to wrestle with what — if any — constitutional role the British monarchy should play in modern times.

Barbados chose to become a republic in 2021. Jamaica last year said it plans to pursue independence. And Australia in February decided to remove the British monarch from the last of its banknotes, although an image of Charles is expected to feature on coins.

"Ideally, in time, New Zealand will become a fully independent country, will stand on our own two feet in the world, as we by and large do now," Hipkins said. "I don't think that swapping out the governor-general for some other form of head of state is necessarily an urgent priority right now, though."

Hipkins faces an election later this year and has already ditched many of his government's more contentious policies as he tries to refocus the political agenda on what he describes as bread-and-butter issues such as the cost of living.

Hipkins unexpectedly rose to power following the shock decision in January of former Prime Minister Jacinda Ardern to step down.

Ardern had previously said she believed New Zealand would eventually become a republic but it was not a legislative priority. Hipkins, however, stated his own support of republicanism more forcefully than Ardern. "I believe we should ultimately be an independent country," he said.

But he said the current constitutional arrangements were working well and he wasn't interested in pushing the republic debate onto New Zealanders.

"The participants are worried about the stability of Afghanistan and expressed those serious concerns," said Guterres.

The UN review of its Afghanistan mission is to be completed by Friday. The world body says it faces the "appalling choice" of whether to leave the country where millions depend on food aid.

The two-day meeting -- involving envoys from the United States, Russia, China and 20 other countries and organizations, including major European donors and neighbours such as Pakistan -- also discussed fears over terrorism and drug trafficking in the South Asian nation.

"The current ban on Afghan women working for the United Nations and national and international NGOs is unacceptable and puts lives in jeopardy" because of the role they play in alleviating the dire conditions, Guterres told a press conference.

"We will never be silent in the face of unprecedented and systemic attacks on women and girls' rights," said Guterres.

Crowds of Those Seeking Rescue Swell at Sudan's Main Seaport

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Exhausted Sudanese and foreigners joined growing crowds at Sudan's main seaport, waiting to be evacuated from the chaos-stricken nation after more than two weeks of fighting increasingly turned the capital of Khartoum into a ghost town.

Others packed buses and trucks heading to Sudan's northern border with Egypt.

Since fighting erupted April 15, fierce clashes have taken place in residential areas of Khartoum and the neighboring city of Omdurman, just across the Nile. The sounds of gunfire and explosions were heard again Tuesday.

"Much of the capital has become empty," said Abdalla al-Fatih, a Khartoum resident. He said everyone in his street has left.

The battle for control of Sudan erupted after months of escalating tensions between the military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and a rival paramilitary group called the Rapid Support Forces, commanded by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

Al-Fatih's family managed to get out of Khartoum over the weekend after they spent the past two weeks trapped in their home in Khartoum's neighborhood of Kafouri, a major flashpoint.

They arrived in Port Sudan on the Red Sea late Monday, after an exhausting 20-hour trip, he said. There, they found thousands, including many women and children, camping outside the port area. Many

had been there for more than a week, with no food and other services, he said.

Port Sudan has become a hub for foreign governments to evacuate their citizens by air and sea.

Tariq Abdel-Hameed was one of around 2,000 Syrians in Port Sudan waiting to be evacuated by ferries that transport foreigners to Saudi Arabia's coastal city of Jeddah or airlifted out of Sudan.

Some stayed in an open area at the port, while others camped in mosques or hostels in the city, he said. Some 200 Syrians have been evacuated since the crisis began, including 35 on Friday on a Jeddah-bound vessel, he added. A first Damascus-bound flight carrying dozens of patients and elderly people is scheduled to take off later Tuesday, Abdel-Hameed said.

At the congested crossing points with Egypt, thousands of families have waited for days inside buses or sought temporary shelter in the border city of Wadi Halfa to finalize their paperwork to be allowed into Egypt.

Yusuf Abdel-Rahman, a Sudanese university student, said he crossed into Egypt along with his family, through the Ashkit crossing point late Monday. They spent their night at a hostel in Egypt's southern city of Aswan, and plan to board a train to Cairo later Tuesday, he said.

Abdel-Rahman's family went first to another crossing point, Arqin, over the weekend, but it was so crowded that they couldn't reach the customs area.



Serbia, Kosovo Leaders in EU-Backed Talks to Normalize Ties

PRISTINA (Dispatches)

- The leaders of Serbia and Kosovo meet in Brussels to continue talks on the implementation of a European Union-backed 11-point plan to normalize ties between the two, but tensions continue to simmer.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell will convene the high-level meeting between Serbian President Aleksandar Vucic and Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti. They are expected to endorse a declaration on missing persons and also discuss the first draft statute on the creation of an association of Serb majority municipalities in Kosovo — two delicate issues for the former war foes.

The meeting follows one in February when both leaders gave tacit approval to the EU-sponsored plan to end months of political crises, and a March summit in North Macedonia where Belgrade and Pristina tentatively agreed on how to implement the plan.

Miroslav Lajcak, Borrell's envoy for the Belgrade-Pristina negotiations, said Tuesday's meeting is "a crucial step forward and it's important to avoid any actions that could worsen the atmosphere."

Few of the agreements reached between the two countries in the 12-year-long EU-facilitated negotiations have been applied. Brussels and the United States often intervene to calm down tense situations between Belgrade and Pristina, more so in the past year since the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

Belgrade insists Pristina must implement a 2013 agreement to establish an association of the municipalities in the north of Kosovo that have a Serb-majority population. It would coordinate work on education, health care, land planning and economic development at the local level. Kosovo's Constitutional Court later declared the plan unconstitutional, ruling it wasn't inclusive of other ethnicities and could entail the use of executive powers.

Serbia says no progress is possible in the talks before the association is tackled. Foreign Minister Ivica Dacic said Kosovo will try to avoid any movement on the topic. "We heard the same 10 years ago. Everyone was thrilled that it was a historic act. Ten years passed and the association of Serb municipalities did not happen," said Dacic.

Local elections were held last month in Serb-dominated communes in northern Kosovo after Serb representatives had left their posts last year. The vote was overwhelmingly boycotted by ethnic Serbs.



AI May Be More Empathetic Than Real Doctors



LONDON (Dispatches) - We rely on doctors for compassion in times of need but now an innovative, yet somewhat disturbing, technology is trying to step in — AI.

Artificial intelligence mimics the human cognitive processes and a new study published in the journal JAMA Network says healthcare is about to see a change.

Doctors not only help patients with their physical complications but also provide them with emotional support and empathy. The findings suggest that whether it's lending a hand of comfort or presenting accurate medical information, ChatGPT, an AI chatbot released in November 2022, is much superior.

"For the first time, we compared AI and physicians' responses to the same patient messages, and AI won in a landslide," says John Ayers, the study leader from the Qualcomm Institute at the University of California, San Diego. "This doesn't mean AI will replace your physician. But it does mean a physician using AI can potentially respond to more messages with higher-quality responses and more empathy."

While comparing doctor and AI responses to over 200 medical questions, a panel of medical specialists discovered that around 80% of ChatGPT's solutions were more nuanced, accurate, and comprehensive than those provided by doctors.

ChatGPT wasn't a slouch, even in terms of bedside manner. Less than 5% of doctoral remarks were rated as "empathetic" or "very empathetic," but AI replies had a 45% empathy rating.

In a cross-sectional research employing 195 randomly selected patient queries from a social media forum, a panel of trained healthcare professionals assessed doctors' and chatbots' responses to patients' questions submitted on a public social media forum. The quality and empathetic scores of the chatbot responses were significantly higher than those of the doctor responses.

The research team emphasized how the COVID-19 pandemic had caused an increase in the number of people seeking virtual medical attention. Patients seeking medical assistance have sent an appreciable and consistent increase in emails, texts, and hospital portal communications, according to doctors.

The "AskDocs" forum on the social media website Reddit is where researchers gathered a random sample of medical queries for their investigation. More than 450,000 people frequently use the open forum to get filtered responses from licensed doctors. A total of 195 actual patient-doctor interactions were taken from the website. The first inquiries were repeated to ChatGPT. Then, panels of three licensed health care professionals, selected in different ways from the doctor and ChatGPT responses, received both of them.

A chatbot produced accurate and sympathetic answers to patient inquiries posted in an online forum for this cross-sectional investigation. In clinical contexts, further investigation of this technology is necessary. For instance, a chatbot may create replies that doctors could subsequently amend. The use of AI assistants may enhance replies, reduce physician burnout, and enhance patient outcomes, as further evaluated by randomized studies.

To see how ChatGPT answers, Healthnews asked the AI tool for some answers regarding fatigue. Here is what it said:

"If you're feeling fatigued, there are several things you can try to help alleviate your symptoms:

*Get enough sleep: Try to get at least 7-8 hours of sleep each night. Make sure your sleeping environment is conducive to restful sleep, meaning it is dark, quiet, and comfortable.

*Eat a healthy diet: Ensure that you are eating a balanced diet with plenty of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, and lean protein. Limit your intake of processed and sugary foods.

Why Does Your Life Flash Before Your Eyes Near Death?



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Survivors of close calls with death often recall extraordinary experiences: seeing light at the end of a tunnel, floating outside their own bodies, encountering deceased loved ones or recapping major life events in an instant.

The fact that these stories share so many elements in common and come from people from diverse cultural backgrounds points to a possible biological mechanism -- one that has yet to be de-mystified by scientists.

In a new paper published Monday in the Proceedings of the National Academy of Science (PNAS), researchers at the University of Michigan found evidence of surges in brain activity associated with consciousness in two dying patients.

While not the first study of its kind, what sets the new research apart is that it's detailed in a way "that's never been done before," senior author Jimo Borjigin, whose lab is devoted to understanding the neurological basis of consciousness, told AFP.

The team looked back at the records of four patients who died from cardiac arrest while on electroencephalogram (EEG) monitoring.

All four fell into comas and were removed from life support after it was determined they were beyond medical help.

When taken off their ventilators, two of the four patients -- a 24-year-old woman and a 77-year-old woman -- saw increases in their heart rates as well as surges of brain waves in the gamma frequency -- the fastest such brain activity, which is associated with consciousness.

Earlier studies -- including a prominent paper published in 2022 about an 87-year-old man who died from a fall -- have also found spikes in gamma waves in some people near the point of death.

The University of Michigan paper went further by examining in greater depth which parts of the brain lit up, with the activity detected in the "posterior cortical hot zone" -- comprised of the temporal, parietal and occipital lobes, which are associated with changes in consciousness.

"If this part of the brain lights up, that means the patient is seeing something, can hear something, and they might feel sensations out of the body," said Borjigin, adding that the region was "on fire."

Brain and heart activity were monitored, second by second, for the last few hours of the patients' life, contributing to the strength of the analysis, she added.

It's not clear why two of the patients experienced these potential signs of "covert consciousness" while two did not, though Borjigin speculated their history of seizures might have primed their brains in some way.

Owing to the small sample size, the authors cautioned against making wide-ranging inferences.

What's more, it's not possible to confirm that the patients really had any visions as they did not live to tell the tale.

Borjigin hopes in the future to collect data on hundreds more people -- increasing the chances that some will actually survive.

One way to do so might be to create an experiment that simulates a near-death experience while the patient is being monitored under lab conditions.

Chinese Medicinal Herb Reduces Inflammation in Heart Attack Patients



LONDON (Dispatches) - The CDC reports more than 800,000 Americans suffer a heart attack each year. A new study from the United Kingdom reveals the benefits of a traditional Chinese herb to improve the condition of heart attack patients.

Research from Newcastle University finds the plant-based compound from Astragalus called TA-65 may help keep the heart healthy following a heart attack. Results published in GeroScience show TA-65 reduces inflammation and improves the immunity of patients.

Astragalus has been used for centuries in traditional Chinese medicine. It is often combined with other herbs to relieve symptoms of upper respiratory infections, allergic rhinitis (hay fever), asthma, chronic fatigue syndrome, and chronic kidney disease. The U.S. National Institute of Health (NIH) notes topical use of astragalus promotes improved blood flow and quick wound healing.

TA-65 is a dietary supplement that contains a molecule called cycloastragenol. TA-65 supplements have been proven to activate telomerase, which slows or stops the shortening of telomeres, which is a DNA structures at the end of chromosomes. Some studies have found the effects of TA-65 to help in the battle against aging.

Researchers isolated TA-65 from Astragalus to create a plant-based compound that maintains or rebuilds telomeres — the region of repetitive DNA sequences at the end of a chromosome. Previous investigations have discovered a link between shorter telomeres leading to heart disease.

"Because It's There": The Enduring Appeal of Everest



KATHMANDU (Dispatches) - Mount Everest is set to see record numbers of climbers this season, with around 1,000 people expected to attempt mountaineering's ultimate goal.

But scaling the awesome 8,849-metre (29,032-foot) peak is both expensive and dangerous, and possibly becoming more so because of overcrowding and climate change.

As the season gets under way, AFP looks at why Everest is such a magnet for climbers and how times are changing on the roof of the world.

Everest, known as Sagarmatha in Nepali and Chomolungma in Tibetan, has captured the imagination of climbers ever since it was identified as the world's tallest mountain above sea level.

The first expedition was launched in 1921 by the British, but it would take another 32 years and several more expeditions before Nepali Tenzing Norgay and New Zealander Edmund Hillary would finally reach its summit.

Seventy years on, commercialisation has drawn crowds of climbers to the slopes of the mountain, and more than 6,000 people have reached its summit. A majority of them have been in the last two decades.

"Because it's there," British climber George Mallory famously said in 1923 in reply to a reporter's question as to why he wanted to climb Everest.

For others, more visible advocacy is their motivation.

"Everest is the tallest mountain and your message from Everest can get the most attention," double-amputee veteran Hari Budha Magar, who is climbing to raise awareness for disabilities, told AFP.

Costs range from \$45,000 to \$200,000, depending on the services included and the level of luxury. This includes an \$11,000 permit for foreign climbers, plus travel, insurance, kit and most importantly, guides.

Pasang Tenje Sherpa of Everest expedition operator Pioneer Adventure said costs have been pushed up in recent years by mountaineers wanting a better climbing experience.

"There is a huge difference now, and companies have to compete on providing the best services to the clients," Sherpa said.

At the base camp, climbers can now enjoy a hearty breakfast, wifi to keep in touch with loved ones -- and to post photos on social media -- brewed coffee and other creature comforts unthinkable for the early climbers.

Everest has always been dangerous, with more than 300 people killed since climbing began, according to the Himalayan Database.

In 2014, an immense, tumbling wall of snow, ice and rock killed 16 Nepali guides on the Khumbu Icefall in one of the deadliest accidents on the Himalayas.

This season began on a tragic note, with the death of three Nepali guides on the same treacherous formation after a chunk of falling glacial ice swept them into a deep crevasse.

Although no extensive research has been done into climate change and mountaineering risks in the Himalayas, climbers have reported widening crevasses, running water on previously snowy slopes and increasing formation of glacial lakes.

Colombia Grapples With Escobar's Hippopotamus Legacy



DORADAL (Dispatches) - In their homeland in Africa, they are responsible for more human deaths than almost any other animal, but in Colombia, hippos have become loved members of the local community and a tourist attraction.

However, in a town close to the city of Medellin, this legacy of the late drug baron Pablo Escobar, is increasingly posing a problem, and one that experts think may soon turn deadly.

Several months ago, one of hippos burst into a school yard in Doradal with both pupils and parents present.

"The mothers get scared when they see an animal of that size," teacher Dunia Arango told AFP.

This time, the uninvited guest chomped at some fruit trees before moving off into the adjacent fields.

But a bloot of hippos have set up home in a lake just 20 meters (yards) from the school.

"There are about 35 children playing that could approach them and provoke a tragedy," said David Echeverri, an official from the local environment authority.

"While they may look very calm, at any moment, given their highly unpredictable behavior, they can attack, as has happened before," he added.

John Aristides, 33, remembers very well that afternoon in October 2021 when he was fishing on the banks of a creek when a hippopotamus "lunged at me and hit me on the head with its lips."

He slipped trying to get away and was bitten on the arm.

"It grabbed me and threw me two meters," he added. "It didn't tear off my arm because they have very wide teeth."

But Aristides still spent a month in hospital recovering.

Japan Airlines' Annual Net Profit Returns to Black

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan Airlines logged today an annual net profit for the first time in three years, buoyed by soaring domestic and international demand for travel after pandemic restrictions were eased. The carrier, Japan's second-largest by market share, said net profit for the year to March was 34.4 billion yen (US\$250 million) — a turnaround from a net loss of 177 billion yen in the previous financial year. "Air passenger demand recovered steadily as the shift toward balancing the Covid-19 pandemic's prevention and socioeconomic activities gained momentum," a company statement said. JAL's results were last in the black in the year to March 2020, just before Covid-19 began to cause global chaos.



Experts Split on Chance of Global Recession, Cost of Living Unrest

LONDON (Dispatches) - Chief economists are evenly divided over the likelihood of a global recession as growth and inflation dynamics vary across regions, but most of them expect the cost of living to remain acute in many countries, according to a survey released Tuesday by the World Economic Forum (WEF).

The WEF's "Chief Economists Outlook: May 2023" report, which includes responses from leading chief economists from both the public and private sectors, revealed that equal shares of 45% of economists see a global recession this year as likely or unlikely.

However, their responses vary depending on the region. With China's reopening, Asia is expected to have the most buoyant economic activity. Half of the economists forecast moderate, 43% strong economic growth this year in the country.

Accordingly, 93% of chief economists expect moderate growth in East Asia and the Pacific. In comparison, 50% and 75% of top economists expect weak growth in the U.S. and Europe this year. Latin America, the Caribbean and sub-Saharan Africa remain at the weaker end of the outlook, as over half of the respondents predict weak growth.

Economists marked an uptick in inflation in all regions compared to their previous expectations in January 2023.

High inflation is set to continue this year, with 90% and 68% of economists expecting high or very high inflation in Europe and the U.S., respectively, with 74% and 73% of them seeing high or very high inflation both in sub-Saharan Africa and Latin America and the Caribbean, respectively.

A slight majority also expects the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) region to record high inflation this year, while China remains an outlier, with only 14% expecting high inflation this year.

According to 79% of the chief economists, central banks will face a trade-off between managing inflation and maintaining banking sector stability. In comparison, 82% expect interest rate rises to slow in the face of financial stability concerns. Meanwhile, 76% of economists think central banks will struggle to bring inflation to their target rates. According to 76% of the chief economists, the cost of living will continue to be at crisis levels in many countries.

Cost of living pressures are particularly acute in some developing economies, where domestic price dynamics are exacerbated by currency depreciation, the WEF said in the report.

"With global wage growth struggling to keep up with prices, the risk is that vulnerable communities will be pushed further into poverty, especially under tighter financial conditions," the report cautioned.

However, despite the recent bank collapses and financial market turbulence, the chief economists express confidence in the systemic integrity of global markets.

Some 69% of the respondents characterized the recent bank sector distress as "isolated episodes with limited additional impact." In comparison, 67% say further bank failures or severe financial disruptions are somewhat or highly likely in 2023.

More than 80% expect businesses will find bank lending more challenging to secure, leading to a slowdown in investment and activity in the technology sector due to recent financial disruption.

Pakistan Inflation Hits Record-High 36.42%

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's year-on-year inflation hit its highest-ever level of 36.42 percent in April, after the government introduced new taxes and raised fuel prices to try to meet International Monetary Fund (IMF) conditions for a crucial bailout.

Government data released Tuesday showed month-on-month inflation was 2.41 percent, while average inflation for the past 12 months stood at 28.23 percent.

Years of financial mismanagement and political instability have pushed Pakistan's economy to the brink of collapse, exacerbated by a global energy crisis and devastating floods that submerged a third of the country in 2022.

Poor Pakistanis are feeling the brunt of the economic turmoil, with rising food prices and soaring transport costs.

"Inflation has broken our backs. Savings aside, it is difficult to meet even the monthly expenses," said Zaibunissa, a housewife in Rawalpindi.

Food prices were up by nearly 50 percent in April from a year earlier, with transport costs 57 percent higher.

To pull the country out of its spiral, Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif is battling to revive the next tranche of a \$6.5 billion loan deal agreed with the IMF in 2019.

The global lender is demanding more stringent reforms, including tax rises and subsidy cuts, likely to rile voters ahead of a general election due no later than October.

Pakistan also has to win guarantees of bilateral support from friendly nations, with China, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates already contributing.

Australia Hikes Rates Despite Signs of Slowing Inflation

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Australia's central bank announced a surprise interest rate hike to an 11-year high on Tuesday, dashing hopes it would hold them steady as inflation shows signs of slowing.

The Reserve Bank of Australia lifted the key interest rate by 25 basis points to

3.85 percent, wrong-footing many economists who predicted there would be no change.

Figures released in late April showed the consumer price index dropping to 7 percent, down from 7.8 percent in December but still stubbornly above the bank's target of between 2 and 3 percent.

Reserve Bank governor Philip Lowe said inflation had "passed its peak", but was still too high.

"Given the importance of returning inflation to target within a reasonable timeframe, the board judged that a further increase in interest rates was warranted today," he said.

Lowe warned it could take a "couple of years" before inflation returned to an acceptable level, and flagged further rate hikes could be on the horizon.

"Some further tightening of monetary policy may be required to ensure that inflation returns to target in a reasonable timeframe, but that will depend upon how the economy and inflation evolve."

The Reserve Bank held interest rates steady at its last meeting in April, ending a series of 10 successive hikes in a row.

Lowe said this had allowed the bank to take stock of the economy, before deciding on the latest rise.

Australians are now forking out an extra Aus\$250 (\$169) every week to meet the repayments on an average mortgage of about Aus\$600,000 (\$407,000).

Like other countries fighting inflation, Australia faces a delicate balancing act to bring prices down without stifling economic growth and sparking a recession.

Central banks around the world continue to tighten monetary policy in the face of runaway food and energy prices, exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

Turkish Factory Activity Gathers pace, Europe's Downturn Deepens

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's factory activity expanded at a faster pace in April, a survey showed Tuesday, propelled by growth in new orders and output, as the sector continued its recovery in the wake of massive earthquakes in early February.

A similar survey showed eurozone factory activity contracted further last month, albeit not by as much as initially thought, while the cost of raw materials fell at the fastest pace in nearly three years.

Turkey's Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for manufacturing rose to 51.5 last month from 50.9 in March, staying above the 50-point mark that separates expansion from contraction, the Istanbul Chamber of Industry (ISO) and S&P Global said.

More robust demand led to an increase in new orders and output, the panel said, with some respondents indicating rising workloads amid the rebound from the Feb. 6 earthquakes, which killed more than 50,000 people, razed hundreds of thousands of buildings and ripped through the southern region's infrastructure.

"The recovery in the Turkish manufacturing sector gathered momentum in April, with gains in new orders and output solidifying and prompting a renewed increase in purchasing activity," said Andrew Harker, economics director at S&P Global Market Intelligence.

Backlogs of work increased for the first time in 14 months due to a combination of higher new orders and disruption from the earthquake, S&P Global said.

Supply chains were still disrupted after the earthquakes as firms reported difficulties in obtaining materials, the survey showed, with delays preventing a rise in stocks of purchases.

Although some firms took on staff, the number of retirements due to a new law kept employment levels broadly unchanged in the manufacturing sector, the panel said. The Turkish lira weakness and high material costs caused input prices to rise sharply and manufacturers increased their output prices as well, albeit at the softest rate since August 2022, the panel said.

Meanwhile, the HCOB final manufacturing PMI in the eurozone fell to 45.8 in April from March's 47.3, just beating a preliminary reading of 45.5 but well below the 50-point line for a 10th consecutive month.

An index measuring output, which feeds into a composite PMI due on Thursday that is seen as a good guide to economic health, dropped back below the breakeven mark to 48.5 from 50.4. "This decline has been fairly broad-based across the eurozone, with regional PMI indices in France and Italy also showing a drop in output, while output in Germany and Spain was nearly stagnant," said Cyrus de la Rubia, chief economist at Hamburg Commercial Bank.

Input costs falling at the fastest pace since May 2020 meant factories barely increased their prices yet demand still weakened. The output prices index fell to a 29-month low of 51.6 from 53.4.

U.S. Job Openings Fall To Lowest Level Since April 2021



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. job openings hit their lowest level since April 2021 in a sign that the Federal Reserve's efforts to cool the job market through interest rate hikes is paying off.

The latest Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS report, released Tuesday revealed 9.6 million job openings at the end of March, down from 9.9 million in February. In April 2021, they stood at 9.3 million.

The decline in job openings moves closer to the "better balance" in labor markets that Federal Reserve Chair Jerome Powell and other Fed officials have referenced.

"The decline in job openings since the start of the year indicates the cumulative impact of the Fed's aggressive rate hike campaign is starting to bite," economists at Oxford Economics wrote. "However, the level of openings is still elevated, and we expect the Fed to opt for another 25bps increase this week as it looks to ensure that the rebalancing of supply and demand in the labor market continues."

The Fed's latest meeting started Tuesday, with Fed officials expected to deliberate on what's next in the fastest interest rate hike cycle in four decades. Fed officials consider reports like JOLTS and other economic data as signs of whether its aggressive rate hike path is cooling inflation. Part of what has driven prices higher is wage growth resulting from a hot job market.

The Fed will announce its latest policy decision at 2 p.m. ET Wednesday, with Fed Chair Jay Powell set to hold a press conference a half-hour later. According to data from the CME Group, markets are placing an 87% chance on the Fed raising rates by 0.25% on Wednesday.

A 0.25% hike in interest rates would push the Fed's benchmark rate to a range of 5%-5.25%. The benchmark rate hasn't breached 5% since July 2007.

Hong Kong Reports Q1 GDP Growth After 2022 Contraction

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Hong Kong's economy grew in the first quarter of 2023, the city's leader said Tuesday, ending a disastrous year-long spell in which the finance hub was effectively closed for business due to pandemic restrictions.

Chief Executive John Lee said the city's quarterly gross domestic product had grown 2.7 percent on-year, reversing contractions in the previous four quarters, including a 4.1 percent drop in the last stretch of 2022.

"A series of large-scale promotional events have boosted tourism and consumption and improved the economy," Lee said at a press briefing.

"As the mainland economy continues to grow at a fast pace and local aviation capacity speeds up its recovery, I believe Hong Kong's economy in the second quarter will be better than that of the first."

Hong Kong recorded one of the world's highest per capita Covid death rates as it dealt with a wave of the highly transmissible Omicron variant early last year.

A series of restrictions on travel and social gatherings saw chunks of its economy shut down and the city's exports dwindle, leading to a drop in GDP in all four quarters in 2022.

At the beginning of 2023, Hong Kong's finance chief unveiled a US\$97 billion budget aimed at resuscitating the city's fortunes. The revival measures included cash handouts for more than six million people, a series of tax breaks and welfare allowances, and a new campaign to revive tourism in the city.

First quarter private consumption expenditure increased by 12.5 percent year-on-year, compared to 1.7 percent in the preceding quarter.

"Private consumption expenditure showed notable growth as sentiment improved sharply along with the removal of anti-epidemic measures in both Hong Kong and the mainland," a government spokesperson said.

Both import and export of goods registered declines, by 14.5 percent and 18.7 percent respectively, though the figures had improved compared to the fourth quarter of 2022.

Exports continue to face "significant challenges" as slower growth in advanced economies will diminish external demand, the spokesperson added.

Officials from the International Monetary Fund said on Tuesday that Hong Kong's government finances are "still in a very strong position".



Iran Urges France to Refrain From Violence Against Protesters

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani advised the French government to hear the voice of protesters in the country and refrain from violence against them. Posting a footage of the violent treatment of the French police against citizens and workers protesting against government policies on the International Workers' Day on May 1,

Kanaani said on Tuesday that France's mistreatment of the protesters is deeply regrettable.

We still recommend the French government to hear the voices of its protesting citizens and refraining from resorting to violence against them, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman said.



Europe's Produce at Stake in Spain's Water War

TOTANA (Dispatches) - Spanish farmer Juan Francisco Abellaneda's salads and watermelons fill the shelves of European supermarkets winter and summer. But maybe not for much longer.

The tap that turned the arid semi-desert of southeastern Spain into Europe's market garden may be about to be turned off, threatening the intensive farms that feed much of the continent.

Spain is the EU's biggest producer of fruit and vegetables and almost half of its exports are grown by farmers like Abellaneda, the crops irrigated by huge transfers of water from the River Tagus hundreds of kilometres (miles) to the north.

But with climate change hitting Spain hard, and three-quarters of the country at risk of desertification, the government has decided to limit the flow of the dwindling waters of the Tagus to the southeastern Levante.

The level of the Iberian peninsula's longest river has been dropping dangerously, to the point that in some places it is possible to cross its dried-up bed by foot in summer.

Just like Egypt's shrinking Nile and the Tigris in Iraq, the right to draw on the waters of the Tagus -- which crosses into Portugal before flowing into the Atlantic -- has become a political hot potato.

The debate is getting even more heated in the run up to regional elections later this month, with the intensive agriculture that is a pillar of the Spanish economy called into question.

"We need the water (from the Tagus). If they take it from us, it will be nothing but a desert here," said Abellaneda.

The 47-year-old cast an anxious eye over the dusty drills of broccoli growing on his 300 hectares (740 acres) near Murcia.

Despite another abnormally hot and dry spring, the farm he and his brothers run is thriving, exporting 3,000 tonnes of fruit and vegetables a year.

In his father and grandfather's time, Murcia was one of the poorest parts of Spain, a land of subsistence farmers. Greenhouses and hi-tech storage depots now stretch to the horizon.

"If they do not bring us the water, what are we going to live on?" asked Abellaneda, a founder member of the Deilor cooperative which employs 700 people.

To make the bone-dry southeast bloom, Spain began building the gigantic Tagus-Segura Water Transfer project under the dictator General Franco in 1960. It took nearly 20 years to complete its 300 kilometres of canals, tunnels, aqueducts and reservoirs, bringing billions of litres of water from the Tagus south into the Segura basin between Murcia and Andalusia.

Once hailed as a model in handling drought, it is now accused of making them worse.

It also made the Levante region -- which includes the dry provinces of Murcia, Alicante and Almeria -- Europe's biggest horticultural hotspot, employing 100,000 people in businesses turning over three billion euros (\$3.3 billion) a year.

But today "the Tagus is suffering", said Baeza. "It is degraded in numerous places... because we have far outstripped its capacity (with) uncontrolled expansion of the land it irrigates."

Since the Transfer project was built, Spain's average temperature has shot up by 1.3 degrees Centigrade (more than two degrees Fahrenheit), according to the Spanish meteorological service.

The flow of the Tagus has dropped 12 percent over the same period and could plummet by up to 40 percent by 2050, the Spanish government estimates.

Extreme heatwaves over the last few years, sometimes very early in the year -- with temperature records again broken last week -- have dried up rivers and reservoirs and have led to water cuts.

"Global warming has changed things," said Julio Barea of Greenpeace. The Transfer "no longer works" for Spain. "The Tagus needs the water (it is losing to farms in the southeast) to survive," he insisted.

In the central Castile-La Mancha region, where the Tagus' water is syphoned away south, the effects of losing so much water have been visible for years.

Known as the "Sea of Castile" for the artificial lakes that were created by the damming of the Tagus in the 1950s, it used to attract lots of tourists who would come for the weekend to swim, boat and eat in its restaurants.

"It was really lively," recalled Borja's father, Carlos Castro, 65, pointing to the ruins of a cafe near a spot where he would come to swim as a teenager. Now "it's like a desert," he sighed.

The beaches where tourists once lounged have disappeared with the lake water



now several dozen metres below where it was.

"Everything stopped when the damned water transfers started," said mayor Castro, who wants them to be stopped completely. "With our water went businesses, jobs and a part of our population.

Madrid wants to reduce the water transfers by a third -- except in times of abundant rainfall -- to bring the Tagus's level up.

But without that water, the southeast "will not be able to maintain modern and competitive agriculture," which could put Europe's food security at risk, warned Alfonso Galvez, a head of the farmers' union, Asaja.

The cut could lead to 12,200 hectares of arable land being abandoned, claimed the SCRATS farmers lobby group. The economic cost would also be colossal, it argued, up to 137 million euros a year, with 15,000 jobs lost.

The political battle over the water in the lead-up to this month's elections has created some strange bedfellows.

The Socialist-held region of Valencia in the east has allied itself with Murcia, run by the conservatives of the Popular Party, to try to stop any cuts. Socialist Castile-La Mancha, meanwhile, is backing the government's decree with the help of local right-wingers.

The left-wing government of Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez said it has no choice but to cut the flow to come into line with rulings from Spain's supreme court and EU environmental rules, which demand protection plans for water basins.

Minister for Ecological Transition Teresa Ribera said the decision was based on "the best scientific knowledge possible", and has promised more money to develop other sources of water.

The government is keen on desalination, which is already going on the Levante, but on a relatively small scale.

But many farmers are not convinced. Galvez said desalinated water lacks nutrients and has "a big environmental impact because "you need lots of electricity to make it" as well as its harmful effects on the marine ecosystem.

The conservative head of the Murcia region, Fernando Lopez Miras, is equally sceptical. He said the costs were prohibitive -- three to four times more than transporting the water from the Tagus. "They are talking about a price of around 1.4 euros a litre. That's the price of petrol!"

The farmers have a right to the water, he argued, because the constitution decreed that "Spain's water belongs to all Spaniards". Desalination plants were at best a help, not "an alternative" water source.

The right to draw on the waters of the Tagus -- which crosses into Portugal before flowing into the Atlantic -- has become a political hot potato

For environmentalists, Spain's whole agricultural model has to be rethought. "More than 80 percent of freshwater in Spain is used by agriculture... it's just not tenable," said Barea of Greenpeace.

There has to be a drastic reduction in the amount of land given over to intensive farming if Spain is to avoid disaster, he said. "Spain cannot be the garden of Europe if our water is getting more and more scarce."

U.S. Wants No End to...

FROM PAGE 1

Two U.S. officials said on Tuesday the package includes Hydra 70 rockets, which are unguided projectiles fired from aircraft, Reuters reported.

It also includes artillery rounds, 155-mm Howitzer cannons, anti-tank missiles and mortars as Ukrainian officials say they are planning a counteroffensive.

The Pentagon has also sent at least 20 High Mobility Artillery Rocket Systems (HIMARS) to Ukraine. HIMARS systems, which are made by Lockheed Martin, are intended to be a "core component of Ukraine's fighting force in the future," according to a senior US defense official told reporters.

The funds for the new military shipment to Ukraine were provided once more by using the Presidential Drawdown Authority, or PDA, by which the President of the United States can legally authorize the shipment of military equipment and services from US stocks without gaining congressional approval in response to an emergency.

The package brings the total amount of U.S. military aid to about \$36 billion dollars.

The U.S. and its Western allies have kept feeding Ukraine with massive amounts of arms since the start of the war last year.

Moscow has time and again warned that military assistance will only prolong the war and add to the suffering of the Ukrainian people.

U.S. President Joe Biden has said he expects American aid to Ukraine will continue without interruption despite opposition by Republicans.

Congresswoman Marjorie Taylor Greene said Washington's military aid to Ukraine was a U.S.-led "proxy war" against Russia.

She said the Ukraine war had placed a heavy financial burden on the shoulders of Americans, who were already grappling with poverty.

Of course Germany and some other European countries are to supply Ukraine with arms and it shows they do not like the war to end and they want to keep Russia involved in war for years. The Joe Biden Administration through this war has tried to regain the lost trust of Europeans to the U.S. which happened during the Trump Administration and now the U.S. through this war has brought back Europe to its band for its future plans.

Now Europe is weakening because of the Ukraine war due to its impact on its economy and inflation, and many European governments are currently struggling with economic problems and they even risk of collapse.

So one can see that the U.S. makes most out of this war and does not want this war to end because through this war Europe has become much dependent on the U.S. and lost its self-confidence and independence, and it has to follow Washington blindly to come out of the current quagmire and American arms manufacturers will fill their pockets in the current condition.

In between Russia will be busy with the war and its development will come to halt due to impacts of the war on its economy and even social progress, and this is the main thing that the U.S. wants to push main rivals out of the race by using other countries, and this time Europeans have turned to the puppets of Washington to fulfill the goals and ambitions of the U.S.

Therefore one cannot expect this war to come to its end very soon as long as the Western arms sellers mainly the American ones fill their pockets and they want to weaken Russia.

Iran Deposits...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the BSI report, Iran's commitments to foreign banks and financial institutions at the end of 2022 also registered a five-percent growth compared to 2021, reaching \$1.768 billion.

As reported, of Iran's total financial commitments at the end of the fourth quarter of 2022, \$876 million were related to foreign banks, and the rest included Iran's commitments to non-banking financial institutions.

Iran's total transactions with foreign banks and financial institutions also reached \$21.572 billion in 2022 registering a 12 percent increase compared to the previous year. The country's exchanges with foreign banks and institutions were reported to be \$19.233 billion in 2021.



Neuroscientists Decoded People's Thoughts Using Brain Scans

LONDON (Dispatches) - Like Dumbledore's wand, a scan can pull long strings of stories straight out of a person's brain -- but only if that person cooperates.

This "mind-reading" feat, described May 1 in Nature Neuroscience, has a long way to go before it can be used outside of sophisticated laboratories. But the result could ultimately lead to seamless devices that help people who can't talk or otherwise communicate easily. The research also raises privacy concerns about unwelcome neural eavesdropping.

"I thought it was fascinating," says Gopala Anumanchipalli, a neural engineer at the University of California, Berkeley who wasn't involved in the study. "It's like, 'Wow, now we are here already,'" he says. "I was delighted to see this."

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As opposed to implanted devices that have shown recent promise, the new system requires no surgery. And unlike other external approaches, it produces continuous streams of words instead of having a more constrained vocabulary.



For the new study, three people lay inside a bulky MRI machine for at least 16 hours each. They listened to stories, mostly from The Moth podcast, while functional MRI scans detected changes in blood flow in the brain. These changes are proxies for brain activity, albeit slow and imperfect measures.

With this neural data in hand, computational neuroscientists Alexander Huth and Jerry Tang of the University of Texas at Austin and colleagues were able to match patterns of brain activity to certain words and ideas. The approach

relied on a language model that was built with GPT, one of the forerunners that enabled today's AI chatbots.

Once the researchers knew which brain activity patterns matched the words in the stories, the team could work backward, using brain patterns to predict new words and ideas. The process inched along in an iterative way. A decoder ranked the likelihood of words appearing after the previous word, then used the brain activity patterns to help pick a winner and ultimately land on the gist of an idea.

"It definitely doesn't nail every word," Huth says. The word-for-word error rate was actually pretty high, between 92 to 94 percent. "But that doesn't account for how it paraphrases things," he says. "It gets the ideas." For instance, when a person heard, "I don't have my driver's license yet," the decoder spat out, "She has not even started to learn to drive yet."

Such responses made it clear that the decoders struggle with pronouns, though the researchers don't know why. "It doesn't know who is doing what to whom," Huth said in an April 27 news briefing.

U.S. May Risk Debt Default as Early as June 1

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States could run out of money to pay its financial obligations -- risking a catastrophic default -- as early as the start of June, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Monday, as policymakers tussle over raising the debt ceiling.

Last week, the Republican-led House of Representatives voted to lift the national borrowing limit, but only with drastic cuts as they sought a showdown with President Joe Biden, a Democrat, over what they see as excessive spending.

Republicans were determined to muscle the Limit, Save, Grow Act through the lower chamber of Congress to strengthen their position in negotiations with Biden, who has refused to agree to spending cuts. But the act has no chance of becoming

law as it is opposed by Democrats controlling the Senate and White House.

The impasse has raised the possibility of Congress and White House overseeing the first national debt default.

"Our best estimate is that we will be unable to continue to satisfy all of the government's obligations by early June, and potentially as early as June 1, if Congress does not raise or suspend the debt limit before that time," said Yellen on Monday, in a letter addressed to House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and other leaders.

While the United States hit its \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit in January, the Treasury has taken extraordinary measures that allow it to continue financing the government's activities.

Man Charged After Stealing Kyrgios' Car

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Australian police have charged a man with armed robbery and accused him of threatening Nick Kyrgios' mother at gunpoint before stealing the Australian tennis player's car, local media reported. The 32-year-old Canberra suspect appeared in the ACT Magistrates Court to face five charges, including failure to stop for police and driving while suspended, the Australian Broadcasting Corporation (ABC) said, citing court documents. He was denied bail.

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Djokovic Able To Play at US Open

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - World number one Novak Djokovic will be able to compete at the US Open this year after the US government said yesterday it will end its Covid-19 vaccination requirements for international travellers on May 11. Djokovic, one of the most high-profile athletes unvaccinated against Covid-19, missed the US Open in 2022 due to his vaccine status. The 35-year-old Serb was unable to enter the country this year after unsuccessfully applying to the US government for special permission to play at Indian Wells and Miami.

Ice-Cool Harden Scores 45 As Sixers Stun Celtics

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - James Harden scored 45 points as the Philadelphia 76ers stunned the Boston Celtics in the NBA playoffs before Nikola Jokic and the Denver Nuggets took a commanding 2-0 series lead over the Phoenix Suns.

In a pulsating Eastern Conference duel in Boston, Harden produced a vintage performance — including a pivotal go-ahead three-pointer with 8.4 seconds remaining -- to leave the TD Garden in stunned silence as the Sixers snatched a 119-115 game one victory.

The Sixers' win was achieved without their best player, injured talisman Joel Embiid, who watched from the bench after failing to recover from a knee injury.

"We're just a resilient team," Harden said. "Even without Joel, we've got the confidence to come here and win games."

"We've been doing it all year long, that's a good one for us."

Harden's points haul came from 17-of-30 shooting and included seven three-pointers.

"He was awesome," Sixers coach Doc Rivers said. "Kept his cool, knew when to attack, knew when to give it up."

Tyrese Maxey provided offensive support with 26 points while Tobias Harris added 18 and De'Anthony Melton 17.

The Celtics were led by 39 points from Jayson Tatum while Jaylen Brown chipped in with 23 points and Malcolm Brogdon 20.

With Boston exploiting the absence of Embiid to score freely in the paint, the Celtics jumped out to lead by 12 in the second quarter.

But Harden and Maxey's scoring ensured that the Sixers remained in touch coming down the stretch with only a handful of points separating the two teams in the closing stages.

A loose pass from Brogdon with 32 seconds left on the clock handed Maxey an easy uncontested layup to put Philadelphia 114-113 up, before Tatum hit back with two free throws to give Boston a slender 115-114 advantage.

But with the clock running down, Harden advanced up the court and took his time before nervelessly sinking a sublime three-pointer from 25 feet to give Philadelphia a 117-115 lead with just seconds remaining.

Rivers said Harden's ice-cool three-pointer at the death was a rebuttal to critics who have



long accused the 33-year-old former NBA Most Valuable Player of folding under pressure.

"I thought he had just the perfect mindset tonight," Rivers said. "I'm so happy for him because it just tells you what he can do on a given night."

"It's amazing -- the guy's a Hall-of-Famer and all you hear is the other stuff about him. He's fantastic."

In the other playoff game, Denver's reigning two-time NBA MVP Jokic finished with 39 points as the Nuggets staged a fourth-quarter rally to eclipse the Phoenix Suns 97-87 and take a 2-0 series lead.

Devin Booker finished with 35 points for Phoenix while Kevin Durant added 24, but the Suns were unable to respond as Denver pulled away to outscore the visitors 27-14 in the fourth quarter.

Jokic's 39-point haul included 26 after half-time as the Nuggets took control of a low-scoring contest that saw Phoenix lead by eight points in the third quarter.

Kentavious Caldwell-Pope delivered a crucial cameo for Denver with a flurry of three three-pointers in the fourth quarter, helping to take the game away from Phoenix as the clock ran down.

A gloomy night for Phoenix was compounded by an injury to veteran Chris Paul, who limped to the locker room near the end of the third quarter after appearing to injure his groin.

"Both teams didn't shoot well, it was a low-scoring game 87-97, it was a tough, rough game -- but we won the game and that's the most important thing," Jokic said.

The victory came as Jokic prepares to discover on Tuesday whether he has won the NBA's regular season MVP award for a third straight year.

The Denver coach said Jokic however was only focused on ending the Nuggets' wait for a first NBA Championship.

Chelsea Hold Talks With Former Manager Mourinho



LONDON (Dispatches) - Chelsea have reportedly 'held talks' with former manager Jose Mourinho over a potential return to Stamford Bridge, but it could be a challenge to prise him away from Roma.

The serial-winning manager enjoyed two unbelievably successful stints with the Blues, helping them to lift eight major trophies.

Now, Chelsea could certainly do with bringing in an experienced manager like Mourinho, as they look to recover from what has been a dismal season.

Indeed, the London club currently sit in 12th place in the Premier League table - on track for their worst campaign since 1994. Interim manager Frank Lampard has failed to turn their form around, too, losing his first five games in charge.

This is despite club co-owner Todd Boehly spending over £600m on new signings this summer. Chelsea will also receive a big financial hit as they miss out on Champions League football.

Bringing in a manager like Mourinho could be exactly what the Blues need to get themselves back on track. Also, it would probably go down well with their supporters.

Sabalenka Reaches Madrid Open Quarters

MADRID (Dispatches) - World number two Aryna Sabalenka made light work of 16-year-old Mirra Andreeva with a 6-3, 6-1 win to reach the Madrid Open quarter-finals.

Russian youngster Andreeva, a wildcard, became only the third 15-year-old to win a WTA 1000 main draw match when she beat 2021 US Open finalist Leylah Fernandez last week.

She went on to beat two top 20 players in Beatriz Haddad Maia and, on her 16th birthday, Magda Linette, but overcoming 2021 Madrid winner Sabalenka was a bridge too far.

"Of course I'm happy with the win, I wish I would have played at Madrid when I was 16," said Sabalenka.

"I think my first few games I was trying to adjust for her rhythm and her game, and then I kept trying to play my game, be aggressive and fight for every point."

Sabalenka broke Andreeva in the first game but the world number 194 immediately responded to get back on serve.

The Belarusian converted her second break point in the fifth game for a 3-2 lead and again broke to clinch the first set 6-3.

Sabalenka, second seed in Madrid, won 67 per cent of points in a convincing second set to reach the last eight.

The Australian Open champion will face Egyptian Mayar Sherif in the next round after she beat Elise Mertens 6-4, 0-6, 6-4.

Ancelotti Backs Antetokounmpo "No Failure" Cry

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti praised NBA superstar Giannis Antetokounmpo for his insistence there was "no failure in sports" last week.

After top seeded Milwaukee Bucks crashed out of the NBA play-offs at the hands of the Miami Heat, Greek player Antetokounmpo said teams can have good days and bad days but there was no such thing as failure in sport.

"What this player said was spectacular, I have nothing to add, I think 100 per cent like him," Ancelotti told reporters.



Klopp Says Referee Row Down to Emotion and Anger

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp said his aggressive confrontation with match officials after Liverpool's dramatic late winner against Tottenham was down to "emotion" and "anger in that moment".

The Football Association is investigating comments by the Reds boss that appeared to call into question the integrity of referee Paul Tierney after Sunday's 4-3 victory at Anfield.

Following Diogo Jota's late winner, Klopp ran down the touchline to celebrate in front of fourth official John Brooks and received a yellow card from Tierney.

"The whole situation shouldn't have happened at all," Klopp said at a press conference on Tuesday. "It was out of emotion, out of anger in that moment. That's why I celebrated the way I celebrated."

"I didn't say anything wrong. I couldn't get close to the fourth official and I didn't want to get close to him."

Klopp, whose team are fifth in the Premier League table after four straight wins, added: "Paul Tierney came over and I didn't expect a red card, I expected a yellow. He said to me: 'For me it's a red card,' but he gave me a yellow."

"After the game I tried to calm down and didn't properly. I said (in TV interviews): 'What he said to me was not OK'. I opened the box which I didn't want to open."

"The rest was things I said about how I felt in that moment and Paul Tierney doing our games. I'm not a resentful person but these things which happen in the past happens, not intentionally but they are there."

"Obviously the refs are really angry about what I said. I did a lot of things that day but I didn't lie."

Klopp said after the game that he did not know what the official "has against us".

Ukraine to Boycott Judo World Championships Over Russia, Belarus Inclusion

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian judokas will not take part in this month's world championships in Qatar following the International Judo Federation's (IJF) decision to readmit Russians and Belarusians as neutrals, the Ukrainian Judo Federation (UJF) said.

The International Olympic Committee (IOC) last month recommended that athletes from the two countries be allowed to return to international competition as neutrals.

The IJF last week announced that it would allow judoka from Russia and Belarus to participate in the May 7-14 championships, saying its decision would allow Russians and Belarusians to participate in qualifying for the 2024 Olympic Games in Paris.

The IOC's recommendations exclude athletes who support the war or are contracted to military or national security agencies. The IJF has said it has enlisted an independent company to perform background checks and identify any such athletes.

However, the Ukrainian federation alleged that a number of Russian judoka registered for the championships are "active servicemen".

"We do not see here neutrality, equal conditions and a 'bridge to peace', as stated in the IJF Resolution on the participation of Russian and Belarusian teams in the World Championships in Doha," the UJF said.

"We see here a decision that contradicts the latest recommendations of the International Olympic Committee ... We are disappointed with the decision of the International Judo Federation. Therefore, we have decided not to participate in the World Championships in Doha."



Haaland Goal-Scoring Heroics a Surprise

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola says Erling Haaland's astonishing scoring feats for Manchester City have been a "surprise", with the Norwegian on the cusp of breaking the Premier League's single-season goal record.

The 22-year-old netted his 34th goal of the league campaign in Sunday's 2-1 win at Fulham, drawing him level with joint Premier League single-season record holders Andy Cole and Alan Shearer.

Haaland's strike at Craven Cottage was his 50th goal of the season -- he holds the all-competitions record by a Premier League player since the top flight was rebranded in 1992.

With a potential 10 games remaining for treble-chasing City this term, Haaland could even pass Dixie Dean's all-time English record of 63 goals set in the 1927/28 season.

The Everton player's mark of 60 top-flight strikes during that campaign will surely remain intact. It has been a breath-taking first year in English football for Haaland, but Guardiola is confident there is even more to come from the former Borussia Dortmund star.

"It is a surprise for all of us -- maybe not for him -- to do what he's doing in this difficult league but the way he behaves and has done it is for the success of the team," he said.

"Of course it's good for him and the team if he breaks the records. It's a good sign."

"The magnitude of a record is because for a long time it was not broken. All records will be broken one day."

"I'm pretty sure he is going to score more goals in the Premier League until the end of the season." In-form City put themselves firmly in control of the title race with their 4-1 rout of Arsenal last week.

