

Iran Deputy Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani on Thursday Hosted Sonja Hyland, the Deputy Secretary General and Political Director at Ireland's Department of Foreign Affairs, for Talks on Different Issues

# IRAN NEWS

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## Tehran, Damascus Pledge To continue cooperation until last terrorists exterminated

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says Iran will keep on cooperating with Syria until the complete annihilation of the remaining foreign-sponsored Takfiri terrorist outfits, which are wreaking havoc in several pockets of the Arab country.

A final communiqué issued at the end of Raisi's two-day official visit to Syria, which started on Wednesday and was the first by an Iranian president to the Arab nation in over 13 years, stated that the two sides expressed satisfaction over joint cooperation in the fight against terrorism and extremism, and emphasized that they will continue working together until the total annihilation of all terrorist groups in Syria.

Raisi and his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad also held in-depth talks on ways to further develop and strengthen cordial and strategic relations between Tehran and Damascus, and exchanged viewpoints on the latest regional and international developments.

The two presidents underlined the need to respect each other's national sovereignty, independence and territorial integrity in accordance with the objectives and principles of the United Nations Charter.

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## Tehran Lambasts U.S. Sanctions Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations has lambasted the unilateral US sanctions against Iran, calling for an end to all the bans which have negative impacts on the environment, health system, and well-being of Iranians.

Amir Saeed Irvani made the remarks in a letter to UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres and UN General Assembly President Csaba Korosi, where he complained about the destructive effects of the "unilateral and illegal" sanctions imposed by the United States against Iran.

The senior Iranian diplomat said US sanctions hamper the country's efforts to address challenges related to the environment, health and welfare of the people.

He also noted that some US sanctions hinder Iran's access to new technologies as well as investment in environmental projects, arguing that they are against international law and the UN Charter.

The US has created a sophisticated network of economic, financial and trade sanctions with the aim of isolating the Iranian nation, the diplomat said, adding that the sanctions also endangered environmental and health problems in the country.

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## Iran to Scale Up Yellowcake Production by 50%



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the Islamic Republic plans to step up the production of yellowcake, which is a type of uranium concentrate powder, by 50 percent, and will also operate 10 uranium mines by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (which concludes on March 20, 2024).

Mohammad Eslami made the remarks on Thursday as he inaugurated the yellowcake production facility in Saghand village in Ardakan County in the central Iranian province of Yazd. Several Iranian nuclear scientists and experts as well as state officials were in attendance during the ceremony.

"Today, we are witnessing the implementation of one of the projects planned within the AEOI's 20-year strategic document. We have utilized heap leaching industrial mining process for the first time," he said.

"Since uranium reserves could be found across the country, we came to an agreement not to ship low-density uranium ores and radioactives, and process raw materials in origin mines instead," Eslami noted.

"Our fellow colleagues have managed to produce yellowcake by means of the heap leaching process. The entire process was homegrown, and Iranian scientists developed, engineered and domestically-manufactured relevant equipment by themselves," the AEOI chief highlighted.

Eslami emphasized that the production of yellowcake in Saghand facility will increase by 50 percent, and this would be the case in other Iranian uranium mines as well.

"We plan to supply the necessary material for generation of nuclear power, and provide nuclear fuel required for the production of various radiopharmaceuticals and other civilian applications," he said.

"Before 2021, Iran had three uranium mines, of which only two were operating. However, we could spot and utilize five more ones a year later in the provinces of Isfahan and Yazd. We are now running eight mines, and intend to operate another ten by the year end," Eslami pointed out.

Yellow cake can be processed into enriched uranium to make fuel rods for nuclear power plants.

## Iran, Belarus May Become SCO Full-Time Members

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - The observer countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), Iran and Belarus could soon become full-time members of the charter as the decision is under consideration as of now, an official said on Thursday.

Earlier, India had also invited the two countries to participate in the SCO Defense Ministers' meeting which took place on April 27-28 in Delhi.

Minister of Defense of Belarus, Major General Viktor Khrenin and Iranian Defence Minister Mohammad Reza Gharai Ashtiani participated in the meeting in the national capital that was chaired by Defence Minister Rajnath Singh. The SCO is being hosted by India this year, and Goa is prepared to welcome all of the SCO member states' foreign ministers to the location where decisions regarding new SCO members will be made.

"The most important work before the SCO Foreign Ministers will be to assess the status of decisions that will be approved at the SCO Summit in New Delhi in July. The meeting will also give an opportunity to discuss the state of multilateral cooperation in SCO, regional and global issues of interest, reform and modernization of the Organization and the progress of admitting Iran and Belarus to the SCO as new Member States," MEA Secretary Dammu Ravi said in Goa.

He further added that India's efforts to further deepening of the bonds of friendship and cooperation in SCO were evident through various socio-cultural events that were hosted.

Currently, SCO has Russia, India, China, Pakistan and four Central Asian countries - Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan as its members. If consideration is accepted by the SCO member on Iran and Belarus to take as new members of SCO, it will have 10 members in the SCO by next year.

The SCO has mainly focused its fight against regional security issues, regional terrorism, ethnic separatism and religious extremism. To date, the SCO's priorities have also included regional development.

"The meeting will also give an opportunity to discuss the state of multilateral cooperation in SCO, regional and global issues of interest, reform and modernization of the Organization," the MEA Secretary said while speaking about the SCO charter in Goa.

Several socio-cultural events organized by India were organized for the first time in the framework of the SCO. To date, India has successfully hosted meetings of SCO ministers of finance, environment, sports, transport, defense, culture, energy, tourism, and ministers responsible for dealing with emergency situations.

"Terrorism is an important element in this summit... Security and terrorism is an emotional issue and it is a normal process in the discussion but it is not the specific agenda. There are many other agendas in the summit," SCO council sources told ANI.

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## IMF Predicts Iran Economy to Grow By 2% in 2023

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) in its latest "Regional, Middle East and Central Asia Outlook" report said that Iran's economy will grow as much as two percent in 2023 despite tough sanctions imposed against the country.

The Islamic Republic of Iran is predicted to curb skyrocketing inflation and liquidity and also to boom its oil exports in the global market, the IMF added. Reviewing the outlook of 12 macroeconomic indexes of Iran in 2023, the IMF also announced that Iran's crude export will rise up by twofold in the current administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

The IMF predicted that Iran's gross domestic product (GDP) will increase in this period while the inflation rate and liquidity growth will decline significantly. The international monetary body forecast that Iran's accessible Foreign Exchange Reserve (FOREX) will reach \$23.2 billion this year.

Of the total 12 macroeconomic indexes, the IMF predicted that Iran would have a better situation in seven indexes in 2023 compared to a year earlier.

Iran will experience a two percent economic growth in 2023 while the country had a 2.5 percent economic growth in 2022. The IMF put the average growth of Iran's economy between 2000 and 2019 at over three percent.

## Iran, Russia to Sign Agreement On Rasht-Astara Construction

TEHRAN (MNA) - A bilateral agreement between Russia and Iran on construction of the Rasht-Astara section in Iran may be signed in May, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak said.

"We just discussed the signing of a bilateral agreement between the two countries on extension of the Rasht-Astara railroad with [Iranian] Ambassador. Hopefully it will be done [agreement will be signed] as early as in May as we have agreed almost on everything. Agreement procedures are underway now," he said on the sidelines of the Caucasus Investment Exhibition in Mineralnye Vody. "It is a very important step to connect railroad infrastructure of Russia and Iran," Novak added, TASS reported.

Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said earlier that the signing of the agreement on construction of the Rasht-Astara section was expected in the near future.

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## No Political Will on Part of U.S. to Revive JCPOA

TEHRAN(MNA) - The advisor to the Iranian negotiating delegation in the nuclear talks said that Joe Biden is afraid of signing the JCPOA revival agreement for electoral reasons.

Seyed Mohammad Marandi who accompanies the Iranian president during his visit to Damascus, in an interview with Al-Mayadeen, said that Iran still welcomes the revival of the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) agreement.

He added that the text agreed last year is acceptable.

The JCPOA was signed in 2015 between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council and Germany. Former US President Donald Trump illegally pulled out of the deal in 2018 while the current US President, Joe Biden, has signaled that he is ready to resurrect the agreement.

Russia, the UK, Germany, China, the US, and France have been in talks with Iran since April 2021 to reinstate the deal.

The talks to salvage the JCPOA kicked off in the Austrian capital of Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of examining Washington's seriousness in rejoining the deal and removing anti-Iran sanctions.

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# Iran, Iraq FMs Review Regional, Int'l Development

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's Foreign Minister and his Iraqi counterpart exchanged views over the latest regional and international development.

During a phone conversation initiated by the Iraqi side, Hossein Amirabdollahian and Fuad Hussein talked about a range of issues, including bilateral and regional ones.

The two sides also reviewed efforts to deepen its bilateral ties with Iran and implement the remaining issues between the two countries.

## President Says Demise of Israel Imminent

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

**TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says Israel's elimination may happen very soon as signs of its decline are visible, calling resistance the only way to counter the occupying regime.**

Raisi made the remarks during meetings with a group of Palestinian resistance leaders, commanders and intellectuals in the Syrian capital, Damascus, on Thursday.

He underlined the need for unity among resistance forces, the region and the Muslim world to expedite the defeat of the usurping entity, the liberation of the holy al-Quds, and the Palestinians' sovereignty over their fate.

"Today, the initiative is in the hands of Palestinian fighters on the battlefield, not at negotiating tables. We believe that the demise of the Zionist regime is imminent as the signs of its decline are visible," he said.

"The only solution for Palestine is state sovereignty based on the will of the Palestinians. If the Westerners seek democracy, they should acknowledge the Palestinian people's vote and remain committed to it."

Raisi also noted that the Palestine issue, along with the liberation of al-Quds, is the most important issue in the Islamic world and that it should not be consigned to oblivion.



He further urged Muslims to do their best to uphold the Palestinians' rights violated by the Tel Aviv regime.

Through waging a hybrid war, the enemies are trying to insinuate that the Palestinians' future hinges on the survival of the Zionist regime, he said, adding that deals such as Camp David, Sharm el-Sheikh and Oslo, together with recent normalization efforts, were all in line with that policy.

The Iranian chief executive also thanked the Syrian nation and government as well as resistance leaders, the Palestinian people in the Gaza Strip and the West Bank, and Lebanon's Hezbollah resistance movement for their perseverance against the Zionist regime.

Heading a high-ranking politico-economic delegation, President Raisi has traveled to Syria upon an official invitation by his Syrian counterpart Bashar al-Assad.

The visit is the first by an Iranian president since the foreign-backed militancy gripped the Arab country in 2011. It focuses on boosting relations between Tehran and Damascus and reinforcing the Axis of Resistance.

## Tehran Reacts to U.S. Concern On President Raisi's Syria Trip

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has reacted to the United States' concern about Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's travel to Syria.

Kanaani tweeted that the U.S. expressed concern about the trip by the Iranian president to Syria and its results.

Of course, the annoyance of a malicious regime, whose horn is in Syria and the whole region has been broken by Iran and the resistance axis, and it must end its aggressive presence in Syria, is natural, he noted.

The spokesman also underlined: Be angry and die of this anger.

U.S.'s State Department Deputy Spokesman Vedant Patel claimed at a briefing that the deepening ties between the two countries should be a source of worry for the international community.

President Raisi, heading a high-ranking delegation, traveled to Damascus as the first chief executive of Iran, who visits Syria from the onset of crisis in the Arab country in 2011.

## Iran Air Force Pushing for Enhancement, Modernization

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Islamic Republic of Iran Air Force (IRIAF) continues to leap forward with the latest reports indicating that it plans to display new achievements in the coming days.

The new capabilities will be in the field of both manned and unmanned aircraft, according to the IRIAF's Commander Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi.

Vahedi said that the air force is growing (in power) and as I have stated before we must never stop for a moment because if we do, we will fall behind. Despite the fact that Iran has one of the lowest military budgets in the West Asia region, the circumstances have not prevented the country from enhancing its defensive powers as it has faced constant threats by the US and the Zionist regime in addition to severe and inhumane economic sanctions over the past decades. The IRIAF is slated to take delivery of the first batch of the state-of-the-art Sukhoi Su-35 heavy air superiority fighter jets in the coming weeks.

The last time the force received advanced fighters of the similar class was in the mid-1970s, when the Grumman F-14A Tomcat fighter aircraft arrived in Iran.

Unlike the F-14A model which had very limited air-to-ground and air-to-sea capabilities and a pair of troublesome engines, the Su-35 is a fighter that excels in all types of missions. Like its counterpart, the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Aerospace Force (IRGCAF), the IRIAF has begun transitioning to modern warfare in the recent years by acquiring new armaments such as Kaman-22 and Kaman-12 unmanned combat aerial vehicles (UCAVs), Yasin precision-guided glide bomb, Qader anti-ship missiles (ASHM), Shahin jamming, self-protection pod, and the recently unveiled Asef land-attack cruise missile with an expected range of 2,000 km.

Furthermore, the IRIAF has also taken concrete steps to enhance survivability and second-strike capability by adopting passive defense strategies in form of building sophisticated, self-sustaining underground bases such as Oghab-44 strategic airbase.

## More Iranian Pilgrims to Be Sent to Syria

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran will start sending pilgrims to holy shia shrines in Syria under a deal signed with the Arab country during President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Damascus.

Iran's transportation minister Mehrdad Bazrpash said that some 50,000 pilgrims will be sent to Syria from Iran per year under an agreement signed with Syrian authorities earlier in the day.

The agreement was one of 15 memoranda of understanding (MoUs) signed in the presence of Raisi and Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in the People's Palace in Damascus.

The MoUs will enable Iran and Syria to significantly increase their trade and economic ties now that the Arab country is emerging from more than a decade of a fighting against foreign-backed militants.

Bazrpash said an average of 1,000 pilgrims will be able to travel from Iran to Syria every week to pay tribute to the holy shrines of Hazrat Zaynab (AS) and Hazrat Ruqayya (AS) in Damascus. He said visit to Syria by Iranian pilgrims will start within the next two months through three to five direct regular flights per week between Iranian cities and Damascus.

The minister said that Iran and Syria had also agreed as part of the MoUs signed on Wednesday to launch a joint bank and an insurance company to provide services to businesses involved in trade between the two countries.

He said the two sides had agreed that two banks from Iran and Syria would process payments between businesses in the meantime until the joint bank starts operating.

## Iran-FAO Joint Project to Boost Sustainable Dryland Farming

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) are working on a project that aims to boost production sustainability in the drylands of the country, a senior official at the Iranian Agriculture Ministry has announced.

Faramak Aziz-Karimi, the director general at the ministry's department for grains and basic products, made the announcement on the sidelines of the first national seminar on the joint project with FAO.

The project is an effort to identify farming methods aimed at boosting productivity in dryland agriculture, the official said on April 30.

He also said that the project has already been launched and is currently being implemented in four provinces namely East Azarbaijan, Ardebil, Hamedan, and Kurdistan.

Maragheh, in East Azarbaijan province in northwestern Iran, was the first city where the project began to be implemented, he added.

The project is of importance as Iran, already classified as a dry country, has been witnessing a sharp decrease in its annual rainfall over the past years.



## Tehran Serious About Gaining Its Water Rights in Hirmand

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian foreign minister has stressed once again that the Islamic Republic of Iran is resolved to acquire its water rights in Hirmand shared river with Afghanistan.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the comments in a recent meeting with the representative of Zabol constituency in Sistan and Baluchestan, where the Hirmand, or as the Afghans call it Helmand River flows.

The foreign minister told Habolollah Dehmordeh that following up on water rights in bilateral relations with neighbors including Afghanistan is one of the priorities of the foreign ministry, adding that "Iran is serious about materializing the Iranian people's water share from Hirmand, and this issue has been one of the main topics of discussions between me, the representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Afghanistan and the Ministry of Energy, with Afghanistan in bilateral and multilateral meetings, including the recent meeting of Afghanistan's neighboring countries in Samarkand."

Emphasizing the readiness of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs to help resolve the problems of the southeastern province, the top Iranian diplomat said, "The current Afghan governing body officials have declared to us their commitment towards Iran's water rights and we seriously expect them not to fail in this regard as a sign of their abiding by the commitments to international agreements and we expect them to let us see water enter the province."

## Iranian Exporters To Have Stronger Presence in Syria

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi has said that obstacles to a stronger presence of Iranian exporters in Syria will be removed soon.

The minister, who is part of a team accompanying President Ebrahim Raisi during his trip

to Syria, made the announcement on his Twitter account Thursday on the second day of the two-day historic visit.

Khandouzi said in his tweet that following the negotiations with Syrian Finance Minister Kenan Yaghi, Economy and Foreign Trade Minister Mohammad Samer al-Khalil, and Central Bank Governor Mohammed Issam Hazima, it was agreed

that obstacles to the stronger presence of Iranian exporters in the Arab country would be removed soon.

The Iranian minister said that those obstacles would be eliminated, whether they are related to financial issues or insurance and customs.

On Wednesday, the Iranian and Syrian economy ministers signed three documents aimed at boosting cooperation between the two countries.

## Iran to Unveil Matchless Aircraft Carrier Soon

TEHRAN (IFP) - The commander of the Navy of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will soon unveil an aircraft carrier that has no equivalent in the world.

Speaking at an exhibition of military achievements on Thursday, Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said the Iranian-made ship is capable of both carrying aircraft and a number of missile launchers on board.

Based on the experience achieved in building earlier models of warships, Iran will develop new-generation vessels in the future, he added.

The IRGC Navy chief praised the progress of Iran's defense sector in various fields, saying the country has designed and developed military hardware that would befit any war scenario. "In maritime warfare, every scenario has been carefully thought out so that the appropriate weapons are available to the forces in accordance with any threats," he said.

## Iran Is World's Largest Producer of Damask Rose

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran is the leading producer of damask roses in the world, accounting for 70% of the global output, according to an official in the country's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad (MAJ).

"Our country is the number one producer of Damask rose and saffron in the world," said MAJ's deputy for planning and economic affairs Shahpour Alaie Moghadam.

Hossein Zeinali, another MAJ official, said production of Damask roses in Iran will increase by 10,000 metric tons (mt) to almost 70,000 mt in the calendar year to late March.

Zeinali, who is in charge of the ministry's national plan for medicinal herbs, said favorable weather conditions has led to a positive outlook for this year's crop yields. Most of Iran's Damask rose output is processed into rose water, with 60 to 70 million liters consumed domestically each year, he said.

However, the MAJ is focusing on a plan to ramp up the production of rose essence in the country, and expects that 45% of rose processing activities will focus on essence production.

The official said an experimental project utilizing new machines and technology is currently in progress to manufacture premium rose essence for exports to global markets.



### Notice of tender for export sale No. 02/1402/Z

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 70,000 metric tons of Iron Ore pellet (%Fe:65.00) on basis of F.O.B at Barco Jetty Bandar-Abbas - Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: ww.geg.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 14:00 P.M. on 14th May, 2023 to the Golgohar (complex in Sirjan, (50 km in Shiraz road) Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 10:00 A.M. on 15th May, 2023 at the office of the Seller

Analysis %		
Min	65.00	Fe
Max	1.0	FeO
Max	0.05	P
Max	0.01	S
Max	3.5	SiO2
Max	0.7	Al2O3
Max	0.9	CaO
Max	2.5	MgO
Min 255		CCS(kg/p)
Min 90		8-16 mm%
Ave5		-6 mm%
Max 4.0		A.I%
Min 94		T.I%
19-24		Prosity%
Min 90		Reducibility%

GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:14
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:31
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:06

13. Those are limits set by Allah, those who obey Allah and His Messenger will be admitted to Gardens with rivers flowing beneath, to abide therein (for ever) and that will be the supreme achievement.

14. But those who disobey Allah and His Messenger and transgress His limits will be admitted to a Fire, to abide therein: And they shall have a humiliating punishment.

Surah 4. Women (13 - 14)

## Tehran, Budapest Urged to Find New Tools For Boosting Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Deputy Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Hossein Salahvarzi in meeting with Ambassador of Hungary to Tehran Mr. Zoltan Varga Haszonits welcomed bilateral talks and emphasized these talks should be focused, presuming the sanctions will remain, on finding new ways for financial and trade exchanges like barter and using crypto currencies.**

Chambers of commerce of Kerman Province of Iran and Budapest signed a MoU on cooperation in the presence of Mr. Salahvarzi and Haszonits.

During the ceremony, Salahvarzi pointed to the long political, cultural and economic ties of Iran and Hungary and said that although due to the sanctions these relations have become colorless, he hopes with the diplomatic efforts once again political, cultural and especially economic relations of Iran and Hungary would improve.

He reiterated that ICCIMA and private sector does its efforts to materialize setting target for economic relations of the two countries during the third joint economic commission, adding that he hopes in the upcoming months, along with exchange of trade delegations and in collaboration with Budapest Chamber of Commerce, both sides would find ways for resolving banking exchanges in line with broadening bilateral trade. He added that he is sure that efforts of Embassy of Hungary in Tehran would be effective in this regard.

Salahvarzi went on to say that Kerman Province accounts for some 4% of national GDP and there are good capacities in this province in the fields of agriculture,



mining, energy production especially clean energies.

Then Hungarian Ambassador Haszonits, for his part, emphasized efforts for increasing the level of trade cooperation between the two states, adding that although industry, agriculture and clean energies are good fields for broadening economic cooperation between Iran and Hungary, there are some restrictions in this regard.

He noted that restrictions are not limited only to banking relation, adding that restrictions related to the FATF are also very effective, stressing that despite all these restrictions, now it is good opportunity for talks to find solutions for this issue.

Then Salahvarzi emphasized that economic activists in the private sector are trying to find ways for sanctions and the FATF in order to remain in the international production value chain, noting that despite these problems, during the years experiences and different solutions for facing these conditions have been tested. He said that Iranian traders have used barter trade and using crypto currencies to overcome the problems.

He said that all talks should be based on this point that sanctions are not removed and both sides should find ways for boosting trade under the current sanctions condition.

Meanwhile in the ceremony, Head of Kerman Chamber of Commerce enumerated the number of exporting items of Kerman Province like pistachio, dates, rose, fruits and greenhouse products and said that Kerman has great potentials in the field of energy production especially solar energy production and clean energies that both sides can cooperate in this field.

## 100 Countries Invited to Partake in IRAN EXPO 2023

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The deputy head of the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPOI) said that 100 countries of the world have been invited to take part in the Fifth Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran dubbed “Iran EXPO 2023”.

All industry ministers of the participating countries would partake in this exhibition, Mehdi Zeyghami noted.

In this edition of the exhibition, 12 groups of commodities in the fields of petrochemicals, energy, medical equipment, knowledge-based, home appliances, construction, industry, foodstuff, agriculture, handicrafts, technical and engineering services, etc, will be showcased, he said, adding that Iran’s export potentials will be displayed in almost all economic areas.

Zeyghami pointed out that 100 countries have been invited to take part in this exhibition while priority has been given to African, Latin American and Asian countries.

The 5th Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran Expo 2023) will be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds from May 7 to 10, 2023.

## Persian Gulf Oil Hospital To Come on Stream Next Year



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Governor of Hormozgan Province paid a visit to Persian Gulf Starr Oil Hospital to be informed about the physical progresses of the hospital which is under construction.

Governor of Hormozgan Province Mr. Mehdi Doosti, being accompanied by the CEO of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company Mr. Alireza Jaafarpour visited the 264-bed Persian Gulf Star Oil Hospital in Bandar Abbas which is under the construction.

During the visit, Mr. Doosti said that construction of this 264-bed hospital is in line with observing social responsibility of the company and hailed the CE of the company and his team for focusing on this project by allocating their time and the project is moving ahead with full speed.

Then the CEO of the company Mr. Jafarpour talked about the progress of this project and said that so far the company has injected 400b tomans and the construction trend of the hospital has been accelerated and they are trying to accelerate the project and bring forth the inauguration of the hospital from the spring of two years later to winter of the next year.

He said that this hospital is being constructed in 7 storeys and will have 10 operation rooms, ICU, CCU, specialized clinics and 264 beds. He added that for completing the project some 500b tomans had been estimated.

Jafarpour noted that the project is currently 25% ahead of schedule and expressed hope that the hospital would be inaugurated in the winter of next Iranian calendar year, (February 2025).

He added with inauguration of the project the company can play a more effective role in the medical spaces of the province.

## Iran Planning to Develop Its ICT Equipment in Syria

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology Issa Zarepour has said that he would make efforts to lay the ground for the presence of Iranian ICT platforms and equipment in Syria.

Zarepour made the announcement in a post he shared on Wednesday on Bale, an Iranian messaging and social media application. The minister shared his post while in Syria where he along with some cabinet ministers is accompanying President Ebrahim Raisi during a two-day official visit that began on Wednesday.

“I share this post with my dear countrymen from the Syrian capital and via domestic platforms,” he said, adding that he would make efforts to prepare the ground for the presence of the Iranian information and communications technology equipment and platforms “within the geography of Syria.”

According to Zarepour, Iran has not had a strong presence in Syria as long as ICT equipment is concerned, despite the fact that the Arab country is in need of them as its infrastructures have been badly damaged during the years-long conflict there.

### Iran-India Long-Term Agreement On Chabahar Port Operations In Final Drafting Stages

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ali Fathi, the deputy head of Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) for engineering and infrastructure development, announced that a long-term agreement between Iran and India for operating the southeastern Chabahar Port is in the final stages of drafting. The move for this agreement comes at a time when China has also been showing a growing interest in investing in ports and other coastal infrastructure in Iran.

The Chabahar port is a strategic port in Iran’s southeastern province of Sistan-Baluchestan. It has been developed to provide an alternative trade route for landlocked Afghanistan and Central Asian countries, bypassing Pakistan. India has been investing heavily in the development of the Chabahar port as it seeks to counter China’s growing influence in the region.

According to Fathi, PMO is ready to cooperate with foreign companies from all over the world, including the countries in the Persian Gulf region. The organization is open to collaboration with various foreign entities in the development of its ports and maritime infrastructure.

The long-term agreement between Iran and India on operating heavy loading and unloading equipment at Chabahar port is expected to boost economic ties between the two countries. The development of the Chabahar port is crucial for India’s connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia, as it will provide a sea-land access route for Indian goods to these regions.

The final stages of drafting the agreement with India come at a time when China has been showing a growing interest in investing in ports and other coastal infrastructure in Iran. The Chinese government has been investing heavily in the development of the Gwadar port in Pakistan, which is situated near the Chabahar port. This has raised concerns in India, as the Gwadar port provides China with strategic access to the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean.

In conclusion, the long-term agreement between Iran and India for operating the Chabahar port is in the final stages of drafting, which is expected to boost economic ties between the two countries. The PMO is open to collaboration with foreign companies from all over the world, including those in the Persian Gulf region. The development of the Chabahar port is crucial for India’s connectivity with Afghanistan and Central Asia, while China’s growing interest in investing in ports and other coastal infrastructure in Iran has raised concerns in India.

## Iran to Double Its Electricity Sales to Pakistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Energy Ministry’s Spokesman for the electricity sector Mostafa Rajabi Mashhadi says that the electricity sales to Pakistan will be doubled after preparing the ground adding that soon Iran will export electricity to Oman.

Speaking to ILNA, Rajabi Mashhadi said that Iran with all countries that it has land border exchange electricity and regarding electricity export to Oman, the executive work has started and it is in the stage of choosing consultation, design and calculation.

He added that Iran receives electricity from Turkmenistan, Armenia and Azerbaijan and exports to Iraq, Afghanistan and Pakistan and the country has electricity exchange with Turkey based on the back to back agreement as Iran gets electricity from Turkey for 3.5 days and exports electricity to this country for 3.5 days. He reiterated that the amount of exports and imports is an even level and export is less than 3% of the amount of exchange and transit.

On doubling exports to Pakistan, Rajabi Mashhadi said that the amount of exports to Pakistan is the same as last year and preparations are being made to double the current amount of 40 to 45 megawatts of electricity export to Pakistan.

On synchronizing electricity network with Russia, he said that this has been done but the median network should be reinforced.

On export of electricity to Iraq, he said that export to Iraq is done based on a long term and

five-year agreement and cooperation continues based on the agreement.

He said that the total amount of electricity import and export is around 5b kilowatts per hour.

On the domestic electricity consumption, he said that low electricity consumers will get bonus for saving energy, adding that there are over 31m electricity subscribers in the country.

Rajabi Mashhadi admitted there is a disequilibrium in the electricity industry, adding that there is around 11,000 megawatts of disequilibrium in electricity and all should work to bring new power stations to the grid and people’s help in saving electricity consumption will help this disequilibrium to reach its least amount.

He went on to say that repair and overhaul in the power plants has finished by 90% and it is expected all of them to be finished by the end of the current year.

He said that the government has plans to solve the issue of the old power plants and since some of the power plants are in the centers of the big cities, some new power stations should be constructed in those places and it needs to get licenses.

He said that in the first stage, renovation of 3000 megawatts of old power plants in the big cities has been put on the agenda.

Rajabi Mashhadi added that with the plans and actions taken by the related bodies, he expects no power cut in the summer but he urged the people to cooperate with efficient electricity consumption.



## Iran-Made Power Plant Parts Replacing U.S. Models in SE Asia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Spare parts manufactured by Iranian companies that are used in power plant maintenance services are replacing rival models from the U.S. in electricity stations in Malaysia and Indonesia, according to an official in the Iranian Energy Ministry.

Abdolrasul Pishahang, who serves as CEO of Iran’s Thermal Power Plants Holding Company (TPPH), said that domestic firms had manufactured some 100,000 parts needed in servicing operations in Iran’s power plants in recent years.

Pishahang said Iranian-made parts are being supplied to power plants in the region and in Southeast Asia where countries previously relied on parts supplied by US companies.

“While responding to the domestic demand, these parts are exported to regional countries and are replacing US-made power plant parts in countries like Malaysia and Indonesia,” he was quoted as saying by ILNA news agency.

Iran has a relatively large electricity industry where dozens of thermal and gas power plants account for a bulk of the power generated in the country.

Total Iranian electricity generation capacity exceeded 90 gigawatts (GW) in October 2022 although Energy Ministry figures suggest production reached a record of nearly 66 GW in the peak demand time last summer.

Sanctions imposed by the US on Iran’s energy sector in 2018 caused the country to introduce measures to cut reliance on foreign suppliers for parts and equipment needed in its power plants.

TPPH’s Pishahang said some 34 new power plant units had been connected to Iran’s national power grid since August 2021.

## Taiwan Says F-16 Deliveries Delayed

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan Defense Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng said that the delivery of 66 advanced new F-16Vs from the United States has been delayed due to supply chain disruptions and the ministry was working to minimize the damage and "make up deficiencies".

The United States in 2019 approved an \$8 billion sale of Lockheed Martin Corp (LMT.N) F-16 fighter jets to Taiwan, a deal that would take the island's F-16 fleet to more than 200 jets, the largest in Asia, to strengthen its defenses in the face of a stepped up threat from China, which claims Taiwan as its own.



## Israel Forces Kill Three Palestinians Over Settler Attack

GAZA (Dispatches) - The Israeli army has killed at least three Palestinian fighters and wounded four others while firing live ammunition during a raid in Nablus in the northern occupied West Bank, according to Palestinian officials.

The Israeli army and intelligence service said in a statement that the men were behind an attack on April 7 north of Jericho that killed two British-Israeli sisters when gunmen opened fire on their vehicle. Their mother also later died of her wounds. Hamas, the Palestinian group governing the besieged Gaza Strip, said the three men who were killed on Thursday - identified as Hassan Qatnani, Moaz al-Masri and Ibrahim Jabr - were members of its armed wing.



## Moscow Says U.S. Behind Kremlin Drone Attack



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia said that the United States was behind what it says was a drone attack on the Kremlin that aimed to kill President Vladimir Putin, while Moscow's forces fired more combat drones at Ukrainian cities including the capital Kyiv.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy, speaking in The Hague after visiting the International Court of Justice (ICC), said that Putin must be brought to justice over the war and said Kyiv would work to create a new tribunal for this purpose. Putin's spokesman Dmitry Peskov, without providing evidence, said Ukraine had acted on U.S. orders with the alleged drone attack on the Kremlin citadel in the early hours of Wednesday.

White House national security spokesman John Kirby said Peskov was "just lying" and said the United States neither encouraged nor enabled Ukraine to strike outside its borders. He added it was still unclear what had happened at the Kremlin.

Kyiv has also denied involvement in the incident, which followed a string of blasts over the past week targeting freight trains and oil depots in western Russia and Russian-controlled Crimea. Moscow has blamed Ukraine for those attacks too.

"Attempts to disown this (attack on the Kremlin), both in Kyiv and in Washington, are, of course, absolutely ridiculous. We know very well that decisions about such actions, about such terrorist attacks, are made not in Kyiv but in Washington," Peskov told reporters.

Peskov said an urgent investigation was under way and that any response would be carefully considered and balanced.

Separately, Russia's foreign ministry said the alleged drone attack "must not go unanswered" and that it showed Kyiv had no desire to end the 15-month old war at the negotiating table.

Russia has increasingly accused the United States of being a direct participant in the war, intent on inflicting a "strategic defeat" on Moscow. Washington denies this, saying it is arming Kyiv to defend itself and retake land illegally taken by Moscow.

Earlier, Russia fired two dozen combat drones at Ukraine, hitting Kyiv for the third time in four days and also striking a university campus in the Black Sea city of Odesa, ahead of a major counteroffensive by Ukraine to recapture occupied land.

There were no reports of any casualties. Kyiv's city administration said Russia had probably fired ballistic missiles as well as drones but that they had all been shot down.

"The Russians attacked Kyiv using Shahed loitering munitions and missiles, likely the ballistic type," it said.

Ballistic missiles are difficult to shoot down, and their downing could indicate Ukraine used sophisticated Western-supplied air defense systems against them. In total, air defenses shot down 18 of 24 "kamikaze" drones in the pre-dawn attack, officials said. Of 15 drones fired at Odesa, 12 were downed but three struck the university campus, the southern military command said.

Shelling in the Donetsk region damaged a power station owned by electricity company DTEK Energo, but no casualties were reported, DTEK and the Energy Ministry said.

The death toll from Russian shelling of Kherson and its environs in southern Ukraine on Wednesday rose to 23, regional governor Oleksandr Prokudin said.

## Several Teachers Killed in Pakistan School Shooting

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - At least seven teachers have been killed in a shooting at a school in northwestern Pakistan, following a separate attack in which another teacher was shot dead, Geo TV reported.

Both incidents took place in the Parachinar area of Kurram tribal district near the border with Afghanistan, the local television channel said.

It said the motive behind the killings remained unclear, and that the teachers killed in both incidents belong to the country's Shia Muslim minority.

Al Jazeera's Kamal Hyder, reporting from Islamabad, said the "gruesome incident" took place in an area that has witnessed in the past sectarian violence between Shia and Sunni tribes.

"Most of the teachers who were killed belonged to the Turi Shia tribe," Hyder said.

The tribal district contains a majority Shia population who are often attacked by armed groups as part of the local Taliban movement.

"This particular attack targeted the teachers while they were in the staffroom ... They were there to conduct examinations which are under way throughout the province for lower secondary school," he said.

The circumstances have remained "mysterious", as not many people were able to see what had transpired, how many attackers were involved, or what their motives were, Hyder said.

Abid Hussaini, a local police official, told Al Jazeera that authorities have shifted seven bodies from the school to the hospital but they cannot speculate on what was behind the killing.

"We have started our investigation, but we are as yet not sure about reasons for the attack. We will be better placed to talk more about it later," he said.

A statement from the provincial chief minister's office said the incident involved a property dispute, but the regional commissioner said sectarian antagonism appeared to be the cause.



## Heavy Fighting in Khartoum as Power Struggle Rages

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Fierce fighting could be heard in central Khartoum as the army tried to push back the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) from areas around the presidential palace and army headquarters, with a lasting ceasefire appearing elusive.

Each side appears to be battling for control of territory in the capital ahead of any possible negotiations, though the leaders of both factions have shown little public willingness to hold talks after more than two weeks of fighting.

Heavy bombardments also rang out in the adjoining cities of Omdurman and Bahri. Both sides had agreed to a seven-day ceasefire, which has been violated.

"Since yesterday evening, and this morning, there are air strikes and the sounds of clashes," said Al-Sadiq Ahmed, a 49-year-old engineer speaking from Khartoum.

"We've got into a state of permanent terror because the battles are around the centres of residential neighbourhoods. We don't know when this nightmare and the fear will end."

The United Nations, meanwhile, pressed the warring factions to guarantee safe passage of aid after six trucks were looted.

U.N. aid chief Martin Griffiths said he hoped to have face-to-face meetings with both sides within two to three days to secure guarantees from them for aid convoys.

The U.N. has warned that fighting between the army and RSF, which erupted on April 15, risks causing a humanitarian catastrophe that could spill into other countries. Sudan said on Tuesday that 550 people had died and 4,926 people been wounded so far in the conflict.

About 100,000 people have fled Sudan with little food or water to neighbouring countries, the U.N. says.

Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida told a news conference in Mozambique that he had discussed the situation in Sudan with African leaders and would work to contribute to peace.

## U.S. Issues Guidelines on Defending Philippines From South China Sea Attack

MANILA (Dispatches) - The United States has laid out in clear terms the extent of its defense treaty commitments to the Philippines, issuing new guidelines that refer specifically to attacks in the South China Sea, including on its coast guard.

The six-page "bilateral defense guidelines" agreed in Washington follow a renewed push under President Ferdinand Marcos Jr to update the Mutual Defense Treaty with the former colonial ruler, at a time of increased tension and maritime confrontation with China.

The guidelines were a first since the treaty was signed in 1951 and follow scores of Philippine diplomatic protests in the past year over what it calls China's "aggressive" actions and threats against its coast guard.

The guidelines said the bilateral treaty commitments would be invoked if either is attacked specifically in the South China Sea and also if coast guard vessels were the target.

It was also updated to include references to modern forms of warfare, including "grey zone tactics", which China is accused of using to assert its claims to sovereignty. The guidelines did not mention China specifically.

"Recognising that threats may arise in several domains - including land, sea, air, space, and

cyberspace - and take the form of asymmetric, hybrid, and irregular warfare and grey-zone tactics, the guidelines chart a way forward to build interoperability in both conventional and non-conventional domains," according to the Pentagon.

The South China Sea, a waterway vital to global trade, has become a major flashpoint in the increasingly testy relationship between China and the United States.

The guidelines send a "warning" to China against targeting the Philippine coast guard said Rommel Ong, former vice commander of the Philippine navy and a professor at the Ateneo School of Government.

Julio Amador, head of the Foundation for the National Interest, a Manila-based think-tank focusing on strategic and security issues, said of the security guidelines "It's clear that it will give China some pause."

China's foreign ministry on Thursday said it opposed the use of bilateral defense treaties to interfere in the South China Sea, which "should not be a hunting ground for external forces".

The guidelines were released during visit to Washington this week by Marcos, which included talks with counterpart Joe Biden.



## Bolsonaro Home Searched as Brazil Probes Fake Vaccine Cards

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Brazil's Federal Police searched former President Jair Bolsonaro's home and seized his phone in what they said was an investigation into alleged falsification of COVID-19 vaccine cards. Several other locations also were searched and a half dozen people faced arrest, police said.

The former president confirmed the search of his residence while speaking with reporters, as did his wife, Michelle, on her Instagram account.

A police official, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the person wasn't authorized to speak publicly, said Bolsonaro would be questioned at Federal Police headquarters and confirmed that one of his closest allies, Mauro Cid, was arrested.

Asked about the search of Bolsonaro's home, the Federal Police's press office provided a statement saying officers were carrying out 16 searches and six arrests in Rio de Janeiro related to the introduction of fraudulent data related to the COVID-19 vaccine into the nation's health system. The statement didn't name Bolsonaro or Cid.

Local media reported that the vaccine cards of Bolsonaro, his advisers and his family members were altered. The police statement said the investigation focused on cards altered in order to comply with U.S. vaccine requirements to enter the country.

"There was no adulteration on my part, it didn't happen," Bolsonaro told reporters after the search. "I didn't take the vaccine, period. I never denied that."

In an interview for Jovem Pan television, Bolsonaro said his vaccination records were not required for any of his trips to the U.S.

"The way heads of state are treated is different than for the common citizen. Everything is arranged ahead of time, and in my travels to the United States, I was not at any time required to have a vaccination card," Bolsonaro said.

Bolsonaro visited the U.S. at least three times after it began generally requiring in November 2021 that non-citizens be fully vaccinated to enter. He went in June 2022 for the Summit of the Americas, September 2022 for the U.N. General Assembly and last December after he left office for a stay in Florida.

The investigation raises questions about whether falsified vaccine information might have been included in documentation for any members of the former president's entourage during those trips.



## Remarkable Alzheimer's Drug Reduces Cognitive Decline

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) – U.S. pharmaceutical giant Eli Lilly on Wednesday announced its experimental Alzheimer's drug significantly slowed cognitive and functional decline, results hailed as "remarkable" by experts despite some patients experiencing serious side effects.

In an analysis of nearly 1,200 people in the early stages of the disease, donanemab slowed the progression of symptoms by 35 percent over a period of 18 months compared to placebo.

This was measured by cognition and their ability to carry out daily tasks like managing finances, driving, engaging in hobbies and conversing about current events in a standardized index called the Integrated Alzheimer's Disease Rating Scale (iADRS).

Side effects included temporary swelling in parts of the brain, which occurred in almost a quarter of the treated patients, as well as microhemorrhages that occurred in 31 percent of patients on the treatment arm and 14 percent of patients in the placebo group.

Two participants' deaths were attributed to the side effects, while a third might have also died from the treatment.

Nonetheless, the data was widely praised by independent experts, who said donanemab had the potential, if approved, to significantly improve the lives of people suffering from the most common form of dementia.

The news comes after the US approved another Alzheimer's drug in January, Biogen and Eisai's lecanemab, which slowed the rate of cognitive decline by 27 percent and was also declared a blockbuster by experts.

Biogen and Eisai had also developed aducanumab, known by the trade Aduhelm, which was given US approval in 2021, though that decision was mired in controversy and led to a damning report by Congress.

In addition to severe side effects, Aduhelm's clinical effectiveness was ambiguous, which is so far not the case for the two subsequent drugs.

Lilly said it would rapidly submit its results to the US Food and Drug Administration (FDA) as well as other global regulators.

"We are extremely pleased that donanemab yielded positive clinical results with compelling statistical



significance for people with Alzheimer's disease in this trial," said Daniel Skovronsky, Lilly's chief scientific and medical officer, in a statement.

Mark Mintun, a top Lilly executive in neuroscience R&D, added however that "like many effective treatments for debilitating and fatal diseases, there are associated risks that may be serious and life-threatening."

Eli Lilly's stock price rose 4.3 percent after Wednesday's announcement.

In Alzheimer's disease, two key proteins, tau and amyloid beta, build up into tangles and plaques, known together as aggregates, which cause brain cells to die and lead to brain shrinkage.

Like lecanemab (also known by its trade name Leqembi), donanemab is an antibody therapy that targets amyloid beta.

Experts said that the results for both drugs validated the theory that removing amyloid beta does improve the course of the disease, and that future therapies targeting both proteins might have even better outcomes.

Nick Fox, of the UK Dementia Research Institute, said that although the full dataset was not yet available, the results announced by press release "confirms that we are in a new era of disease modification for Alzheimer's disease."

"This clinical trial is a real breakthrough, demonstrating a remarkable 35% slowing of cognitive decline in Alzheimer's patients with high amyloid beta but low tau burden," added Marc Busche, UK Dementia Research Institute group leader at University College London.

"These are the strongest phase 3 data for an Alzheimer's treatment to date," said Maria Carrillo, chief science officer at the US Alzheimer's Association. "This further underscores the inflection point we are at for the Alzheimer's field."

Alzheimer's disease accounts for 60-80 percent of dementia, according to the Alzheimer's Association. It progressively destroys thinking and memory, eventually robbing people of the ability to carry out the simplest of tasks.

## People Are Spending Less and Less Time Online

PARIS (Dispatches) - It's a growing trend. Despite the ever-growing number of distractions tempting them, internet users are actually spending less and less time online, according to a new study. Here's what we know.

Most of us don't notice how much time we're spending online as we surf from one site to another, checking out social media feeds, news, videos and games.

Between the endless amount of content, the multitude of different social networks and the success of streaming, internet users have a lot to keep them busy.

Yet, according to the latest "Digital 2023 April Global Statshot Report," published in partnership with We Are Social and Meltwater, which analyses the latest digital trends for April 2023, we are spending less and less time online.

Internet users now spend an average of 6 hours and 35 minutes per day online, regardless of the device used.

That's two minutes less than the previous results from January 2023.

And based on GWI data, it represents a decrease of 18 minutes per day, or 4.4 per cent of time spent online, compared to the same period last year.

Since the second quarter of 2021, time spent online has steadily declined from 6 hours and 57 minutes to 6 hours and 35 minutes today. And yet, while the decline in time spent online is intensifying, internet users still spend more time online than watching TV.

In fact, in comparison, internet users spend 3 hours and 12 minutes watching TV, 1 hour and 49 minutes reading the press (both online and in print) and 1 hour and 28 minutes listening to streaming music.

It is also worth noting that internet users spend 2 hours and 24 minutes using social media, and in this area a decline has also been observed, of 5 minutes compared to 2022.

Whether it's watching TV, reading the press, listening to music, radio, or podcasts and even playing on video game consoles, the study shows a decline in the amount of time internet users spend on these activities.

With the world average coming in at 6 hours and 35 minutes, Japan has the lowest time spent online per day at 3 hours and 51 minutes while South Africa spends the most at 9 hours and 27 minutes.

The UK is below the world average with an average of 5 hours and 42 minutes, while India's average is 6 hours and 39 minutes, while the US average is 7 hours and 2 minutes and Singapore's 7 hours and 7 minutes.



## Loneliness Poses Risks as Deadly as Smoking



WASHINGTON (AP) - Widespread loneliness in the U.S. poses health risks as deadly as smoking up to 15 cigarettes daily, costing the health industry billions of dollars annually, the U.S. surgeon general said Tuesday in declaring the latest public health epidemic.

About half of U.S. adults say they've experienced loneliness, Dr. Vivek Murthy said in an 81-page report from his office.

"We now know that loneliness is a common feeling that many people experience. It's like hunger or thirst. It's a feeling the body sends us when something we need for survival is missing," Murthy told The Associated Press in an interview. "Millions of people in America are struggling in the shadows, and that's not right. That's why I issued this advisory to pull back the curtain on a struggle that too many people are experiencing."

The declaration is intended to raise awareness around loneliness but won't unlock federal funding or programming devoted to combatting the issue.

Research shows that Americans, who have become less engaged with worship houses, community organizations and even their own family members in recent decades, have steadily reported an increase in feelings of loneliness. The number of single households has also doubled over the last 60 years.

But the crisis deeply worsened when COVID-19 spread, prompting schools and workplaces to shut their doors and sending millions of Americans to isolate at home away from relatives or friends.

## Ukrainian Farmer Comes Up With Novel Way to Demine His Fields

HRAKOVE (Dispatches) - A Ukrainian farmer has come up with a novel way to remove mines left in his fields after Russia's invasion -- he's kitted out his tractor with protective panels stripped from Russian tanks and operates it by remote control.

After Russian forces were driven back from parts of eastern Ukraine by a Ukrainian counteroffensive last year, mines remained in many fields, making it perilous for farmers to sow grain for the next harvest.

Fields around the village of Hrakove are no exception. Oleksandr Kryvtsov, a general manager at his agricultural company, decided he couldn't wait for help from overworked official deminers to clear his field.

Instead, he designed a remote-controlled tractor that could withstand blasts. Using armour from damaged Russian military vehicles to protect the body of his tractor, he bought a system that would enable one of his team to operate the tractor remotely from a digger's bucket suspended in the air nearby.

Remote controlled demining machine made of tractor and armoured plates from destroyed Russian military vehicles is seen in a field near the village of Hrakove

"We started doing this just because the crop-sowing time has come and we can't do anything because the rescue services are very busy," Kryvtsov told Reuters.

"We ran over an anti-tank mine. The protection got blown out (but) the tractor is safe," he said. "Everyone's alive and safe. The equipment was restored and repaired."

Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal said last week about 30% of Ukrainian territory had been mined by Russians and that the government was focused on de-mining agricultural land as quickly as possible.

"We have no time to demine the fields. The amount of work is enormous," said Serhii Dudak, head of the demining unit now overseeing the tractor's work. "It would take years to demine this particular field by hand and to guarantee that there are no mines here."



## Star Swallows Planet in First Glimpse of Earth's Likely End



PARIS (Dispatches) - Scientists said that they have observed a dying star swallowing a planet for the first time, offering a preview of Earth's expected fate in around five billion years.

But when the Sun finally does engulf Earth, it will cause only a "tiny perturbation" compared to this cosmic explosion, the US astronomers said.

Most planets are believed to meet their end when their host star runs out of energy, turning into a red giant that massively expands, devouring anything unlucky enough to be in its path.

Astronomers had previously seen the before-and-after effects of this process, but had never before caught a planet in the act of being consumed.

Kishalay De, a postdoc researcher at MIT in the United States and the lead author of the new study, said the accidental discovery unfolded like a "detective story".

"It all started about three years ago when I was looking at data from the Zwicky Transient Facility survey, which takes images of the sky every night," De told an online press conference.

He stumbled across a star that had suddenly increased in brightness by more than 100 times over a 10-day period.

The star is in the Milky Way galaxy, around 12,000 light years from Earth near the Aquila constellation, which resembles an eagle.

De had been searching for binary star systems, in which the larger star takes bites out of its companion, creating incredibly bright explosions called outbursts.

But data showed that this outburst was surrounded by cold gas, suggesting it was not a binary star system.

## French Wants to Break Food Price Inflation "Spiral" by Autumn

PARIS (Dispatches) - Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire said on Wednesday that he would meet with retailers and suppliers next week to discuss ways to break the food price inflation "spiral" by autumn, which is a major concern for cash-strapped consumers.

Le Maire also told Franceinfo radio that economic growth remained solid in France despite recent strikes and protests against President Emmanuel Macron's legislation to raise the retirement age by two years to 64. French food retailers and their suppliers agreed a 10% average increase in prices in annual negotiations in March, which both sides said was necessary to cover higher production costs.



## U.S. Nominee Ajay Banga Elected as World Bank President



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Bank's board of governors elected former Mastercard CEO Ajay Banga to a five-year term as president, ushering in an Indian-born finance and development expert to revamp the lender to tackle climate change and other global crises.

Banga, 63, was nominated for the post by U.S. President Joe Biden in late February and was the sole contender to replace departing World Bank chief David Malpass, an economist and former U.S. Treasury official who served in the Trump administration. He starts the new job on June 2.

The election came after World Bank board members interviewed Banga for four hours. Malpass' last day at the bank will be June 1. The decision came in a vote by 24 of the board's members, with Russia abstaining, instead of the usual consensus-based process, a source familiar with the process said.

Biden congratulated Banga on his "resounding approval" to run the World Bank, which he described as "one of humanity's most critical institutions to reduce poverty and expand prosperity around the globe."

"Ajay Banga will be a transformative leader, bringing expertise, experience, and innovation to the position of World Bank President," Biden said. "He will help steer the institution as it evolves and expands to address global challenges that directly affect its core mission of poverty reduction — including climate change."

Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said Banga brought the "right leadership and management skills" to the job, and would play a critical role in pushing forward with additional reforms, including by forging partnerships between the public and private sectors and nonprofit groups.

"Ajay understands that the challenges we face — from combatting climate change, pandemics, and fragility to eliminating extreme poverty and promoting shared prosperity — are deeply intertwined. He has effectively built a broad global coalition around his vision for the Bank over the course of his candidacy," Yellen said in a statement.

Katie Malouf-Bous, interim head of Oxfam International's Washington office, said the bank needed "serious reform" to tackle the widening gap between rich and poor, but that would require huge new public investments and "guardrails around private finance that has run riot for too long."

One senior U.S. official said Banga's election came at a critical moment marked by emerging debt distress in lower- and middle-income countries and ongoing problems in food and energy markets as a result of Russia's war in Ukraine.

"It is a challenging moment, but it's a moment where the World Bank remains more vital than ever, and where getting the evolution of the World Bank is absolutely critical," the official said.

The bank already loans out hundreds of billions of dollars to developing countries but is working to increase its lending to help them address overlapping global challenges such as climate change, conflict and brace for future pandemics.

"The Board looks forward to working with Mr. Banga on the World Bank Group Evolution process ... on all the World Bank Group's ambitions and efforts aimed at tackling the toughest development challenges facing developing countries," the bank said.

The World Bank has been led by an American since its founding at the end of World War Two, while the International Monetary Fund has been led by a European.

Banga, who was born in India and spent his early career there, has been a U.S. citizen since 2007. Banga has met with officials from 96 governments since his nomination, the source said. He visited eight countries during a three-week world tour to meet with government officials, business leaders and civil society groups, flying a total of 39,546 miles (63,643 km).

## Malaysia Central Bank May Hit Pause

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Malaysia's central bank unexpectedly raised its benchmark interest rate on Wednesday, as it looks to manage persistent inflation amid strong domestic demand.

Bank Negara Malaysia (BNM) lifted its overnight policy rate by 25 basis points to 3%, confounding economists' expectations for an extended pause.

Some economists now see the move marking the end of the current tightening cycle as price pressures ease along with slowing global growth that will likely hurt the export-driven economy.

BNM had kept rates unchanged at its two previous meetings this year, as it sought to assess the impact of four consecutive hikes totalling 100 basis points in 2022.

The Southeast Asian economy has bounced back strongly from a pandemic-induced slump, with growth hitting a 22-year high of 8.7% in 2022, but slowing global demand has clouded the outlook for the exporter of oil, commodities and high tech goods.

BNM said in a statement that latest developments point towards further expansion in economic activity in the first quarter of 2023, driven by strong domestic demand, household spending and better labour market conditions.

While inflation was expected to moderate, core inflation would remain at elevated levels amid firm demand conditions, it said.

"With the domestic growth prospects remaining resilient, the MPC judges that it is timely to further normalize the degree of monetary accommodation," the central bank said, referring to its monetary policy committee.

The Malaysian ringgit was up 0.3% against the U.S. dollar, extending gains after the move.

Wednesday's hike marks the return of borrowing costs to pre-pandemic levels and comes ahead of planned reforms to Malaysia's subsidy program, which could add to inflationary pressure. The government has said it was looking to do away with broad subsidies that have squeezed government coffers, aiming to target aid towards vulnerable and low-income groups.

BNM said the balance of risk to the inflation outlook was "tilted to the upside and remains highly subject to any changes to domestic policy including on subsidies and price controls, financial market developments, as well as global commodity prices".

On Tuesday, Australia's central bank also stunned markets by raising its cash rate 25 bps, citing inflationary pressures.



## IMF Says Inflation To Slow Growth Across Mideast This Year

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Economies across the Middle East and Central Asia will likely slow this year as persistently high inflation and rising interest rates bite into their post-pandemic gains, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

The IMF's Regional Economic Outlook blamed in part rising energy costs, as well as elevated food prices, for the estimated slower growth. The report said that while oil-dependent economies of the Gulf Arab states and others in the region have reaped the benefits of elevated crude prices, other countries — such as Pakistan — have seen growth collapse after an unprecedented flooding last summer or as economic woes worsened.

The regional slowdown also comes as an explosion of fighting in Sudan between two top rival generals — who only a year ago as allies orchestrated a military coup that upended the African country's transition to democracy — threatens a nation where IMF and World Bank debt relief remains on hold.

Rising interest rates, used by central banks worldwide to try to stem inflation's rise, increase the costs of borrowing money. That will affect nations carrying heavier debts, the IMF warned.

"This year we're seeing inflation again being the most challenging issue for most of the countries," Jihad Azour, the director of the Middle East and Central Asia Department at the IMF, told The Associated Press. "For those who have high level of debt, the challenge of increase in interest rate globally, as well as also the tightening of monetary policy, is affecting them."

The IMF forecast predicts regional growth will drop from 5.3% last year to 3.1% this year. Overall, regional inflation is expected to be at 14.8%, unchanged from last year, as Russia's war on Ukraine continues to pressure global food supplies and affect energy markets.

It will be even worse in Pakistan, where the IMF projected inflation to more than double, to about 27%. Pakistan and IMF officials have held repeated talks over the release of a stalled key tranche of a \$6 billion bailout package loan to Islamabad.

The IMF warned that financial conditions worldwide will tighten this year, brought on in part by two bank failures in the United States in March. The sudden collapse of Credit Suisse before it was purchased by UBS also strained markets.

For Sudan, Azour acknowledged the challenge as the country faces a humanitarian crisis brought on by the weeks of fighting there. The violence has also worsened a debt crisis that has gripped the country for decades as it faced Western sanctions.

"We have worked with the government of Sudan, for the Sudanese people, in order to help them by achieving a debt operation that would allow Sudan to have a debt relief of more than \$50 billion," Azour said.

"But unfortunately, the recent developments... put in a halt to all of those efforts," he added.



## Over Quarter-Billion People Faced Acute Food Insecurity in 2022

ROME (Dispatches) - Over 250 million people across 58 nations experienced acute food insecurity last year due to various factors spearheaded by conflicts, climate change, the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine, according to a U.N. report published.

"More than a quarter of a billion people are now facing acute levels of hunger, and some are on the brink of starvation. That's unconscionable," U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said.

The Global Report on Food Crises, an alliance of humanitarian organizations founded by the U.N. and European Union, said people faced starvation and death in seven of those countries: Somalia, Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Haiti, Nigeria, South Sudan and Yemen.

The report found that the number of people facing acute food insecurity and requiring urgent food aid — 258 million — had increased for the fourth consecutive year, a "stinging indictment of humanity's failure" to implement U.N. goals to end world hunger, said Guterres.

The figure compared to 193 million people in 53 countries reported in 2021.

"Conflicts and mass displacement continue to drive global hunger," Guterres said.

"Rising poverty, deepening inequalities, rampant underdevelopment, the climate crisis and natural disasters also contribute to food insecurity."

While the increase last year was due in part to more populations being analyzed, the report also found that the severity of the problem increased as well, "highlighting a concerning trend of a deterioration."

## Turkish Inflation Eases to 16-Month Low Ahead of Key Elections

ANKARA (Dispatches)- Annual consumer price increases in Turkey moderated further in April, easing for the sixth consecutive month, in a trend the government says is expected to continue as the nation heads to critical elections slated for May 14.

The consumer price index (CPI) has almost halved since reaching a peak in October, easing to an annual 43.68% last month, the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) said.

The reading marks a notable regress from 85.51% in October last year — a 24-year peak. It fell in December and touched 50.51% by March, with a favorable base effect and a relatively stable Turkish lira.

Month-over-month, the inflation rose 2.39% in April, the TurkStat said. The official numbers came in less than predicted, with a median monthly estimate of 2.60% and an annual forecast of 44% in the latest Reuters poll.

The data also showed that the producer price index (PPI) eased to an 18-month low of 52.11% in April from 62.45% a month ago.

Among the main industrial sectors, prices for the energy industry surged 49.33% yearly in April, and those for non-durable consumer goods grew 50.57%.

Month-over-month, producer prices edged up 0.81% in April versus a 0.44% rise in the preceding month.

Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati cited a nearly 42-point drop in inflation from the peak, stressing a rapidly narrowing gap between CPI and PPI, which he said fell to single-digit levels from 72.2 points in October.

In a statement following the data release, Nebati stressed that they expect the decline in inflation to continue.

"The deceleration in headline inflation and the fact that the gap between PPI and CPI continues to close gradually positively impact inflation expectations as well," he said.

"While the world is struggling with recession concerns and employment losses, we are firmly continuing our fight against inflation without compromising production, employment and growth," Nebati noted.

"We expect this rapid decline, which results from our determined fight against inflation, to continue in the coming months and annual inflation to fall to much lower levels later this year."

The latest inflation marked the lowest since December 2021, when prices had risen 36.08%.

## South Korea Minister Seeking to Get Domestic Bonds Into WGBI



INCHEON (Dispatches) - South Korea (Reuters) -South Korea is seeking to have its domestic bonds added to a key international market index this year although a decision by the benchmark publisher may not be made until September next year, the country's finance minister told Reuters.

The government has said it hoped its bonds would be added to Russell's World Government Bond Index (WGBI) as early as this year, a move that could bring fresh foreign funds into domestic capital markets.

"Under the usual timetable, it will be September next year, but the government will make maximum efforts to make it happen earlier than that," Choo Kyung-ho told Reuters on the sidelines of the Asian Development Bank annual meeting in Incheon, South Korea.

FTSE Russell put South Korea on its watch list in September last year for possible addition to WGBI. Barclays said it expected South Korean bonds to join the WGBI and estimated some \$60 billion in passive flows over several quarters. Choo also said that reviving a currency swap arrangement with Japan had not been discussed in meetings this week with his Japanese counterpart, although he expects to expand economic cooperation with Tokyo as diplomatic relations improve.

A previous bilateral foreign exchange swap agreement between South Korea and Japan expired and was not renewed amid diplomatic tensions between the two Asian economic powerhouses.

Choo said he still sees growth in Asia's fourth-largest economy picking up in the latter half of the year, despite the central bank's recent warning that growth for the whole of the year would be weaker than earlier projected.

He said the country's exports to China have suffered from a mix of factors, including Beijing's efforts to drive the economic recovery through domestic consumption, which has shifted focus to local production over imported goods.

## Iran Among Top Four Countries Producing FMD Vaccine

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The caretaker of Iran's Ministry of Agriculture on Thursday that the country is now one of the four countries producing the Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccine.

With the inauguration of the production line of Foot-and-Mouth Disease (FMD) vaccine, Iran joined the world club of the top four countries in the field of producing FMD vaccine, Seyed Mohammad Aghamiri stated.

Speaking in the inaugural ceremony of the largest production line of the FMD vaccine in the Sepehr Industrial Town of Nazarabad, near Tehran, the official noted that domestic producers are also producing other animal vaccines inside the country.

Up to 91 percent of animal vaccines are produced by domestic experts in the country and there is no need to import them from other countries, he emphasized.



## China's AI Industry Barely Slowed by U.S. Chip Export Rules

BEIJING (Dispatches) - U.S. microchip export controls imposed last year to freeze China's development of supercomputers used to develop nuclear weapons and artificial-intelligence systems like ChatGPT are having only minimal effects on China's tech sector.

The rules restricted shipments of Nvidia Corp and Advanced Micro Devices Inc (AMD.O) chips that have become the global technology industry's standard for developing chatbots and other AI systems.

But Nvidia has created variants of its chips for the Chinese market that are slowed down to meet U.S. rules. Industry experts told Reuters the newest one - the Nvidia H800, announced in March - will likely take 10% to 30% longer to carry out some AI tasks and could double some costs compared with Nvidia's fastest U.S. chips.

Even the slowed Nvidia chips represent an improvement for Chinese firms. Tencent Holdings, one of China's largest tech companies, in April estimated that systems using Nvidia's H800 will cut the time it takes to train its largest AI system by more than half, from 11 days to four days.

"The AI companies that we talk to seem to see the handicap as relatively small and manageable," said Charlie Chai, a Shanghai-based analyst with 86Research.

The back-and-forth between government and industry exposes the U.S. challenge of developing China's progress in high tech without hurting U.S. companies.

Part of the U.S. strategy in setting the rules was to avoid such a shock that the Chinese would ditch U.S. chips altogether and redouble their own chip-development efforts.

"They had to draw the line somewhere, and wherever they drew it, they were going to run into the challenge of how to not be immediately disruptive, but how to also over time degrade China's capability," said one chip industry executive who requested anonymity to talk about private discussions with regulators.

The export restrictions have two parts. The first puts a ceiling on a chip's ability to calculate extremely precise numbers, a measure designed to limit supercomputers that can be used in military research. Chip industry sources said that was an effective action.

But calculating extremely precise numbers is less relevant in AI work like large language models where the amount of data the chip can chew through is more important.

Nvidia is selling the H800 to China's largest technology firms, including Tencent, Alibaba Group Holding Ltd and Baidu Inc for use in such work, though it has not yet started shipping the chips in high volumes.

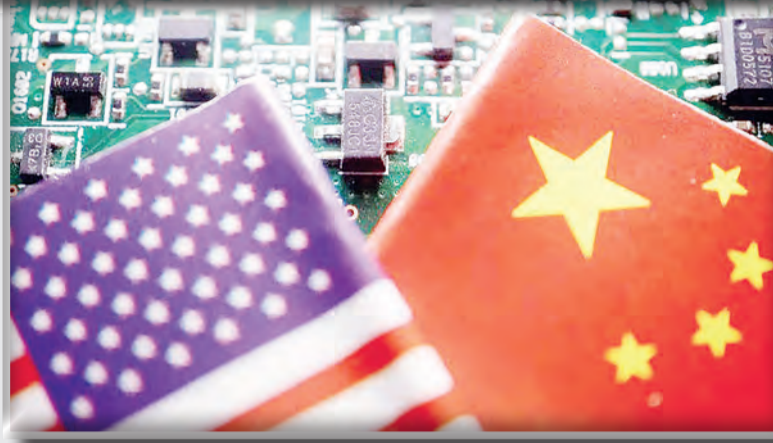
"The government isn't seeking to harm competition or U.S. industry, and allows U.S. firms to supply products for commercial activities, such as providing cloud services for consumers," Nvidia said in a statement last week.

China is an important customer for U.S. technology, it added.

"The October export controls require that we create products with an expanding gap between the two markets," Nvidia said last week. We comply with the regulation while offering as-competitive-as-possible products in each market."

Bill Dally, Nvidia's chief scientist, said in a separate statement this week that "this gap will grow quickly over time as training requirements continue to double every six to 12 months."

A spokesperson for the Bureau of Industry and Security, the arm of the U.S. Commerce Department that oversees the rules, did not return a request for comment.



The second U.S. limit is on chip-to-chip transfer speeds, which does affect AI. The models behind technologies such as ChatGPT are too large to fit onto a single chip. Instead, they must be spread over many chips - often thousands at a time - which all need to communicate with one another.

Nvidia has not disclosed the China-only H800 chip's performance details, but a specification sheet seen by Reuters shows a chip-to-chip speed of 400 gigabytes per second, less than half the peak speed of 900 gigabytes per second for Nvidia's flagship H100 chip available outside China.

Some in the AI industry believe that is still plenty of speed. Naveen Rao, chief executive of a startup called MosaicML that specializes in helping AI models to run better on limited hardware, estimated a 10-30% system slowdown.

"There are ways to get around all this algorithmically," he said. "I don't see this being a boundary for a very long time - like 10 years."

Money helps. A chip in China that takes twice as long to finish an AI training task than a faster U.S. chip can still get the work done.

"At that point, you've got to spend \$20 million instead of \$10 million to train it," said one industry source who requested anonymity because of agreements with partners. "Does that suck? Yes it does. But does that mean this is impossible for Alibaba or Baidu? No, that's not a problem."

Moreover, AI researchers are trying to slim down the massive systems they have built to cut the cost of training products similar to ChatGPT and other processes. Those will require fewer chips, reducing chip-to-chip communications and lessening the impact of the U.S. speed limits.

Two years ago the industry was thinking AI models would get bigger and bigger, said Cade Daniel, a software engineer at Anyscale, a San Francisco startup that provides software to help companies perform AI work.

"If that were still true today, this export restriction would have a lot more impact," Daniel said. "This export restriction is noticeable, but it's not quite as devastating as it could have been."

## Global Rate Hike Push Slows to a Trickle in April Ahead of Busy May



LONDON (Dispatches) - Interest rate hikes from central banks around the globe slowed to a trickle in April thanks to a combination of easing inflation and slowing growth prospects amid a dearth of meetings on monetary policy decisions.

April saw two interest rate hikes across five meetings by central banks overseeing the 10 most heavily traded currencies. Policy makers in New Zealand and Sweden delivered a total of 100 basis points (bps) in rate hikes, while Japan, Australia and Canada held fire at theirs. That compares to six interest rate hikes across eight meetings by G10 central banks in March.

"We are approaching the end of the global hiking cycle, we are at an inflection point," said Omar Slim, co-head of Asia ex-Japan fixed income at PineBridge Investments.

However, whilst the developed market tightening cycle was in its final throes, policy makers had still some lose ends to tie up in May with Australia's central bank surprising markets with an interest rate on Tuesday and policy makers at the U.S. Federal Reserve and European Central Bank - neither of which met last month - expected to deliver more hikes in coming days.

"The Fed is widely anticipated to hike but likely to maintain a tightening bias to provide optionality for another hike if inflation doesn't comply," said Mark McCormick at TD Securities.

In emerging markets, further signs of a slowdown in the rate hike push became evident. Eleven out of 18 central banks in the Reuters sample of developing economies met to decide on rate moves, but only policy makers in Israel and Colombia hiked by a cumulative 50 bps. China, Indonesia, India, Korea, Russia, Turkey, Hungary, Poland and Chile all decided to stay put.

That compares to fourteen central banks in developing economies meeting in March with five hiking by a total of 150 bps.

## World's Apparel, Sneakers Hub Vietnam Struggles

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

Among garment exporters, Vietnam has faced the worst hit from the Uyghur Forced Labor Protection Act, a Reuters review of official U.S. data showed. The law, in place since June, requires companies to prove that they do not use raw material or components produced with Xinjiang's forced labor. The U.S. clampdown hurts as it comes on top of a drop in clothing demand from richer nations that has already dented industrial output and exports from the Southeast Asian manufacturing powerhouse, a major supplier to big brands such as Gap, Nike and Adidas.

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

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

Vietnamese manufacturers, trade associations and the industry ministry did not reply to Reuters questions about the impact of UFLPA. The value of shipments from Vietnam that have been denied entry to the U.S. exceeded \$2 million, three times more than those from China - with the sanctions having increased exponentially in the first months of this year.

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

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

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

That, in turn, will hit U.S. consumers as Vietnam is their main source of cotton apparel, according to the U.S. Department of Commerce. "Vietnam's heavy reliance on cotton textile materials from China poses a significant risk of containing Xinjiang cotton, as the province produces over 90% of China's cotton," Sheng Lu, Director at the Department of Fashion and Apparel Studies at the University of Delaware, told Reuters.

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

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

### Iran, Belarus...

FROM PAGE 1

The theme of India's Chairmanship of SCO in 2023 is 'Secure-SCO'. India attaches special importance to SCO in promoting multilateral, political, security, economic and people-to-people interactions in the region. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) is an intergovernmental organization established in 2001.

The last meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization was held in Samarkand, Uzbekistan. India took over the rotating presidency of the SCO at the Samarkand SCO Summit in 2022.

### Iran, Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

First Deputy Managing Director of Russian Railways Sergey Pavlov said in March that the construction was estimated at around \$1.6 bln. According to the Iranian side's design decisions, the construction of the Rasht-Astara section will take four years, though Pavlov did not rule out the possibility of the term's reduction.

The project is aimed at connecting the land sections of the International North-South Transport Corridor, which will permit raising the economic efficiency of the trans-Caspian route. Some 170 km long, the Rasht-Astara line is planned to be constructed by Moscow and Tehran. Meanwhile the line connecting the Iranian city of Astara and the Azerbaijani city of Astara will be built by Moscow, Tehran and Baku.

### Tehran, Damascus Pledge...

FROM PAGE 1

They went on to emphasize the importance of cementing mutual ties through continuation of political, economic and consular interactions, as well as exchange of high-ranking delegations between the two countries.

The two sides also expressed readiness and willingness to take appropriate measures aimed at further promotion of bilateral commercial and economic relations through existing mechanisms such as the Joint High Commission for Economic Cooperation. They stressed the potential areas of cooperation in Syria's post-war era of reconstruction and development.

Raisi and Assad condemned in the strongest terms the recurrent Israeli air raids on various areas across Syria and described them as a destabilizing factor in the Middle East region, and pointed to Syria's legitimate right to respond to such acts of aggression in a proper manner.

They denounced the continued Israeli occupation of Syrian Golan Heights, and the Tel Aviv regime's decision to annex the strategic plateau in flagrant violation of the international law.

The two sides also censured the US government's decision to recognize Israeli control of the territory, which has been under an Israeli military occupation since the 1967 Arab-Israeli War.

Raisi and Assad also condemned the presence of foreign occupation forces on Syrian soil as "illegal," and called for cessation of such deployments.

They stressed the need for the Damascus government to increase its sovereignty throughout Syria, and denounced the US military's continued plundering of Syrian crude oil and natural resources.

The two presidents demanded a decisive response from the international community to stop such actions.

The two sides also strongly condemned the unilateral and illegitimate sanctions imposed by the United States and the European Union against Iran and Syria, stating that the coercive measures are in breach of international laws and humanitarian principles.

They underlined that the sanctions affect innocent people and adversely affect them, calling for an immediate end to such inhumane measures.

Raisi also stressed that the Islamic Republic will stand by Syria in the reconstruction of quake-devastated areas, and condemned the continuation of illegal and cruel Western sanctions against Syria.

The two sides emphasized the need to immediately break Syria's siege in order to receive international aid and assistance for the reconstruction of earthquake-hit regions.

Raisi and Assad finally hailed the recent reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in a agreement brokered by China, terming rapprochement as an important step towards establishment of stability throughout the Middle East.

### Tehran Lambasts...

FROM PAGE 1

Iravani further said cooperation in the field of environmental issues is a global responsibility, and that US measures are against the global sustainable development goals.

He also emphasized that the US must assume responsibility for its wrongdoing against the Iranian people, calling on Washington to lift all illegal and unilateral sanctions with environmental impacts.

The United States under former president Donald Trump reinstated crippling sanctions on Iran after unilaterally walking out of the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018, despite Iran's full compliance with the terms of the agreement, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Although Trump failed to achieve his professed goals with the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign, the waves of sanctions took a heavy toll on ordinary Iranians, including those battling life-threatening diseases.

The sanctions, maintained by Trump's successor Joe Biden, have restricted the financial channels necessary to pay for basic goods and medicine, undermining supply chains by limiting the number of suppliers willing to facilitate sales of humanitarian goods to the country.

Iran has repeatedly denounced the sanctions as an act of "economic war", "economic terrorism", and "medical terrorism."

### No Political Will on...

FROM PAGE 1

The negotiations have been at a standstill since August due to Washington's insistence on its hard-nosed position of not removing all the sanctions that were slapped on the Islamic Republic by the previous US administration. Iran maintains it is necessary for the other side to offer some guarantees that it will remain committed to any agreement that is reached.

According to Marandi, Washington does not have the political will to sign the agreement because Biden is afraid that he will sign the agreement and his opponent in the election will use it against him.

## Russia to Launch Friendship Games After 40-Year Gap

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia plans to relaunch the multi-sport Friendship Games next year, 40 years after its first edition, Sports Minister Oleg Matytsin has told President Vladimir Putin.

Matytsin said the event would be held after the Paris Olympics, which will run from July 26-Aug. 11 next year.

"We propose to intensify the practice of holding competitions in an open format with the invitation of partner countries," The Kremlin's official website reported Matytsin as saying.

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## Olympic Medal-Winning Sprinter Dies Aged 32

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Tori Bowie, the 100m silver medalist at the 2016 Rio Olympics and the 2017 world champion, has died at the age of 32, USATF and her management company said on Wednesday.

Bowie also won an Olympic 200m bronze and gold in the 4x100m relay at the Rio Games. "USATF is deeply saddened by the passing of Tori Bowie, a three-time Olympic medalist and two-time world champion. A talented athlete, her impact on the sport is immeasurable, and she will be greatly missed," the federation's CEO Max Siegel said in a statement.

## Haaland Sets Premier League Goal Record to Put Man on Top

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Erling Haaland set a new record of 35 goals in a Premier League season as Manchester City overcame West Ham 3-0 to move back to the top of the table, while Liverpool edged out Fulham 1-0.

City were made to work by an under-manned Hammers to edge one point clear of Arsenal in the title race, with a game in hand still to come.

But they cut loose after half-time as Haaland wrote himself into the record books with his 51st goal in all competitions of his debut season at City.

"I do not think of all these records, I would go crazy in my head," said Haaland. "I go home now, play some video games, eat something and then sleep."

The Norwegian was given a guard of honor by his teammates as he left the pitch after full-time.

"In football when there is a special occasion, we have to show how special it is," said City boss Pep Guardiola.

"We are very pleased for him because he is a joy to work with, to be with, and everyone is happy to have him with us. The record will be broken in the future, maybe by him."

The visitors were missing England international Declan Rice, Tomas Soucek and Nayef Aguerd through illness, while injuries meant David Moyes could only name five outfield substitutes.

But Moyes' men held out for 50 minutes before succumbing at the Etihad to remain rooted in a relegation battle.

Nathan Ake was the unlikely figure to break the deadlock as the Dutch defender rose highest to power home Riyad Mahrez's free-kick.

But there was no surprise over the scorer of City's second as Haaland raced onto Jack Grealish's pass and deftly dinked the ball over the advancing Lukasz Fabianski.

The 22-year-old moved past Alan Shearer and Andy Cole's mark of 34 set for Blackburn and Newcastle respectively in the 1990s.



final flourish as his sweetly-struck volley deflected off Emerson Palmieri to leave Fabianski wrong-footed five minutes from time.

City's 13th consecutive home win in 2023 edges Guardiola's men ever closer to a fifth Premier League title in six seasons.

The champions need just four wins from their remaining five games to ensure Arsenal are denied their first title in 19 years.

Defeat leaves West Ham still four points above the relegation zone with four games to play.

At Anfield, Liverpool refused to give up the fight for a top-four finish by keeping the pressure on Newcastle and Manchester United for the final two places in next season's Champions League behind City and Arsenal.

Jürgen Klopp's men have now won five league consecutive league games for the first time this season.

"Five games in a row is good. I liked it a lot. We have to try to do something we can use, something we can build on in the next season," said Klopp.

Mohamed Salah's 29th goal of the season was the difference between the sides as the Egyptian shrugged off his recent struggles from the penalty spot to convert after Darwin Nunez had been fouled by Issa Diop six minutes before half-time.



## Real Madrid Close in on Bellingham Deal

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid are closing in on Borussia Dortmund midfielder Jude Bellingham, with Spanish reports saying a deal will soon be reached.

The England international, 19, is one of the brightest prospects in world football and is poised to move for over £100 million, with Dortmund said to want considerably more.

Bellingham excelled at the World Cup with England in 2022 and has also drawn interest from Madrid's Champions League semi-final opponents Manchester City.

The midfielder signed for Dortmund at 17 from Championship team Birmingham City for €29 million and has become a key player for the German side.

Spanish newspaper Marca say any deal between Madrid and Dortmund will not be announced until the end of the Bundesliga season, with Bellingham's side a point behind leaders Bayern Munich in the title race.

Madrid are looking to find long-term replacements for their veteran players, including midfielders Luka Modric, 37, and Toni Kroos, 33.

## Raducanu out of French Open, Wimbledon

LONDON (Dispatches) - Emma Raducanu said she will miss the French Open and Wimbledon as the British number one recovers from hand and ankle surgery.

The 2021 US Open champion has been dogged by injury problems in recent months and pulled out of the Madrid Open in April with a hand injury.

The 20-year-old, who has slipped to 85th in the world rankings, posted a photo of herself in a hospital bed with her right hand bandaged on her social media accounts.

"It is safe to say the last 10 months have been difficult as I dealt with a recurring injury on a bone of both hands," she said.

"I tried my best to manage the pain and play through it for most of this year and end of last year by reducing practice load dramatically, missing weeks of training as well as cutting last season short to try heal it.

"Unfortunately it's not enough. I'm having a minor procedure done on both hands to resolve the issues.

"I'm disappointed to share that I will be out for the next few months and while I am at it will have another minor procedure that is due on my ankle.

"It pains me that I will miss the summer events and I tried to downplay the issues so I thank all my fans who continued to support me when you did not know the facts."



## Alcaraz Into Madrid Open Semis

MADRID (Dispatches) - Defending champion Carlos Alcaraz moved into the Madrid Open semi-finals with a straight sets victory over Karen Khachanov in his final match as a teenager, while Iga Swiatek reached the women's last four.

US Open winner Alcaraz, who turns 20 on Friday when the last-four ties are played, overturned 4-1 and 5-2 deficits in the second set to defeat 12th-ranked Khachanov, 6-4, 7-5.

"Winning this match will give me a lot of

confidence, Karen was at a great level and took me to the limit," said world number two Alcaraz who unleashed 31 winners.

"It was decided by small details and I am very, very happy to be able to get through this round."

The top seed triumphed in one hour and 52 minutes and will next face Borna Coric of Croatia who eased past German lucky loser Daniel Altmaier 6-3, 6-3.

"It was pretty tough. The first set as well, it was close," added Alcaraz whose record on clay this year now stands at 17 wins against one defeat.

"I was in trouble in the second set, a break down and he had two break points to have the second break. So it was really tough for me to come back and he had his chances to win the second set.

"Luckily I knew I was going to have my chances. I just tried to take my opportunities and I'm really happy to get through."

## PSG set for Messi Divorce After Suspending Superstar

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain's relationship with Lionel Messi is set to end after two underwhelming years following the French champions' decision to suspend the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner for going on an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia.

Greeted as a hero by adoring supporters when he arrived in Paris from Barcelona in August 2021, Messi was supposed to be the man to deliver PSG elusive Champions League success.

It has not worked out and some of those fans had recently turned against a player they see as a symbol of all the club have done wrong in focusing on superstar signings while failing to build a genuinely competitive team.

Having at one point looked set to secure Messi's signature for another season, the Qatar-owned club briefed a month ago that the player was now "much more likely" to depart at the campaign's end when his contract expires.

This week's events are surely the final straw.

Messi, who will be 36 in June, played in PSG's insipid 3-1 home defeat by Lorient in Ligue 1 on Sunday.

He then travelled to Saudi Arabia to fulfil commitments as part of a contract with the country's tourist office. As a result Messi missed a training session pencilled in for Monday following the weekend defeat.

PSG acted swiftly to punish Messi, despite his status as one of the sport's greats.

He has been suspended even though PSG still need points to retain the French title with five matches left this season.

A source with knowledge of the disciplinary procedure told AFP that Argentina's World-Cup winning captain would be sidelined for "several days".

Various media in France reported he would be suspended for two weeks.



## Sharp-Shooting Celtics Blitz Sixers To Square Series

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Boston Celtics produced an exhibition of three-point shooting to blow away the Philadelphia 76ers 121-87 and square their Eastern Conference playoff series.

Jaylen Brown led a clinical offensive display for the second-seeded Celtics to swat aside a Sixers line-up who welcomed back newly crowned NBA Most Valuable Player Joel Embiid after an injury absence of nearly two weeks.

Brown finished with 25 points while Malcolm Brogdon poured in 23 from the bench, including six three-pointers, as the Celtics bounced back from Monday's game-one loss at the TD Garden.

The best-of-seven series is now level at 1-1 as the teams head to Philadelphia for game three on Friday.

After the rout, Sixers coach Doc Rivers will have plenty of food for thought despite the mostly successful return of Embiid, who had not played since injuring his right knee in game three of the first-round sweep of Brooklyn.

Embiid made his presence felt with 15 points and five blocks but was clearly not at full fitness, before being removed from the fray in the third quarter as Boston surged into a commanding lead.

Boston meanwhile will be buoyed by a display that mixed defensive ruggedness with free-scoring offense.

"We just set the tone on defense, trying to be aggressive on both sides of the ball, getting our team-mates going. But really just setting the tone on defense and having fun," Celtics forward Brown said afterwards. No fewer than eight Celtics players contributed to Boston's tally of 20 three-pointers from 51 attempts.

Philadelphia by contrast made only six of 30 from beyond the arc with their off-night underscored by James Harden's futile shooting from three-point range.



## Atletico Overtake Real Madrid With Cadiz Rout

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Antoine Griezmann shone as Atletico Madrid thrashed Cadiz 5-1 to climb above rivals Real Madrid into second in La Liga.

Diego Simeone's side are a point above the champions but 13 behind leaders Barcelona, who just need two more points to clinch the title.

Struggling Valencia earned a 1-1 draw with fifth-placed Villarreal but remain in 17th place, level on points with Getafe, 18th, who beat Celta Vigo 1-0.