

Energy Minister in Meeting With His Iraqi Counterpart Said That the Participation of Regional Countries In Using New Technologies to Deal With Water Shortage Is So Effective

IRAN NEWS

According to the Head of the 5th Exhibition of Export Capabilities of The Islamic Republic of Iran, (IRAN EXPO 2023), the Opening of the Exhibition Will Be Held Today in the Presence of President Ebrahim Raisi

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U.S. to Blame for Israel's Sabotage Against Iran Nuclear Program

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's security chief considers the United States to be responsible for all of the Israeli regime's acts of terror targeting the Iranian nuclear facilities and the people working for the Islamic Republic's nuclear program.

Secretary of Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC) Ali Shamkhani made the remarks in a tweet on Friday.

Shamkhani cited earlier comments by US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan, in which the latter had alleged that Washington would recognize Tel Aviv's "freedom of action" in the event of, what he called, Tehran's attempt "to obtain a nuclear weapon."

Sullivan's remarks echoed allegations issued consistently against Iran's nuclear peaceful nuclear program by the United States and its allies.

Tehran has invariably asserted that its nuclear program is aimed at purely peaceful purposes and that the Islamic Republic had no intention of developing nuclear weapons.

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Tehran, Tashkent Seek Broadening All-Out Ties



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN – Majlis Speaker says that the foreign policy priority of the country is relations with neighboring and regional countries, especially Islamic countries.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf made the remarks in a joint press conference with the Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of Uzbekistan Nurdinjon Ismailov who at the head of a parliamentary delegation arrived in Tehran on Friday night.

"Given Iran has prioritized the development of relations with neighboring and regional countries, especially Islamic countries, the development of relations with Uzbekistan is one of our priorities," said Qalibaf.

He added that Iran can develop its relations with Uzbekistan in the political, economic and cultural fields. "There are good and favorable opportunities in the development of economic, transportation and transit relations with Uzbekistan, especially in the use of the north-south corridor and the east-west corridor."

The Iranian parliament speaker went on to say that Iran is looking to expand its relations with Uzbekistan in cultural and tourism fields as well.

According to Qalibaf, the two sides also discussed Afghanistan developments in their meeting.

He added: "Considering the situation in Afghanistan, the countries of the region need cooperation to help Afghanistan. We hope that these meetings can lead to the development of relations in the region."

Nurdinjon Ismailov, for his part, said that the President of Uzbekistan will visit Iran next month, adding that relations between Iran and Uzbekistan have developed in all fields in recent years.

Stating that the development of economic and commercial relations between Iran and Uzbekistan is emphasized during the meeting, he said, that the development of relations and cooperation in the field of transportation and transit is very important.

The government of Uzbekistan, like the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran, has prioritized the development of relations with the countries of the region, Ismailov noted.

Stating that the parliamentary cooperation between Iran and Uzbekistan is expanding in recent years, he added that great steps have been taken to improve the relations between the two countries.

Ismailov pointed out: "Of course, these days, parliamentary cooperation between the two countries is developing, and in recent years, we have taken great steps in this field, and our meeting today was a logical continuation of the talks between the speakers of the two parliaments in Tashkent. When governments try to develop relations, parliaments should also try to provide legal foundations for the development of these relations."

"We talked about Afghanistan, we both have a common border with Afghanistan, and its situation is very important to us, and establishing peace and security in it is very important to us. We are determined to improve the situation in Afghanistan as much as possible," he added.

Iran-Turkey Trade Stands At \$1.379b in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of trade between Iran and Turkey stood at \$1.379 billion during the first quarter of 2023, down 14 percent from \$1.619 billion in the first three months of 2022, according to the figures recently released by the Turkish Statistical Institute.

Based on the mentioned data, Turkey's export to Iran rose two percent to \$702 million in the three-month period of this year, from \$682 million in the same time span of the previous year.

Iran's three-month export to Turkey fell 27 percent to \$677 million from \$932 million.

Based on the data previously released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the value of Iran's exports to neighboring Turkey increased by 19 percent to reach \$3.35 billion in 2022.

Turkey had imported over \$2.82 billion worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic in 2021.

Based on the mentioned data, Iran's imports from the country also marked an 11-percent rise to hit \$3.07 billion in the past year, in comparison with 2021, when the figure was \$2.77 billion.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S. Economy Collapsing Any Moment

As many economists and politicians had predicted in the past that the U.S. grandeur is approaching its end and that the U.S. will not be any longer the economy number one in the world in near future, it seems their prediction is coming true and domino of economic collapse and failure in this country has just started and everyday some big banks or financial institutions are falling in this country and the alarm has been heard in the U.S.

According to recent reports, more than 500 banks across the U.S. have closed since 2001, of which most happened after the 2008 financial crisis, according to data from the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation.

American regulators seized and then sold First Republic Bank to JPMorgan Chase on Monday, marking the second largest-ever U.S. bank collapse and the third major bank shutdown nationwide in the past two months, following the collapse of Silicon Valley Bank (SVB) and Signature Bank.

Of all the banks that closed since 2001, the largest was Washington Mutual, which closed in September 2008, during the early stage of the financial crisis. The closure of First Republic Bank is the second-largest bank closure in the United States and the largest since the end of the financial crisis.

About 70 banks across the US have closed over the past decade. The total assets of the three banks closed this year exceeded the total assets of the 25 banks closed in 2008, meaning that the scale of U.S. bank closures in 2023 is the largest in recent years.

In March this year, a study jointly released by economists from multiple universities in the United States showed that the Fed's rate hike greatly increased the vulnerability of the US banking system. Affected by the Federal Reserve's aggressive interest rate hikes, the value of financial assets such as bonds held by many U.S. banks has shrunk sharply, and the asset value of some banks has even decreased by more than 20 percent.

According to the study, if market confidence continues to weaken and more depositors withdraw their deposits, as many as 186 banks may become insolvent and face the risk of closure.

The Federal Reserve rate hike on Wednesday led to a deep selloff in U.S. regional banks on Thursday.

Stocks of U.S. regional lenders such as Western Alliance and Pacific West dropped over 60 percent before recouping some losses. First Horizon tumbled as much as 45 percent, its biggest intraday fall since the 2008 financial crisis. Multiple other lenders, both large and small, too were caught up in the panic.

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Iran to Reduce Average Age of Its Aviation Fleet to 20 Years

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Civil Aviation Organization (CAO) of Iran plans to reduce the average age of its aviation fleet to 20 years, CAO's head has said.

Mohammad Mohammadi-Bakhsh said that the Islamic Republic had purchased new planes and shipped them into the country over the year to late March.

Mohammadi-Bakhsh said the import of new planes caused the average lifespan of the Iranian fleet to drop to below 26 years despite claims that second-hand airplanes are above 40 years of age.

The official had said earlier this week that Iran's aviation industry, which remains under US sanctions, needs some 550 passenger planes to function properly, adding that the country purchased and took delivery of some 50 used aircraft and helicopters over the past 18 months.

Following the nuclear deal of 2015, Iran placed orders for purchases of 200 brand-new passenger planes from Western suppliers, including Airbus and Boeing. The contracts, however, were suspended in 2018 after the United States withdrew from the accord and unilaterally restored sanctions on the Islamic Republic.

Raisi's Historic Visit to Syria Shatter Fallacy of U.S. Domination in Region

VEIRUT (Dispatches) - The head of the religious council of the Hezbollah resistance movement has praised Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's landmark visit to Syria, saying the visit shattered the myth of US domination in West Asia and proved that US hegemony in the region has collapsed.

Speaking at a ceremony in the northeastern Lebanese city of Baalbek on Friday evening, Sheikh Mohammad Yazbek hailed Raisi's visit as "historic", saying it dealt a sharp blow to the US-engineered and much-condemned Caesar Act, passed in 2019, highlighted the waning power of Washington in the region, and was in line of support for Syria-based resistance groups.

"The meetings, negotiations and cooperation agreements between the two sides perplexed the Zionist enemy, breathed new life into the Axis of Resistance, and created a new opening in the region," he added.

Sheikh Yazbek also hailed the recent reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in an agreement brokered by China, but hastened to add that religious scholars and clergymen have frequently censured normalization agreements between some Arab countries and the Israeli apartheid regime as a "dangerous precedent."

Even though an atmosphere of agreement and concord has prevailed in the region, the top Hezbollah official said, Lebanese authorities have qualms about using such an ambiance of dialogue and understanding in order to improve the status quo and address existing concerns. "Everyone in Lebanon desires formation of a strong and just government, which can exercise sovereignty through the country," he said.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Sheikh Yazbek denounced Israeli military raids, incursions into holy places and vicious assaults against Palestinian prisoners, calling for the wholesale condemnation of the regime following the martyrdom in prison of prominent Islamic Jihad leader Khader Adnan after an 87-day hunger strike.

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Navy Destroyers Equipped With Abu Mahdi Missile

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of Iran's Army Navy Force Rear Admiral Shahram Irani said that the Iranian navy destroyers were equipped with Abu Mahdi cruise missiles.

Abu Mahdi cruise missile is one of Iran's Aerospace Industries products with a range of over one thousand kilometers which can destroy any target.

Rapid reaction, management of target selection, and evading the enemy's defenses are among the characteristics of the Abu Mahdi cruise missile.

Regional People Consider Iran a Strong Reliable Pillar

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Pointing out that today the people of Syria and the region believe that Iran is a strong pillar that they can rely on, President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi stated, "In the meeting with different resistance groups, we saw that these groups, despite their different tastes, agreed that Iran can be trusted and relied on".

Speaking upon his arrival in Tehran from Damascus, Ayatollah Raisi explained the results and achievements of his intensive two-day official trip to Syria, and said, "After 12 years of resistance of the people and the government of Syria against the conspiracies of the enemies and the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran from this resistance and standing, this trip was very important for both countries and the region".

The President described this trip as a turning point in the development of economic, commercial, political and security relations between Iran and Syria and clarified, "This trip was also a way of honoring the resistance of the Syrian people and government against the harsh attacks of the enemies".

Raisi added, "Today, after 12 years of resistance, the change in conditions for the people of Syria and the region is quite evident, and despite the constant importance of security issues and relations, economic and trade issues and interactions are now on the agenda of Syria and the countries of the region".

Stating that Iran and Syria have good capacities and fields for exchanging and cooperating with each other in order to improve the level of economic and trade relations, the President said, "In the several meetings I had with Bashar al-Assad, mainly economic and trade issues and the exchange of mutual capacities of the two countries were discussed".

Raisi pointed out, "The issue of cooperation in the field of energy production and distribution, facilitating economic and commercial cooperation by establishing a joint bank and insurance and reducing trade tariffs between the two countries to zero, strengthening and expanding transit between Iran, Iraq and Syria, the efforts of the Syrian side and Iran's assistance to revive Syria's agricultural, industrial and energy capacities after the war and facilitating pilgrimages between the two countries were among the axes of the 15 cooperation documents signed between the two countries".



Referring to the serious will of Iran and Syria to develop relations and implement agreements made between the two countries, the President said, "In some parts, the implementation of the agreements started in Syria itself, and the Iranian officials started the implementation work in contact with the country, and we hope that these agreements will be implemented as soon as possible".

Raisi mentioned another aspect of this trip as his meeting with the Syrian people and added, "In the meetings and also in the two unplanned encounters we had with the Syrian people upon arrival and in the Hamidiyah market, we witnessed the great interest of the Syrians in the Islamic Republic of Iran".

Pointing out that today the people of Syria and the region believe that Iran is a strong pillar that they can rely on, the President stated, "In the meeting with different resistance groups, we saw that these groups, despite their different tastes, agreed that Iran can be trusted and relied on".

Raisi stated, "In the meeting with various resistance groups, we witnessed that these groups, despite their different tastes, were united and agreed on this statement that according to the words of Martyr Soleimani, the Islamic Republic is a sanctuary and you can trust and rely on him. All the resistance groups emphasized that Iran has defended and supported the resistance movement since the beginning of the victory of the Islamic Revolution".

Emphasizing that today the Resistance Front has become a strong and invincible movement that has changed the equations in the region and the world, the President stated, "The signs of this change can be observed, and what is more, the initiative is in the hand of Palestine today".

In the end, thanking the Syrian government and people for the good reception, Raisi expressed hope that this trip, as a strategic trip and interactions like it, will strengthen the relations between friendly countries, including Iran and Syria.

Four Azerbaijani Diplomats Expelled

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran expelled four Azerbaijani diplomats after a similar decision by Baku amid heightened tensions between the two neighbors.

Iran's news agency IRNA reported that the diplomats were declared persona non grata last month. They were working at Azerbaijan's embassy in Tehran and its consulate in the northwestern city of Tabriz.

The news agency said the measure took effect in April. The move is in response to Baku's decision last month to expel four Iranian embassy employees over what it called "provocative actions".

Baku's decision was announced shortly it said it had arrested six men, who it claimed were linked to Iranian secret services and were plotting a coup in the Caspian nation.

Iran had denounced Azerbaijan's decision as "radical and unconstructive", and vowed retaliation.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kan'ani said at the time that the move is in contradiction with good neighborliness principles and is in line with the Israeli regime's policy of fomenting tensions between Muslim nations.

Azerbaijan's foreign ministry confirmed on Friday that Iran had declared four Azerbaijani diplomats persona non grata in early April.

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran were strained in January following an attack on the Eurasian country's embassy in Tehran.

8500 Knowledge-Based Companies Aactive in Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - The Vice-President for Science, Technology, and Knowledge-Based Economy, as the Chief of the National Elite Foundation, said that 8,500 knowledge-based companies are active in Iran.

Rouhollah Dehghani Firouzabadi stated: We are ready for big changes and our economy has no other way than become knowledge-based.

The Vice-President for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy, as the Chief of the National Elite Foundation said that in order to be able to develop the knowledge-based economy, the capacities of the private sector and the elites' capabilities must be used.

He further said: Foreign investment is one of the requirements in a knowledge-based field, we must have mechanisms to develop foreign investment, and of course we Foreign investment with several countries.

It Is Time for The U.S. to Change

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights criticized the U.S. government's indifference to human rights and the Black's lives.

Following the murder of a U.S. black man by a white American in New York, Kazem Gharibabadi expressed his concern over the continuation of racist killings in the US and the obvious disregard of the American government for human rights.

It seems that what is of no importance in the US are the Black lives, Gharibabadi said that addressed the U.S. authorities: "It is time to change."

The 30-year-old Jordan Neely was strangled by a white American who compressed his throat with his hand, while two others strongly kept the victim's hands and feet to prevent his resistance.

Neely suffered from mental illness "which began at age 14 when he experienced the brutal murder of his mother.

Disestablishment of Political System First Sign of Israel's Decline

KERMANSHAH (IP) - The Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) said the Israeli regime is close to collapse one of the symptoms of which is the failure in the re-establishment of the political system.

Delivering a speech, Major General Hossein Salami said once some of the Arab states competed with each other to normalize their ties with the Israeli regime: "Unfortunately, taking photos with the Zionist authorities had become an honor, but in fact a national and Arab shame; the Zionist officials used to come by plane to the capital of some of these countries, taking proud gestures, and imagined that they could limit the Islamic Republic."

But today all of them have abandoned the normalization queue and those who normalized their ties are now regretful and ashamed because it is impossible to rely on loose support that has rotten from within, General Salami added.

Since the beginning of January, thousands of Zionist settlers have taken to the streets on a weekly basis against Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu over his bill of judicial reforms.

Iran Army Aviation Owns Most Powerful Helicopter Fleet in West Asia

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The commander of the Iranian Army Aviation says his unit possesses the most powerful helicopter fleet in the West Asia region.

Brigadier General Yousef Ghorbani made the comment at a ceremony commemorating the martyrdom anniversary of distinguished Iranian pilot Ali Akbar Shiroodi during the Iraq-Iran war in the 1980s in the western province of Kermanshah.

He said sustainable security across the country and along its borders has been achieved thanks to the sacrifices of martyr Shiroodi and other martyrs. The memory of such martyrs should be kept alive, he said, adding that the people and the youths should know how the enemy's tanks were targeted and destroyed by Martyr Shiroodi.

"Today, if the aviation unit is the most powerful helicopter fleet in West Asia, [and] the Islamic Republic of Iran is powerful in the world, [and] causes jitters among the Zionists, it is by virtue of the blood of the martyrs," Ghorbani said.

"The aviation unit stands with all its strength when the country faces defense issues, and in times of peace, it stands by the people in disasters and dangers," he added. The top commander further said Iran is currently in a position to disrupt the military equations of the so-called superpowers, adding that the enemy is plotting to destroy the Islamic establishment at any moment, but all their plots are foiled with a speech by the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

Touching upon the cutting-edge technology of the aviation unit's helicopter fleet, Ghorbani said some of the equipment of the world's most advanced choppers have been mounted on Iranian helicopters, such as domestically-manufactured night vision systems.

Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Iranian officials have made clear that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never open for negotiations.

Amir Kabir Petrochemical Co Sets Record for Dividend

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of shares of Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company set an unprecedented record and reached its highest level ever.

According to the public relations of the company, the value of each share of Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company was traded for 113,360 rials which is the highest price since the time the share of this company were offered in the stock market.

The price of each share of the company with the stock market symbol of "SHEKBIR" which was traded at the farabourse floor hit its highest ever level which was unprecedented in the history of the company.

Amir Kabir Petrochemical Company is one of the biggest polyolefin units of company.

ECO, Mashhad Urban Railway to Cooperate in 50-km Rail Project

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) Mr. Mehdi Koohi in meeting with the CEO of Mashhad Urban Railway Co. Mr. Kianoush Kiamarz pointed to the capabilities of this gigantic industrial complex for supplying required rail by urban railway of Mashhad and other cities in the country and said that cooperation and interaction of these two organizations have had good results and it will definitely be expanded.

Koohi then noted this point that ESCO has succeeded in indigenizing the technology of producing rail by using the capabilities and



expertise of domestic endeavorers, adding that ESVCO is able to manufacture any type of rail required by the urban railways of the country and this product is in accordance with the international standards.

Then Mr. Kiamarz pointed to the history of effective cooperation of his company with ESCO and said that due to the past co-operations as well as the current 50-kilometer rail project which is on the

agenda in Mashhad, they can have good interaction and cooperation.

Last year ESCO and Mashhad Urban Railway Company signed a MoU on cooperation for supply of rail for developing Mashhad's urban railway.

New Accolades and Honors for HOSCO

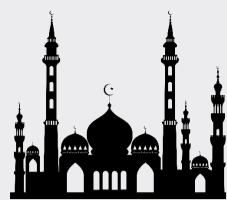
IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - During the 34th festival of honoring workers, elite working groups and exemplary units of Hormozgan Province, Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) was honored as the leading employer in the labor sport and as the top committee of safety and occupational health.

On the occasion of the Labor Day, the 34th festival for honoring the workers, elite working groups and the exemplary units of Hormozgan Province was held in the presence of the governor of the province Mr. Mehdi Doosti, representative of Bandar Abbas to Majlis Mr. Ahmad Moradi and some other officials of the province.

This festival due to the brilliant performance of Hormozgan Steel Company in supporting worker sports honored the company by giving the award to the CEO of HOSCO Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani and governor of the province presented the award to Mr. Maroufkhani.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:19
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:29
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:05

15. If any of your women are guilty of lewdness, Take the evidence of four (Reliable) witnesses from amongst you against them; and if they testify, confine them to houses until death do claim them, or Allah ordain for them some (other) way.
16. If two men among you are guilty of lewdness, punish them both. If they repent and amend, Leave them alone; for Allah is Oft-returning, Most Merciful.

Surah 4. Women (15 - 16)

Tehran, Hanoi Seek Broadening Trade Ties by Removing Legal Hurdles

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Some of trade activists of Vietnam who are in Tehran to attend IRAN EXPO 2023 met their counterparts in Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture and during the meeting both sides emphasized they can broaden trade ties by removing legal hurdles.

The Vietnamese trade delegation led by Firs Secretary and Commercial Attache of Embassy of Vietnam in Tehran Mr. Nguyen Tien Dung attended the ICCIMA and exchanged views with their Iranian counterparts.

In the meeting, Shahram Khasipoor, director of Arab and Africa Department of the ICCIMA said that Vietnam's economy is moving ahead and it experiences growth and last year the country experienced 8% growth while the trade volume of the country in the past year has increased by 10%.

He added that according to the statistics, the trade volume between Iran and Vietnam is around \$15m that Vietnam's export to Iran is valued at \$96m while in return Iran's export is \$45m, admitting that the figure is not good considering the good existing capacities.

Khasipoor called for boosting cooperation in trade especially in the fields of tropical fruits, coffee, dried fruits and apple and both countries can cooperate in the



construction materials, medicines and sea products as well as technical and engineering services that Iran has good capacity.

He added that both countries can increase their trade to \$2b and to this end, governments of both countries should provide some required infrastructures and finding a monetary mechanism as well as launching regular shipping lines and flights between the two countries.

He also said that exchange of information is very important and announced readiness of ICCIMA in this regard.

Then Mr. Dung, for his part, pointed to the negative impacts of COVID-19 pandemic and expressed his satisfaction over continuity of trade activities between Iran and Vietnam and said that last year both countries witnessed their highest bilateral trade till now which was around \$125m and noted that Embassy of Vietnam in Tehran looks a ICCIMA as a link for connecting traders of the two countries which can pave the ground for increasing trade exchange between Tehran and Hanoi.

Then Head of Iran-Vietnam Joint Chamber of Commerce Mr. Sajed Nikmehr expressed the efforts of the chamber for increasing the trade between the two states especially in the field of tourism. And said Iran can focus on cooperating in construction materials in Vietnam.

3.7m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week posted trade of 3,074,495 tons of commodities and 475 vehicles with a total trading value of more than \$691m.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,608,233 tons of commodities worth more than \$454m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,197,197 tons of cement, 890,000 tons of iron ore, 379,188 tons of steel, 129,500 tons of sponge iron, 8,205 tons of copper, 6,325 tons of aluminum, 740 tons of zinc, 230 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 60 tons of precious metals concentrate and 475 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 452,585 tons of commodities valued at nearly \$226m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 158,164 tons of bitumen, 107,989 tons of polymeric products, 78,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 46,000 tons of lube cut, 38,358 tons of chemicals, 8,732 tons of petroleum products, 8,120 tons of sulfur, 6,219 tons of base oil, 1,000 tons of slops wax, 470 tons of insulation and 200 tons of gas feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 13,677 tons of commodities on its side market.

Leader's Representative Visits Persian Gulf Star Refinery

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Supreme Leader's Representative Office in universities visited Persian Gulf Star Refinery where he was informed about the achievements of Iranian experts in the biggest gas condensate refinery in the world.

According to reports, during this visit Hojjatoleslam Mostafa Rostami got acquainted with achievements of young Iranian experts in the most Iranian refinery of the country and honored endeavors of the producer of over 40% of the gasoline in the country.

He also hailed the actions taken in this refinery and visited different parts of the refinery. Hojjatoleslam Rostami also visited the 264-bed hospital of Persian Gulf Star Oil which is under construction in the framework of the company's social responsibilities.



The CEO of "Persian Lux Group" Says

Chandelier Production costs on the Rise Because of Recession in the Market



According to official statistics, in recent years, Iran's chandelier industry has not been very successful in the field of exports, and it can be said that during this period, Iraq was the largest importer of Iranian chandeliers, and 57% of Iranian chandelier exports were destined for this neighboring country. Following Iraq, Armenia and Germany are ranked next with a share of 7.6% of exports, respectively. The United Arab Emirates and Uzbekistan each account for 3% of Iran's chandeliers export and 24% of the export market of Iranian chandeliers is also in the hands of other countries."

Chandeliers are traditionally produced in the country and the number of active production units in this sector has decreased compared to previous years. One of the obstacles and problems that stand in the way of the development of chandelier exports is the increase in the price of raw materials, including bronze, various types of rice ingots, etc. Also, the lack of raw materials such as connecting parts, brass pipes, etc., the increase in the cost of transportation, electricity consumption, etc., the inability to compete against foreign products, the limitation in the variety of appearance, and the lack of presence in European markets due to the high potential. This market can be seen as one of the problems that have hindered the development of exports in this sector. Experts believe that many imported goods, especially Chinese products, are of very low quality about the presence of Chinese chandeliers in the market. Also, foreign productions do not either have support; these products have once come to the country and in case of a defect in a part, it becomes very difficult to find

a replacement for it while parts of domestic products are easily found in the market even after 10 years. Persian Luxury Group has been formed in the field of chandelier production since the Iranian calander year of 1390 (2011). Mehdi Shariati, the CEO of Persian Luxury Group, believes that in the period when the entry of foreign chandeliers was banned (since 2010), the domestic production of profile chandeliers became more prosperous. Regarding brass chandeliers, there were old manufacturers who did not allow the import of similar Chinese products, and at the same time, the price of Chinese products was also high. This chandelier maker said: We have made progress in terms of exports over the past 10 years, but it is not very satisfactory. He said that the most important problem of domestic producers is the lack of support from the authorities and said: We expect the government to stop the import of unnecessary materials and reduce customs fees. Producers are not looking for facilities and...

The boom in the production of profile chandeliers

Before the ban on import of foreign chandeliers, profile chandeliers were imported from China and disrupted domestic production. Domestic manufacturers could produce these chandeliers only when one import shipment was finished until the next shipment arrived. The CEO of Persian Luxury Group announced this in an interview with "Economic World" and said: "Fortunately, for the past few years, a heavy tariff has been imposed on the import of chandeliers, which has supported domestic producers." At that time, this group had 5 employees, but now it has 100 employees and is considered the first brand in the field of profile chandeliers production.

Mehdi Shariati said about the need to import raw materials in the chandelier production industry: some of the raw materials required for the production of chandeliers such as crystal parts, plating materials (nickel) and chemicals (lacquer) are imported. Also, some raw materials such as copper are supplied from inside, but their prices are dependent on the world price and the fluctuation of currency prices affects their prices. He added: There is no problem in supplying the necessary raw materials and only their prices have increased.

Closure of production units in case of non-exports

Manufacturers who produce in high volume, if they cannot export, they have to close their business due to the lack of customers. The CEO of Persian Lux Group announced this and said: On the other hand, the price of raw materials has increased significantly and producers have to buy them. But what has happened now is that the purchasing power of the consumer has decreased and the market stagnation has reduced the amount of sales. Because the chandelier is not considered an essential item and the consumer can easily remove it from his shopping cart. As a result,

producers have no choice but to export. The CEO of Persian Lux Group Mehdi Shariati said about the export obstacles: the main part of the export problem is due to the lack of connection with the export market. This collection has been looking for export of products since last year. The only problem is that it is not related to the export market and we cannot find its buyer and advertiser. He added: It is difficult to establish this relationship. If an organization established a relationship between producers and export buyers, this export problem would be solved. The solution is to establish an economic advisor between Iran and export destination countries to facilitate the export and communication. Solving this problem can lead to the prosperity of many chandelier production units in the country. Shariati further said: Iranian goods can compete with Chinese chandeliers in terms of price and quality in export markets. For example, in a country like Uzbekistan, they prefer the quality of Iranian chandeliers to Chinese ones, and it is acceptable in terms of quality. Iranian producers have no problem in terms of quantity and quality of products, the only problem is communication with buyers in export destinations. He added: Currently, most of the chandeliers are exported in small quantities and in passenger form and not in bulk and containerized form. A number of old manufacturers from the past, export customer have their own and export. But other producers cannot communicate with export buyers.

Negative Impact of Forex rate Fluctuations on the Production of Chandeliers

The fluctuation of exchange rate has caused problems for many producers because the producer cannot increase the price of its products due to the decrease in the purchasing power of the consumer. On the other hand, due to the exchange rate fluctuation, the producer has to buy the raw materials he needs at a higher price. Most of the chandelier manufacturers are concerned about selling their products. The ability to produce chandeliers in the country is about 5 times the current level. But producers have to produce with one-fifth of their capacity while having to pay fixed production costs, which are equivalent to 5 times their current production rate. He added: Realizing the issue of exports in the chandelier sector can keep the producers afloat. The most important point for the continuation of production in the current conditions is the realization of the issue of export. Because if this issue is not realized, many producers will have to close their business. Shariati further said: Sanctions have reduced the value of the national currency and on the other hand increased the export power of producers. For this reason, Chinese chandeliers are cheaper than Iranian ones.

Mali's Junta to Hold Referendum On New Constitution



PARIS (Dispatches) - Mali's ruling junta announced Friday a referendum on a new constitution would be held in the West African nation on June 18. Government spokesman colonel Abdoulaye Maiga read out a decree on state television saying the country was called upon "to decide on the Constitution project" in June, after missing a previous deadline of March 19.

The new constitution is the first major step in plans the military has invoked to justify continuing to govern until 2024 following the overthrow of former president Ibrahim Boubacar Keita in August 2020. Elections are due to be held in February 2024 to restore a civilian government in Bamako.

Wagner Group Vows to Quit Bakhmut, Ukraine Claims They Are Piling In



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's main military group announced plans to pull out of the eastern Ukrainian city of Bakhmut, but Ukraine said the group's fighters were reinforcing positions to try to seize it before Russia marks victory in World War Two day next week.

Wagner Group leader Yevgeny Prigozhin said his men had been starved of ammunition and would expect the army to take their place in Bakhmut next Wednesday, jeopardising what has long been Russia's main target in its attempt to carve up its neighbour.

"My lads will not suffer useless and unjustified losses in Bakhmut without ammunition," Prigozhin said in a video accompanying a written withdrawal announcement addressed to the head of general staff, the defense ministry, and President Vladimir Putin as supreme commander.

The announcement said "bureaucrats" had held back supplies despite knowing that Wagner's target date to capture the city was May 9, when Moscow holds its World War Two Victory Day.

"If, because of your petty jealousy, you do not want to give the Russian people the victory of taking Bakhmut, that's your problem," Prigozhin added in the video.

State-owned RIA news agency later reported that Shoigu had instructed one of his deputy ministers to ensure troops had all the weapons they needed.

The battle for Bakhmut, which Russia sees as a stepping stone to other cities in Ukraine's Donbas region still beyond its control, has been the most intense of the conflict, costing thousands of lives on both sides in months of grinding warfare.

Ukrainian troops have been pushed back in recent weeks but have clung on in the city to inflict as many Russian losses ahead of Kyiv's planned big push against the invading forces along the 1,000 km (620 mile) front line.

"Because of the lack of ammunition, our losses are increasing exponentially every day," Prigozhin's official withdrawal statement said.

"On May 10, 2023, we are obliged to transfer positions in the settlement of Bakhmut to units of the defense ministry and withdraw the remains of Wagner to logistics camps to lick our wounds."

It was not clear if Prigozhin, who often makes impulsive comments, would go ahead with the withdrawal if his men got extra ammunition or if the row might even be a smokescreen.

A senior Ukrainian official said Russia was bringing Wagner mercenary fighters from along the front line to Bakhmut to capture it by Victory Day.

"We are now seeing them pulling (fighters) from the entire offensive line where the Wagner fighters were, they are pulling (them) to the Bakhmut direction," Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said on Ukrainian television.

The Kremlin declined to comment on Prigozhin's statement, citing the fact it was related to what it calls its "special military operation" in Ukraine, where it has declared southern and eastern regions it has partly seized as annexed to Russia.

Moscow says Ukraine's moves towards the West threaten its security. Kyiv says the invasion is simply a land grab.

In another sign of disarray on the Russian side, former Russian deputy defence minister Colonel General Mikhail Mizintsev joined Wagner as a deputy commander, Russian pro-war social media channels reported.

Earlier, Prigozhin was pictured surrounded by corpses he said were his men, shouting abuse at Russian Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov.

Modi to Join Macron for France's Bastille Day Military Parade



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi will join President Emmanuel Macron in Paris for France's Bastille Day military parade on July 14, the two countries said in a joint statement.

Following in the footsteps of other world leaders wooed by Macron such as former US president Donald Trump, the gesture towards Modi and India comes as France looks to shore up alliances in the Indo-Pacific region.

Modi's presence -- and Indian forces' participation in the parade -- would mark "a new phase in the strategic partnership between France and India," Macron's Elysee Palace office said. The two nations would "set new objectives for strategic, cultural, scientific, academic and economic cooperation, including in a large number of industrial sectors," it added.

Serbia President Promises Justice After Two Mass Shootings in Days



BELGRADE (Dispatches) - Two mass shootings in two days in Serbia, where such tragedies are rare, have sent the country and surrounding Balkan region into a state of shock.

Late on Thursday, at least eight people were killed and 14 wounded after a 21-year-old suspect in a moving car opened fire on passers-by in a town south of Belgrade.

A day earlier, a 13-year-old suspect carried out an attack that officials say he had planned for months, killing eight of his schoolmates and a security guard.

On Friday, waking up to the news of the drive-by attack, Serbia entered an official three-day mourning period to pay tribute to Wednesday's child victims.

"There will be justice. These monsters will never see the light of the day, neither the little monster nor the little older monster," President Aleksandar Vucic said, as he deplored Thursday's "terrorist attack" and proposed tough new gun controls.

In a sombre national address, President Vucic, wearing a dark suit, said the gunman had been wearing a T-shirt with neo-Nazi symbols.

He gave no further details about the shootings.

Vucic proposed a moratorium on gun permits regardless of weapon type, in what he called a "practical disarmament" of Serbia that would also include more frequent medical and psychological checks of gun owners.

The government would also hire 1,200 new police officers to improve security in schools, he said.

Vucic added that he had proposed the reintroduction of the death penalty but said the government was against such a step.

In Serbia, the president is largely a ceremonial figure but Vucic wields considerable power as he also heads the ruling party.

Thursday's shooting took place near Mladenovac, a town 50km (30 miles) south of the capital Belgrade.

The state-run RTS television said the suspected gunman first opened fire at a schoolyard in the village of Dubona and killed a police officer and his sister, along with others in the area.

Maduro Accuses Biden Administration of Looting Venezuelan Oil Firm

CARACAS (Dispatches) - Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro accused US President Joe Biden's government of "looting" over the proposed sale of Caracas' most valuable overseas asset, oil refiner Citgo.

A court in the US state of Delaware ruled that shares of Citgo, a subsidiary of Venezuelan state oil company PDVSA, can be sold to pay off its creditors, with the US Treasury Department's Office of Foreign Assets Control endorsing the move on Monday.

"What Joe Biden's government is doing is one of the thefts, one of the biggest lootings that has ever taken place against any nation in the world and we reject it," Maduro said during an event in Caracas.

Venezuelan Vice President Delcy Rodriguez indicated Wednesday that the acts "are absolutely null and void," while accusing Washington of green-lighting the "judicial auction of Citgo." Maduro's 2018 reelection was not recognized by Washington, which considers the results of those polls fraudulent, and for some time recognized opposition candidate Juan Guaido as the country's leader.

The next year, Washington ramped up sanctions against Caracas, which were first imposed in 2015 over the brutal repression of anti-government protests.

On Thursday, Maduro also pointed the finger at Guaido -- who last month arrived in the United States -- saying he had backed the sale of Citgo.

After a summit in Colombia, delegations from 20 countries -- including the United States -- said they favored easing sanctions on Venezuela, if its government committed to holding elections with guarantees for the opposition in 2024.

Maduro said the Citgo decision was an attempt to undermine those efforts, spearheaded by Colombian President Gustavo Petro.

The Citgo case dates from 2011, when the Venezuelan government seized a mine awarded to Canadian firm Crystallex, but then failed to repay \$1.2 billion to the company, which was agreed in international arbitration.

Other creditors have tried to go after Houston-based Citgo to settle debts that the cash-strapped government in Caracas is unable or unwilling to pay.

Shelling in Sudanese Capital Disrupts Aid Delivery Efforts

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Heavy shelling in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum disrupted efforts to deliver badly needed aid to trapped civilians, after yet another fragile and frequently violated truce ran out, residents said.

Sudan has plunged into chaos since fighting erupted in mid-April between the country's two rival top generals. There is increasing concern for those trapped and displaced by the fighting, and aid workers and civilians have said there's a dire lack of basic services, medical care, food and water.

In central areas of Khartoum, sporadic explosions could be heard Thursday, a day after the United Nations warned that the Sudanese people are "facing a humanitarian catastrophe," and after the latest in a series of cease-fires expired earlier in the day.

"The situation is very dire," said Atiya Abdalla Atiya, who leads a key doctors union. "All forms of shelling can still be heard in Khartoum, whether air or artillery shelling."

Black plumes of smoke rising from downtown neighborhoods dotted Khartoum's skyline at midday. The fighting also raised questions about the viability of internationally backed initiatives seeking to bring an end to the violence that upended the African country's transition to democracy.

The conflict started on April 15, preceded by months of escalating tensions between the military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and a rival paramilitary

group called the Rapid Support Forces, or RSF, commanded by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo.

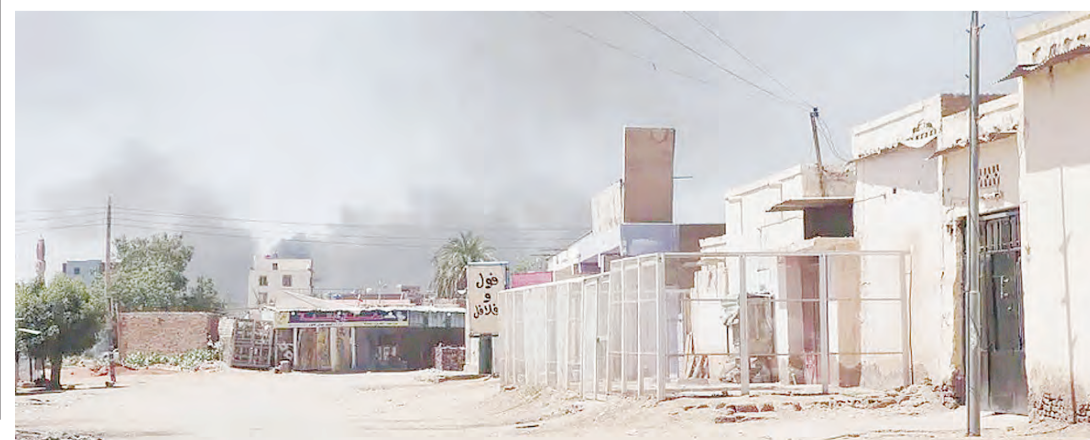
The fighting turned urban areas into battlefields and foreign governments rushed to evacuate their diplomats and thousands of foreign nationals out of Sudan.

Both sides have traded accusations of truce violations over the past weeks. On Thursday, each side claimed its forces were the subject of attacks. The military said late Wednesday it clashed with RSF forces around key government institutions in Khartoum, including the Republican Palace in the capital's center.

Cease-fire initiatives by the United States, Saudi Arabia and the East African bloc known as IGAD have all floated a path towards longer negotiations. But the warring sides have shown little commitment to even short-term promises to stop the fighting.

The doctors' group has in recent days warned that at least 60% of hospitals located near areas of active fighting are out of service, either because they have been shelled or due to the shortage of medical personnel and supplies.

Among those in a critical, life-threatening situation are some 12,000 patients with kidney failure with no access to dialysis facilities. "People suffering from chronic diseases are dying at home because functioning hospitals are only attending to the wounded," said Atiya, of the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate.



Taiwan Leader, Paraguay President-Elect Reaffirm Ties



TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan's leader Tsai Ing-wen made a congratulatory

telephone call to Paraguayan president-elect Santiago Pena as they reaffirmed relations between the island and its only diplomatically in South America, her office said.

Economist and former finance minister Pena had vowed to continue recognizing Taiwan, and his win erased Taipei's fear that Paraguay would ditch ties with the self-ruled island in favor of Beijing.

His challenger Efraim Alegre had mooted a shift in allegiance to China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory and pushes to isolate it internationally.

During their 20-minute telephone call, Tsai congratulated Pena and thanked him for "expressing his firm stance to maintain and strengthen the Taiwan-Paraguay relations", her office said in a statement.

Pena told Tsai he looks forward to visiting Taiwan and meeting her "as soon as possible", and hopes the two allies can "continue to deepen exchanges and cooperation", her office said.

"I look forward to working with you to advance our bilateral cooperation & the well-being of our peoples," Tsai tweeted after the call.

Paraguay is one of Taiwan's few remaining allies in Latin America and the only one in South America -- after Panama, El Salvador, the Dominican Republic, Nicaragua and Honduras switched allegiance to China in recent years.

Latin America has been a key diplomatic battleground for China and Taiwan since the end of the Chinese Civil War in 1949.

Beijing has spent decades convincing Taipei's diplomatic allies to switch sides, gaining nine since Tsai took office in 2016.

Honduras made the latest switch to Beijing in March, leaving only 13 countries that diplomatically recognise Taipei.

Taking the High Road: India Infrastructure Drive Counters China



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Freshly laid roads, bridges, upgraded military camps, and new civilian infrastructure dot the winding high Himalayan route to the Indian frontier village of Zemithang -- which China renamed last month to press its claim to the area.

It is in the far northeastern Indian state of Arunachal Pradesh, almost all of which Beijing insists falls under its sovereignty as "South Tibet".

The Asian giants fought a war in 1962 over their 3,500-kilometre (2,200-mile) divide, now known as the Line of Actual Control, and it remains disputed to this day, with sporadic clashes and regular diplomatic manoeuvres.

Culturally largely Tibetan, Arunachal Pradesh is savage territory for battle, with mountain passes as high as 4,750 metres (15,000 feet) still covered in snowdrifts as late as May, and thickly forested slopes lower down. Now both powers are engaged in major construction drives to reinforce their positions.

New Delhi bristled at Beijing's announcement renaming Zemithang -- dubbed "Bangqin" -- and 10 other sites in April.

Foreign ministry spokesman Arindam Bagchi said the state "is, has been, and will always be an integral and inalienable part of India", adding: "Attempts to assign invented names will not alter this reality."

Beijing has sought to change the facts by force before.

Zemithang, just a few kilometres from the boundary, and picture-postcard Tawang, the main town in the district -- home to the biggest and oldest Tibetan Buddhist monastery outside Lhasa -- were both seized by Chinese forces in 1962 as they inflicted a humiliating defeat on Indian troops before retreating.

The Indian army officer charged with preventing a repetition is Brigadier N.M. Bendigeri, who commands thousands of troops in Tawang.

Hundreds of his men clashed with Chinese forces in December.

And three years ago in Ladakh, at the western end of the frontier, 20 Indian and four Chinese soldiers were killed in brutal hand-to-hand combat.

Beijing's announcements "won't change a thing here", Bendigeri said.

But in fact, Chinese actions are profoundly changing the once neglected and remote region.

Worried about China's build-up on the other side, Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government has pumped billions of dollars into ambitious connectivity projects, to boost civilian presence, and establish new paramilitary battalions.

India has scaled up its defences, deploying cruise missiles, howitzers, US-made Chinook transport helicopters and drones.

At the same time, in an indication of New Delhi's constant geopolitical balancing act, India is part of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, which includes China and Russia.

As the grouping's current chair, on Friday it hosts a meeting of its foreign ministers in Goa.

But in the face of China's increased assertiveness under leader Xi Jinping it has also become a member of the so-called Quad with the US, Australia and Japan, set up to counter Beijing.

Within days of Beijing's renaming announcement, India's powerful interior minister Amit Shah launched a \$585 million "vibrant villages" scheme for civilians along the border.

"India wants peace with everyone," said Shah at Kibithoo, one of the first Arunachal Pradesh villages overrun in 1962.

Prep in the Pool For Europe's Next Astronauts



COLOGNE (Dispatches) - A new cohort of astronauts at the European Space Agency's training center in Cologne, Germany, can expect to see time in both the pool and the classroom as they get ready to head into orbit.

Trainees dive into the water to emulate the experience of working in zero gravity, as well as studying a variety of subjects from medicine to geology.

The aim of the curriculum is to prepare the group for service on the International Space Station (ISS) and later on a potential mission to the moon.

"The biggest challenge is to learn so many different things in a very short period of time," British astronaut Rosemary Coogan, 31, told AFP in an interview.

Along with four other hopefuls, Coogan in April began the 13-month course and will have finished by May 2024. By then, the group will know who among them will be the first to climb aboard the low-orbit station in 2026.

For French candidate Sophie Adenot, 40, the "variety of the training" is part of the pleasure.

"It is everything from theoretical science to operational training. I am astounded by everything we have done in the last month," she told AFP.

Graduates from the course could be headed for the moon, in the scope of the Artemis mission, which hopes to return astronauts to the rock within a decade and to establish a permanent base on Earth's natural satellite.

The current cohort of astronauts includes the highest number of women to date after a push by the ESA to make space travel less masculine.

The agency encouraged more women to apply for the opportunity to go to space. In all, almost a quarter of candidates in 2021 were women, up from 15 percent in the last round in 2008.

"More than just having women in the team, what is important is diverse backgrounds and professions," said Adenot.

"A doctor will have a different way of thinking than an engineer or a pilot... it's important to have various ways of thinking in the team," she said.

Adenot, herself a helicopter test pilot, is joined in the group by Swiss doctor Marco Sieber, Belgian neuroscientist Raphael Liegeois and Spanish aeronautical engineer Pablo Alvarez Fernandez.

In addition to the five candidates, the ESA has also appointed a "parastronaut" -- an astronaut with a handicap -- 41-year-old Briton John McFall, who will take part in the training.

McFall's presence will allow the ESA to study the feasibility of sending an astronaut with greater physical limitations into space.

The training course seeks to prepare the future astronauts for any situation they could be confronted with in space. In the pool, 10 metres underwater, the team practice what to do if a colleague falls ill in space and how to communicate with them.

"Astronauts have to have a very sound judgement," said Coogan.

"When you get to space, there are often very unpredictable things and it can be to do with your day-to-day activities or an emergency situation. And that's where you need to stay calm."

After 13 months of training, only the candidate chosen to go to the ISS will begin a separate two-year programme tailored to the mission.

Despite the limited space onboard the rocket, the team at the ESA work well together.

"We are like a team of highly trained athletes. The demands of space missions are so high that you can only match them by working together," said Adenot.

What Will the Artemis Moon Base Look Like?

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Colorado Springs (United States) (AFP) -- The next time NASA goes to the Moon, it intends to stay. Under the Artemis program, the US space agency plans to maintain a human presence, for the very first time, on a celestial body other than Earth.

But building a lunar base is no small feat. It will need power generators, vehicles and habitats, and the space industry is racing to meet the technological challenges.

"It's the Super Bowl of engineering," Neal Davis, lead systems engineer for the Lunar Terrain Vehicle at space company Dynetics, told AFP.

Dynetics revealed its prototype design for a Moon rover last month at the Space Symposium in Colorado Springs.

But it probably won't be until later Artemis missions -- 7 onwards -- "where we're starting to look at adding permanent habitations on the surface," said NASA associate administrator Jim Free.

Artemis 3, the first planned landing, won't happen until later this decade, so habitat building wouldn't start before the 2030s.

The base would likely comprise multiple sites, he added, to diversify the targets of scientific exploration and to offer more flexibility for the landings.

Despite this distant timeline, companies are already chomping at the bit.

"Step zero is communications," Joe Landon, CEO of Crescent Space, a new subsidiary of Lockheed Martin dedicated to lunar services, told AFP.

"Think about when you move into a new apartment, you've got to hook up your phone and your internet first."

Starting out with a pair of satellites, the company wants to become the Moon's internet and GPS provider. This would relieve the strain on NASA's Deep Space Network, which threatens to overheat in the face of all the upcoming missions, including private ones.

Landon estimates the value of the lunar market will be "\$100 billion over the next 10 years."

Next up: switching on the lights.

Astrobotic, with 220 employees, is one of three companies selected by NASA to develop solar panels.

They need to be placed vertically because at the Moon's south pole -- the intended destination because it has water in the form of ice -- the Sun barely peeps above the horizon.

About 60 feet (18 meters) high, the Astrobotic panels will be connected by cables running several miles (kilometers), said Mike Provenzano, the company's director of lunar surface systems.

The solar arrays will be fixed to vehicles that can run them out to different locations.

For its scientific expeditions, NASA has tasked industry with developing an unpressurized -- that is to say, open top -- rover for two people, ready by 2028.

Unlike the Apollo missions' rovers, it will also have to operate autonomously for outings without an astronaut.



This means surviving frigid lunar nights, which can last two weeks, with temperatures dropping to around -280 degrees Fahrenheit (-170 Celsius).

Many companies have made a start.

Lockheed Martin has partnered with General Motors, leaning on the auto giant's expertise in electric and off-road vehicles.

Dynetics, a subsidiary of engineering behemoth Leidos, has joined forces with Nascar.

Its prototype, which will achieve a top speed of nine miles per hour (15 kilometers per hour), includes a robotic arm and metal wheels that are braided like textiles to maximize traction on the sandy surface and deal with any rocks they encounter.

"But at the same time, they actually have a lot of openings to the outside so that they don't collect that sand and carry it with us," Davis said.

Moon dust, or regolith, poses a major challenge because, lacking erosion by water or wind, it is almost as abrasive as glass.

NASA has yet to announce the selected company or companies.

In the longer term, NASA is working with the Japanese space agency JAXA on a pressurized vehicle, in which astronauts won't need to keep their suits on.

Finally, the crew will need a place to hang up their helmets and call home.

NASA has awarded a \$57.2 million contract to the Texas-based company Icon, which specializes in 3D printing, to develop the technology needed to build roads, landing strips on the Moon, and ultimately, dwellings.

The idea is to use lunar soil as a material. Other companies, such as Lockheed Martin, are developing inflatable habitat concepts.

"The beautiful thing is you can land it on the moon and inflate it and now there's a much larger volume for the crew to live in and work in," Kirk Shireman, vice president for the Lockheed Martin Lunar Exploration Campaign, told AFP.

Inside would be bedrooms, a kitchen, a space for scientific instruments, etc. -- all mounted on a frame, so the habitat can be mobile.

The basic concept behind returning to the Moon under Artemis is to help NASA prepare for much more distant missions to Mars.

"Whatever money we have to spend to go develop these systems on the moon, we want those same systems to be applicable to go to Mars," said Shireman.

Record Sea Surface Heat Sparks Fears of Warming Surge

PARIS (Dispatches) - With sea surface temperatures swelling to new highs in recent weeks, scientists warn that humanity's carbon pollution has the potential to turn oceans into a global warming "time bomb".

Oceans absorb most of the heat caused by planet-warming gases, causing heatwaves that harm aquatic life, altering weather patterns and disrupting crucial planet-regulating systems.

While sea surface temperatures normally recede relatively quickly from annual peaks, this year they stayed high, with scientists warning that this underscores an underappreciated but grave impact of climate change.

"The ocean, like a sponge, absorbs more than 90 percent of the increase in heat caused by human activities," said leading oceanologist Jean-Baptiste Sallee, of the French research agency CNRS.

Year by year ocean warming is increasing at "an absolutely staggering rate", he told AFP.

In early April, the average surface temperature of the oceans, excluding polar waters, reached 21.1 degrees Celsius, beating the annual record of 21C set in March 2016, according to data from the United States NOAA observatory that goes back to 1982.

Although temperatures began to drop at the end of the month, they have remained above seasonal records for the past six weeks, with fears that the looming warming El Nino weather phenomenon could load even more heat into the climate system.

The most immediate consequence of the surge in ocean temperatures is more marine heatwaves, which he said "act like underwater fires" with the potential to irreversibly degrade thousands of square kilometres of underwater forest -- for example of kelp or corals.



OPEC+ to Hold June Policy Meeting in Person

LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ has confirmed it will hold its June 4 policy meeting in person in Vienna, four sources familiar with the matter said as oil prices slid.

Sources said there had been some discussion in the group about convening the meeting virtually, since ministers will be travelling to Vienna for the OPEC seminar in July.

However, two sources familiar with the matter said on Wednesday the meeting will go ahead in person. Several OPEC+ members in April announced voluntary production cuts that take effect in May, but oil prices have continued to fall on concern about economic growth and interest rate hikes.



India, Russia Suspend Negotiations to Settle Trade in Rupees

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and Russia have suspended efforts to settle bilateral trade in rupees, after months of negotiations failed to convince Moscow to keep rupees in its coffers, two Indian government officials and a source with direct knowledge of the matter said.

This would be a major setback for Indian importers of cheap oil and coal from Russia who were awaiting a permanent rupee payment mechanism to help lower currency conversion costs.

With a high trade gap in favor of Russia, Moscow believes it will end up with an annual rupee surplus of over \$40 billion if such a mechanism is worked out and feels rupee accumulation is 'not desirable', an Indian government official, who did not want to be named, told Reuters.

India's finance ministry, the central Reserve Bank of India and Russian authorities did not immediately respond to requests for comment. The rupee is not fully convertible. India's share of global exports of goods also is just about 2% and these factors reduce the necessity for other countries to hold rupees.

India started exploring a rupee settlement mechanism with Russia soon the invasion of Ukraine in February last year, but there has been no reported deal done in rupees. Most trade is in dollars but an increasing amount is being carried out in other currencies like the UAE dirham.

The two sides have spoken about facilitating trade in local currencies but the guidelines were not formalised.

Russia is not comfortable holding rupees and wants to be paid in Chinese yuan or other currencies, a second Indian government official involved in the discussions said.

"We don't want to push rupee settlement any more, that mechanism is just not working. India has tried everything we could to try and make this work but it hasn't helped," a third source who is directly aware of the developments said. Since Russia's invasion of Ukraine on Feb. 24 last year, India's imports from Russia have risen to \$51.3 billion until April 5, from \$10.6b in the same period in the previous year, according to another Indian government official.

Discounted oil has constituted a large part of India's imports, surging twelve-fold in the period. Exports from India in the same period fell slightly to \$3.43 bln from \$3.61 bln in the previous year, the official said.

Another official said both countries have started looking for alternatives after the rupee settlement mechanism did not work out but did not give details.

The sources said trade with Russia has been continuing despite sanctions and payment issues.

"Right now we are making some payments in dirham and a few other currencies but the majority is still in dollars. Settlement is happening in different ways, third party countries are also being used," one of the government officials said.

Indian traders are currently also settling some of the trade payments outside Russia, the officials said.

"Third-parties are being used to settle trade with Russia. There is no ban on transacting with other countries over SWIFT. So payments are being made to a third country which route it or offset it for their trade with Russia," the other official said.

On whether money was also being routed via China, the official said: "Yes, including China".

Russian Oil Companies Ramp Up May Exports

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia is expected to increase seaborne oil exports from its western ports this month to a four-year high to meet Asian demand for low-priced oil, two sources familiar with the loading plans from the ports said.

Weaker global prices mean Russian oil trades below \$60 per barrel, the price cap level imposed by Western countries, making it more attractive to Asian buyers as they have fewer issues with banks and compliance.

Oil exports from Russia's main western outlets, Primorsk, Ust-Luga and Novorossiisk, will reach a combined 2.42 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, slightly up from 2.38 million bpd last month, according to Reuters calculations based on data provided by the sources.

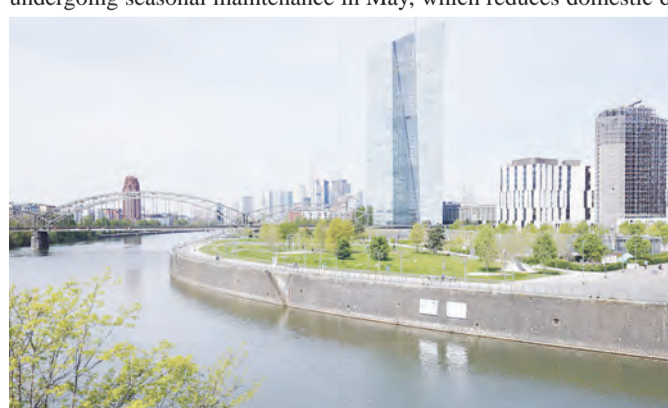
May exports from the ports will be almost 2% higher than in April and the highest since 2019, Reuters data showed.

Oil loadings from Primorsk and Ust-Luga will reach 7.5 million tonnes, including Urals and Kazakhstan's transit sold as KEBCO oil grade, up from 7.2 million tonnes in April.

G7 countries imposed a price cap to try to curb Moscow's revenues, which took effect on Dec. 5.

Under the cap, Russian barrels sold below \$60 per barrel on an FOB basis, which does not include freight and insurance, in the port of loading can be shipped and insured by Western companies, while volumes sold above the cap are banned from the services.

Apart from weaker oil prices that are facilitating trade, more oil is available for export as oil refineries in Russia are undergoing seasonal maintenance in May, which reduces domestic demand.



Russian Oil Companies Ramp Up May Exports

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia is expected to increase seaborne oil exports from its western ports this month to a four-year high to meet Asian demand for low-priced oil, two sources familiar with the loading plans from the ports said.

Weaker global prices mean Russian oil trades below \$60 per barrel, the price cap level imposed by Western countries, making it more attractive to Asian buyers as they have fewer issues with banks and compliance.

Oil exports from Russia's main western outlets, Primorsk, Ust-Luga and Novorossiisk, will reach a combined 2.42 million barrels per day (bpd) this month, slightly up from 2.38 million bpd last month, according to Reuters calculations based on data provided by the sources.

May exports from the ports will be almost 2% higher than in April and the highest since 2019, Reuters data showed.

Oil loadings from Primorsk and Ust-Luga will reach 7.5 million tonnes, including Urals and Kazakhstan's transit sold as KEBCO oil grade, up from 7.2 million tonnes in April.

G7 countries imposed a price cap to try to curb Moscow's revenues, which took effect on Dec. 5.

Under the cap, Russian barrels sold below \$60 per barrel on an FOB basis, which does not include freight and insurance, in the port of loading can be shipped and insured by Western companies, while volumes sold above the cap are banned from the services.

Apart from weaker oil prices that are facilitating trade, more oil is available for export as oil refineries in Russia are undergoing seasonal maintenance in May, which reduces domestic demand.

Canada's March Trading Activity Slowed in Sign of Cooling Demand

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada's imports and exports dropped to one-year lows in March, data showed, a sign that global demand is likely slowing after a series of interest rate hikes by the world's major central banks.

Total exports fell 0.7% in March, largely on cheaper energy products, while imports declined 2.9%, driven by pharmaceuticals and other consumer goods, Statistics Canada said in a statement.

Canada's global trade surplus came in at C\$972 million (\$714 million) in March, above analyst forecasts of a C\$200 million surplus. February's trade balance was revised to a C\$487 million deficit from an initially reported C\$422 million surplus.

"Not a spectacular month but I think it needs to be seen in context ... We had explosive gains in January, we had some moderation in February," said Stuart Bergman, chief economist at Export Development Canada, the country's export credit agency.

"Looking at some early warning indicators here, we do have some concerns going forward just in terms of our outlook for global demand going forward," Bergman said.

Overall, exports dropped to the lowest level since February 2022, mainly due to lower exports of crude oil.

Despite the overall decline, exports of aircraft and other transportation equipment and parts increased. By volume, exports rose 0.1% in March.

Imports dropped to their lowest level in a year, impacted by pharmaceutical products, as well as clothing, footwear and accessories. Imports of cellphones and computers also declined in March. By volume, imports fell 5.3%.

Export volumes likely boosted Canada's first-quarter gross domestic product, but a contraction in import volumes in recent months indicates a slowdown in domestic demand, said TD economist Marc Ercolao in a note.

"We expect economic momentum to slow as interest rate increases work their way through the economy," Ercolao said.

Canada's GDP likely grew 2.5% on an annualized basis in the first quarter, Statscan said in a preliminary estimate last week. The Bank of Canada expects positive but weak growth during the remaining three quarters of this year.

The bank has kept interest rates on hold in its last two meetings after hikes at eight consecutive policy meetings previously as it sought to cool the economy and bring inflation down.

The Canadian dollar was trading 0.2% higher at 1.3590 to the greenback, or 73.58 U.S. cents.

Turkish Central Bank Keeps Inflation Forecast Unchanged for Yearend

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) Governor Şahap Kavcıoğlu announced on Thursday the bank kept the inflation forecasts unchanged at 22.3% for the end of 2023 and 8.8% for the end of 2024.

In the second inflation report briefing of the year, Kavcıoğlu said cost pressures on inflation were largely removed.

Inflation decreased to 43.7% in April, marking a significant decline of 42 points from its peak of 85.5% in October, Kavcıoğlu said.

He noted that the exchange rate stability as a result of effective policies, improved expectations and a slowdown in global commodity prices are playing a decisive role in the disinflation process.

The central bank governor said that despite the inflation continuing to decline, it remained above the forecast range outlined in the previous inflation report. The bank attributed this development to increases in unprocessed food prices that were higher than projected.

Kavcıoğlu clarified that the bank's inflation forecasts were interim targets as stated in the "Monetary Policy and Liraization Strategy for 2023" and that the bank is committed to utilizing all the tools of its Liraization Strategy to support an inflation path consistent with its forecasts.

He said the CBRT has acknowledged that the Turkish lira-denominated import prices, along with the stable course of the Turkish lira, had a lowering effect on its forecasts by 2.3 points. However, the impact of realized food prices pushed the bank's estimates up by 1.5 points. Additionally, the stronger course of domestic demand than anticipated contributed to the forecasts by 0.2 points.

Kavcıoğlu noted that the CBRT had factored in the downward trend in commodity prices while developing their forecasts. He added that import prices were expected to decrease in 2023 and that



the bank observed faster and more balanced global growth compared to the previous reporting period. Additionally, supply constraints and supply conditions had improved more strongly than anticipated.

Pointing out that the global growth figures were realized above the estimates and the recession concerns decreased, Kavcıoğlu stated that they updated their global growth forecasts to a limited extent compared to the previous reporting period.

Kavcıoğlu stated that they will resolutely follow the anti-inflation strategy in which price stability-oriented holistic policies will be implemented by all stakeholders in the most effective way, Kavcıoğlu said, "We believe that within our current policy framework, credit conditions compatible with the decline in inflation and stable exchange rates will provide a stronger improvement in the underlying trend of inflation than our previous report forecasts."

German Exports Fall Significantly More Than Expected in March



BERLIN (Dispatches) - German exports fell significantly more than expected in March, as deliveries to the United States and China sharply declined, data showed.

Exports decreased by 5.2% on the previous month, with exports to European Union countries falling 6.2%, to the United States declining 10.9% and to China dropping 9.3%, the federal statistics office said.

A Reuters poll had predicted a month-on-month decline of 2.4%.

"We continue to see no evidence of China's reopening in these data," said Claus Vistesen, chief eurozone economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics.

Trade volumes with China shrank significantly at the end of the first quarter, but Vistesen noted that China's reopening didn't get fully underway until the beginning of the second quarter.

Sentiment among German exporters has rebounded to the highest point seen since the outbreak of war in Ukraine, on hopes of increased demand following China's reopening and thanks to the resilience of the U.S. economy, according to a survey by the Ifo economic institute.

Despite the upbeat sentiment among exporters, the global economy has important challenges ahead: sticky inflation, rising interest rates and geopolitical uncertainties stemming from the war in Ukraine. "The export-heavy German economy is feeling the effects of this," said Thomas Gitzel, chief economist at VP Bank.

Imports fell by 6.4% compared with February versus analysts' expectations for a 1.7% fall.

The foreign trade balance showed a surplus of 16.7 billion euros (\$18.52 billion) in March, up from 16.1 billion in the previous month.

The German Chamber of Commerce and Industry (DIHK) on Wednesday slashed its forecast for real growth of German exports in 2023 to 1% from a previously predicted 2.5%.

The statistics office publishes more detailed economic data on its website.

Hormozgan Refining Capacity To Be Up by 1m Barrels

TEHRAN (IP) - The governor of Hormozgan province says one million barrels of oil will be added to the refining capacity of the province.

Mehdi Dousti said the project will be implemented with a whopping \$30 billion investment allocated by the Raisi administration, showing that the president pays special attention to Hormozgan province.

He said the Oil Ministry will soon start the construction of several large petro-refineries in Hormozgan, explaining that Shahid Soleimani and Negin Makran petro-refineries with a capacity of 300,000 barrels each, as well as another 300,000-barrel refinery in the Makran region and a 120,000-barrel refinery, are among the country's petro-refineries.



Asia's Crude Oil Imports Slip in April Amid Softer China, India

LAUNCESTON (Dispatches) - The strong start to the year for Asia's imports of crude oil came to a halt in April, with arrivals dropping to a seven-month low as top buyers China and India trimmed purchases.

A total of 108 million tonnes, or 26.39 million barrels per day (bpd) was imported by Asia last month, according to data compiled by Refinitiv Oil Research.

This was down from March's 27.6 million bpd, which in turn was lower than February's 29.4 million bpd and the 29.13 million bpd in January.

The decline in April arrivals was led by China, the world's largest crude importer, with Refinitiv estimating imports at 10.67 million bpd, down from the 34-month high of 12.37 million bpd in March.

It was always likely that China's imports would pull back in April as that month and May are the peak season for refinery maintenance.

But after the strong start to the year for China's crude oil imports, there are now several question marks over the outlook for coming months, as the rebound in the world's second-biggest economy appears uneven.

The official manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) dropped to 49.2 in April from 51.9 in March, slipping below the 50-level that demarcates expansion from contraction for the first time since December.

The PMI was also below market expectations for a positive outcome of 51.4.

Manufacturing is one of the key pillars of China's economy from a commodity demand perspective, the others being construction and infrastructure.

The news here is somewhat mixed, with infrastructure investment rising 8.8% year-on-year in the first quarter, outpacing a 5.1 rise in overall fixed-asset investment, while property investment fell 5.8%.

There is also the question of crude prices and the lag between moves in these and imports, given the time between refiners ordering oil and its delivery can be as long as three months.

Crude oil prices were kicked higher at the start of April when the OPEC+ group of producers surprised the market by announcing an additional 1.16 million bpd of output cuts.

Benchmark Brent futures rose from just below \$80 a barrel to a peak of \$87.49 a barrel on April 12, but have since slipped back to end at \$72.33 on Wednesday as concerns over global growth trumped fears of tighter supply.

Nonetheless, the rise in Brent futures, which was accompanied by higher official selling prices for May cargoes from Middle East exporters such as Saudi Arabia, may put a dampener on Chinese demand for May and June cargoes.

This could extend to other major buyers in Asia, with the region's second-biggest importer India showing signs of moderating crude appetite in April.



Imports were estimated at 4.60 million bpd in April, down from the eight-month high of 5.02 million bpd in March. It's also worth noting that India's refiners are continuing to switch to cheaper Russian crude, with arrivals in April at 1.68 million bpd, only slightly down from the record high of 1.72 million bpd in March.

Russia has become India's largest crude supplier, displacing erstwhile OPEC+ ally Saudi Arabia, with India's April imports from the kingdom dropping to the lowest since September 2021.

Russian crude is also winning against Saudi oil in China, with April arrivals of 2.10 million bpd beating out the 1.73 million bpd from the Middle East's top exporter.

Outside of the two Asian heavyweights, there was a mixed picture with number three importer Japan recording arrivals of 2.77 million bpd, up slightly from March's 2.52 million, while fourth-ranked South Korea saw imports slip to 2.56 million bpd in April, a 10-month low and down from 2.96 million bpd in March.

The overall view on Asia's imports is that April showed a loss of momentum after a strong start to the year.

Whether the slower April imports are mainly because of technical and temporary factors such as refinery maintenance, or if they signal the soft global economy is starting to drag Asian demand will become clearer in May and June.

Swedish-Backed Mastermind of 2018 Ahvaz Terrorist Attack

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The ringleader of a separatist group responsible for several terrorist operations in Iran, including the 2018 deadly terrorist attack in southwestern city of Ahvaz, has been executed.

Mizan news agency, affiliated with the Iranian Judiciary, reported that the death sentence against Habib Farajollah Chaab, also known as Habib Asyud, the ringleader of the Harkat al-Nazal terror outfit, was carried out on Saturday morning.

Back on March 12, Iran's Judiciary confirmed the death sentence "on charges of corruption on earth through the formation, management, and leadership of a rebel group called Harkat al-Nazal and the design and execution of numerous terrorist operations in Khuzestan province."

He pleaded guilty and confessed last year to masterminding the 2018 atrocity as well as many other acts of terror targeting the Iranian nation.

Chaab had admitted to being naturalized by Sweden and backed by the Scandinavian country's government, saying he had been provided with a device that would alert Swedish security officials to rescue him whenever he was in danger.

The Swedish-backed terrorist was arrested in November 2020 on the back of a set of "specialized and combined measures" by Iranian intelligence forces.

The Harkat al-Nazal terror outfit has been pushing to separate the southwestern province of Khuzestan — home to the country's Arab population — from the rest of Iran by engaging in an armed conflict against the Iranian government.

In September 2018, it claimed responsibility for an attack on a military parade in Ahvaz, Khuzestan's provincial capital, which killed 25 people, including members of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and civilian bystanders, and injured more than 270 others.

Syria, Iran to Soon Exchange MoUs Signed in Damascus

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance of Iran Ehsan Khandouzi says that the Iranian government is in charge of following up on a series of memoranda of understanding (MoUs) signed between Iran and Syria earlier this week, adding that two countries will exchange the MoUs next week.

Khandouzi said on Saturday that economic agreements signed between Iran and Syria during Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Damascus earlier this week will encompass issues related to financial, banking and insurance affairs. He said economic delegates of both countries will meet in the coming weeks to pursue the implementation of the agreements.

Khandouzi went on to say that the presidents of Iran and Syria have underlined that the two countries should make the utmost use of time to speed up the implementation of agreements signed earlier this week.

Europeans Drain Billions From Banks, Fed Up With Shrinking Savings

LONDON (Dispatches) - European savers are pulling more of their money from banks, looking for a better deal as lenders resist paying up to hold on to deposits some feel they can currently live without.

The trend emerged as some of the region's biggest lenders outlined a profitable start to the year in results that also offered a glimpse of a phenomenon dubbed a "bank walk" - a slow but notable outflow of customer cash.

Lenders wasted little time in charging more for loans when interest rates rapidly rose from an almost 15-year slumber around zero last year, but most have dragged their feet on boosting deposit rates paid to millions of their customers.

That has boosted profits at many major banks beyond many analysts' expectations but left savers disgruntled, raising fresh questions over the longer-term stability of the sector.

"Traditional banks need to decide whether to maximise their return by keeping rates on deposits as low as possible, or to prioritise their liquidity and stability by increasing rates and retaining customers' funds," Nicola Marinelli, assistant professor of finance at Regent's University London, said.

Money market funds are proving popular among savers seeking bigger returns on their cash as high levels of inflation persist.

In recent years, returns on these funds have only narrowly beaten bank deposit rates but the Crane sterling denominated Money Market Fund index reported a 7-day annualised yield of 4.12% as of April 25, compared with some bank interest rates still stuck below 1%. The euro-denominated equivalent was 2.81%.

Data from Refinitiv Lipper showed more than 34 billion euros (\$37.6 billion) of net flows into European money market funds in March, the best-selling asset type that month.

The fund class was already worth more than 1.4 trillion euros at the end of last year although it remains tiny compared to the 9.45 trillion euros held in current, or checking, accounts at banks across the euro zone.

Fidelity International also reported an 8% year-on-year uplift in flows into money market funds on its investment platform between Jan. 1 and April 26.

Foreign Interference in Sudan "So Worrying"

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says interference by certain foreign powers in Sudan has contributed to circumstances of "so worrying" nature.

"Sudan situation is so worrying. If proper measures are not taken, Sudan territorial integrity is jeopardized with ramifications for the region," Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in a post on his Twitter account.

He expressed regret over foreign interference and provocation in Sudan, urging domestic dialogue and understanding to resolve the crisis.

"Domestic dialog and understanding seem to be the most viable option to end crisis," the top Iranian diplomat tweeted.

Deadly violence broke out on April 15 between Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, who commands the regular army, and his deputy-turned-rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The World Health Organization (WHO) said at least 551 civilians had died and 4,926 been wounded, based on data from Sudan, but real tolls were likely much higher due to the difficulty of accessing medical facilities.

The violence has sent tens of thousands of refugees across Sudan's borders, and threatens to stir instability across a volatile swathe of Africa between the Sahel and the Red Sea. The UN refugee agency UNHCR is estimating an exodus of 860,000 people from Sudan and called on governments to look kindly on fleeing civilians.

Raisi's Historic Visit...

FROM PAGE 1

Meanwhile, Hebrew-language Israeli media outlets on Friday described Raisi's visit to Damascus as a major step toward consolidation of an alliance between Iran, Syria, and the Hezbollah resistance group, calling the development "appallingly bad" for the Tel Aviv regime.

Israel's Channel 12 military correspondent Nir Davori said "efforts are underway to further fortify a front against Israel," adding that the Iranian president visited Damascus in order "to strengthen the Tehran-Damascus-Hezbollah alliance. This is not good for Israel by any means."

Davori highlighted that there is "great competition" among regional heavyweights in order to participate in Syria's post-war era of reconstruction and development.

Iran-Turkey...

FROM PAGE 1

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the trade between the two countries has registered a 15-percent rise in 2022.

The value of trade between the two neighbors reached \$6.42 billion in 2022, while the figure stood at \$5.59 billion in the preceding year.

Iran's trade balance with Turkey has been \$280 million positive in favor of Iran in the past year.

As announced by an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the value of Iran's export to Turkey increased by 23 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

U.S. Economy...

FROM PAGE 1

Now, the fear is that another financial institute may soon drop. All of this demonstrates how market anxiety persists after a series of bank failures and deposit outflows.

Last week United States Treasury warned that the U.S. government will be unlikely to meet payment obligations by early June if the debt ceiling is not raised.

The date is earlier than the Treasury estimated in January, indicating that the United States financial situation is more precarious than previously thought.

In a letter to Speaker of the House Kevin McCarthy, published on Monday, U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen asked Congress to increase the government's debt ceiling before this date or to suspend its implementation in order to prevent economic turmoil.

After reaching the borrowing cap of \$31.4 trillion on January 19, Yellen informed Congress that the Treasury would use cash receipts and extraordinary cash management measures to continue making payments on debt, federal benefits, and other expenditures at least through June 5.

Previously, economists had predicted Washington's debt would increase to the set limit by the end of early August and the collection of less-than-expected tax revenues will speed the process.

Experts believe the U.S. could default on its obligations if the debt ceiling is not raised by the summer, triggering an economic downturn that could result in a recession, create an unemployment crisis, and damage the country's reputation as a safe haven for investors.

The economic outlook is also clouded by a deepening rivalry between Biden and Republican lawmakers, who are demanding drastic spending cuts in exchange for more government borrowing power.

For the past two months, the White House has refused to talk to McCarthy and has demanded that the Republican-controlled Congress unconditionally approve the increase in the debt ceiling.

Recent turmoil in the banking industry may have you worried about your money.

On Monday, officials announced that they closed San Francisco-based First Republic Bank, making it the third U.S. bank to collapse in the past two months. Most of First Republic's assets are being acquired by JPMorgan.

First Republic had wealthy clients who rarely defaulted on their loans. But the vast majority of deposits were above the \$250,000 limit set by the Federal Deposit Insurance Corporation (FDIC), meaning they were uninsured.

And that worried analysts and investors who were apprehensive that if First Republic were to fail, its customers might not get all their money back.

Now the question is whether money in American banks is safe or not, and many Americans are concerned about their savings in the banks that they are getting bankrupt one after the other.

If the current condition continues, the U.S. banks will not be a safe place for saving and many countries will withdraw their funds from the American banks which will accelerate the collapse of this world hegemony which is currently world economy number one and losing its place to China which is moving ahead fast to become world economy number one, and now many countries in the world have resorted to using yuan in their trades and this is a serious warning to the U.S. whose dollar loses its power in competition with its main rival China and its yuan.

So the countdown for a big economic collapse in the U.S. has begun and domestic rifts and bipolarization helps this collapse and one can expect China to replace the U.S. as the top economy in the world very soon.

U.S. to Blame for...

FROM PAGE 1

Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has even issued a fatwa (religious decree) declaring that the acquisition, development, and use of nuclear weapons violated Islamic principles and were therefore forbidden.

"This admission [by the United States] means that the US has been and will be responsible for all terrorist acts of Zionists against Iran's facilities and people, and should definitely accept its consequences," Shamkhani wrote in a Persian tweet which was also later published in English.

The Israeli regime has assassinated as many as seven Iranian nuclear scientists, including Dr. Mohsen Fakhriadeh, whom the regime subjected to targeted killing in 2020, and targeted Iran's nuclear installations on several occasions with terrorist crimes.



Babar Azam Becomes Fastest to 5,000 ODI Runs

KARACHI (Dispatches) - Pakistan skipper Babar Azam became the fastest batter to complete 5,000 one-day international runs during the fourth match against New Zealand in Karachi.

The 28-year-old beat South African Hashim Amla's record when he took a single to reach 19 during Pakistan's innings after they were sent in to bat by New Zealand. This is Azam's 97th innings in 99 one-day internationals, improving on Amla's feat of reaching the milestone in 101 innings from 104 matches.

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Europe Captain Donald Sad To Be Without LIV Trio

LONDON (Dispatches) - Europe's Ryder Cup captain Luke Donald expressed his sadness that Lee Westwood, Ian Poulter and Sergio Garcia will be unavailable for the team but insisted his side could yet triumph against the United States.

The experienced trio have all been deemed ineligible for this year's edition of the biennial team golf contest in Rome in September after quitting the European Tour, having joined the Saudi-backed breakaway LIV Golf circuit. "It's sad we've got to this point but this was always a possibility," Donald told the BBC yesterday.

Warriors Adjust to Beat Lakers 127-100

SAN FRANCISCO (AP) - After yet another big basket, Klay Thompson scurried toward the fans sitting courtside opposite the Warriors bench and raised his arms in the air to ignite an entire arena behind him. It didn't take much the way his shots were falling.

He has been waiting his entire life to shine against his father's Los Angeles Lakers on the big stage.

Thompson scored 30 points with eight 3-pointers, Golden State limited Anthony Davis while allowing LeBron James 23 points, and the defending champion Warriors evened their Western Conference semifinal with the Lakers at one game apiece with a 127-100 win.

"I was just trying to get the crowd going," Thompson said. "It's always fun when you shoot the ball well, it's even better when you couple that with a win."

Stephen Curry added 20 points and 12 assists as Splash Brother Thompson got hot to help Golden State make 21 more 3-pointers — giving the Warriors an NBA record for most in the first two games of a playoff series at 42. James' Cavaliers hit 40 against Atlanta in the 2016 second round.

"They made their adjustments. We knew they were going to do that, that's what a championship team does," James said. "They held serve on their home court tonight."

Coach Steve Kerr switched things up and inserted JaMychal Green into the starting lineup for Kevon Looney, who had a career-high 23 rebounds in Game 1 but has been dealing with an illness. Kerr aimed to give a different look with scoring options and more free-throw chances by going hard with a physical presence against Davis in the paint — where Golden State got thoroughly outplayed in a 117-112 loss in the opener.

Thompson's basket with 7:48 left in the third gave Golden State its biggest lead at 82-64 and the Warriors rolled from there.

"Klay got it going and our defense was kind of fueling our offense," Kerr said.

The Warriors had more fast-break points and points in the paint. JaMychal Green matched his playoff career high with 15 points, while Draymond Green contributed 11 points, 11 rebounds and nine assists after insisting he had to get more aggressive.



"I've been waiting on this moment, just wanted to show that I could help," JaMychal Green said. "They always tell me to stay ready, my time will come."

The best-of-seven series shifts to Los Angeles for Game 3. Back home in Southern California, Thompson said he would play in the memory of "my biggest inspiration" Kobe Bryant and daughter, Gigi.

"I have so much respect for just the opportunity ahead for me," Thompson said.

James shot 6 for 8 in the first with a pair of 3s for 14 points as the Lakers led 33-26. He retrieved a loose ball and let it fly for a pretty 3 with 7:47 before halftime but the Warriors were too much.

Davis followed up his brilliant Game 1 performance — 30 points, 23 rebounds, five assists and four blocked shots and 11-for-19 shooting — with 11 points while shooting 5 for 11, seven rebounds, four assists and three blocks.

"We played with more force," Draymond Green said.

Golden State outscored the Lakers 84-47 over the second and third quarters — recording two 40-point quarters in the same playoff game for the first time in franchise history.

"It was hard for us to guard four shooters," Lakers forward Rui Hachimura said. "Defensively they were more aggressive I feel like. They had all the loose balls and the rebounds and everything."

Looney received huge roars as he came off the bench for his first action with 3:41 left in the first. He grabbed eight rebounds and scored six points playing just less than 12 minutes — and the Warriors still outboarded the Lakers 55-40 without its best rebounder.



MADRID (Dispatches) - Jan-Lennard Struff thought he was done at the Madrid Open when he lost to Aslan Karatsev in the final round of qualifying last week.

Then he got an unexpected spot in the tournament's main draw as the so-called lucky loser and has really made it count, upsetting fourth-seeded Stefanos Tsitsipas 7-6 (5), 5-7, 6-3 to set up another shot at Karatsev — this time in the semifinals.

The big-serving German is just the third lucky loser to reach the semifinals of a Masters 1000 tournament.

Women's No. 1 Iga Swiatek and No. 2 Aryna Sabalenka both won their semifinals and will meet for the title on Saturday. It will be a rematch of the final in Stuttgart two weeks ago, when Swiatek won. It will be the first time the top two ranked players meet in a WTA 1000 final since then No. 1 Serena Williams beat second-ranked Li Na for the 2014 Miami Open title.

"I really want to have this revenge," Sabalenka said.

The 33-year-old Struff gets a chance to avenge a 6-4, 6-2 loss to Karatsev in qualifying. He only made it into the main draw because another player withdrew.

Naples Celebrates Wildly, Dozens Injured

ROME (Dispatches) - The southern Italian city of Naples celebrated wildly overnight after its soccer team became Serie A champions for the first time in 33 years, with dozens injured in the revelry, local officials said on Friday.

Mass street partying, punctuated by fireworks, flares, horns and firecrackers, began late on Thursday after the Napoli team secured the title with a 1-1 draw away at Udinese in northeast Italy.

Naples health authorities said 203 people accessed emergency services overnight, including 22 with "red-level" critical injuries and 75 with "yellow-level" serious but not life-threatening conditions.

Health service spokesperson Anna Tagliaferri said the figure was not unusually high, with any of Naples' larger hospitals routinely handling as many as 200 emergency room cases on a "normal" day.

Wild partying had been widely expected over the "Scudetto" title win and authorities had taken several steps to try to contain risks to public order.

The city centre was pedestrianised while fireworks and firecrackers were banned, but that did not stop Neapolitans celebrating with such items throughout the night.

In an unrelated incident, one man died from gunshot wounds. Naples Prefect Claudio Palomba told RAI public radio the shooting had "nothing to do with the celebrations".

Revelries were expected to continue in the coming hours and days, with Luciano Spalletti's side set to receive a heroes' welcome upon their return from Udine later on Friday and at Sunday's home match with Fiorentina.

Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni joined the chorus of congratulations for the club, which won two previous league titles in 1987 and 1990 under the leadership of Argentine legend and local icon Diego Armando Maradona.

"Thirty-three years after the last Scudetto, Napoli are back as champions of Italy. Congratulations to the whole team, to coach Spalletti and to the entire club for all their efforts and for this well-deserved result," Meloni tweeted.

Ten Hag Urges Man United to Be More Clinical



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Manchester United need to be more clinical in front of goal and maintain their focus for a full 90 minutes, manager Erik ten Hag said after his side squandered a few chances before conceding late in yesterday's 1-0 Premier League loss at Brighton & Hove Albion.

United and Brighton both had opportunities early in the first half, with Antony firing wide in the second minute before Kaoru Mitoma hammered a fierce shot straight into the face of David De Gea.

However, the deadlock was not broken until the ninth minute of stoppage time, when Alexis MacAllister scored from the spot to secure victory after Luke Shaw had handled the ball in the box.

"Every defeat is a disappointment but in the end when you lose in the last second, that is of course annoying," Ten Hag told reporters.

"And I think the first minutes sum everything up. We create a good chance, we were not clinical enough, then in the attack after we concede a big chance by a giveaway from us, the ball on the head for David.

"And in the end, we also gave away the goal and that's annoying. If you can't win because you don't finish your opportunities then don't lose."

Asked if United's defeat was caused by fatigue, Ten Hag said: "I have seen our physical outputs in the last games, we still have high levels, performing really well.

"The last five games, we had four wins, one draw. We were in a good run, we are improving. But we still have a way to go. We have to be more clinical and stay focused until the end of the game."

Galtier Says Not His Decision To Suspend Messi

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain manager Christophe Galtier said he had nothing to do with the club's decision to suspend Lionel Messi while he also condemned the Ligue 1 side's fans for staging protests outside Neymar's house.

French media reported that Messi was suspended for two weeks after an unauthorised trip to Saudi Arabia when he was supposed to train with his team following their 3-1 defeat at home to Lorient in the league.

Messi has received a formal offer to join Saudi Arabian club Al-Hilal next season, a source close to Argentina's captain told Reuters, with a contract renewal at PSG not on the cards for the World Cup winner who turns 36 next month.

"I was informed by the board at the start of the week of the decision to suspend Messi. When I was informed, I had the responsibility of not commenting on it," Galtier told a press conference ahead of Sunday's game at Troyes.

"I'm employed by the club and that is my role... The decision was nothing to do with me. I was informed of the decision.

"Leo's suspension has added to poor performances, we can't hide behind that... I can't say it has been a pleasant period. There's a target to achieve, players are working hard. We are focused and committed."

PSG lead the standings but last weekend's loss has reduced the advantage over second-placed Olympique Marseille to five points with five games left this season.

PSG's dip in form this year, especially after they were knocked out of the Champions League in the last-16 in early March, has been a cause for concern for supporters.

Galtier's side were unbeaten in all competitions until December but have since lost nine games, with fans protesting outside Neymar's home this week chanting for him to leave.



Ronaldo and Neymar Beyond Newcastle's Reach

LONDON (Dispatches) - Eddie Howe says Newcastle are not able to launch blockbuster moves for superstars like Cristiano Ronaldo and Neymar despite the financial muscle of their Saudi owners.

Newcastle, 80 percent owned by Saudi Arabia's Public Investment Fund, have spent over £250 million (\$315 million) on new players in the last three transfer windows.

With Howe's side sitting third in the Premier League ahead of this weekend's visit from Arsenal, the Magpies look odds on to secure a lucrative berth in next season's Champions League.

Newcastle's impressive transformation since Howe took charge has made them a desirable destination for top players, with Paris Saint Germain forward Neymar and Al Nassr striker Ronaldo both linked with moves to St James' Park recently.

But, asked on Friday about the prospect of some of the best players in the world coming to Newcastle, Howe told reporters: "It is best to discover them before they explode onto the world scene.

"We could not be able to come close to affording those players as they are the best players in the world.

"We are never going to be in a position currently to afford those transfer fees and wages, so we need to go underneath and find them young and develop them into the players they can be."

Howe has made shrewd signings like Nick Pope and Kieran Trippier for relatively low fees, while spending larger sums to land Bruno Guimaraes, Sven Botman, Alexander Isak and Anthony Gordon.

Mega-money swoops for players of Neymar's calibre remain out of Newcastle's reach at present, but Howe knows that won't stop the speculation.

"That kind of speculation has been there from day one since the takeover, really. Naturally everyone has then assumed the biggest names in world football will be going to Newcastle," he said.

