

**TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Dropped 125,761 Points to 2.314m on Monday, as reported, Over 13.657b Securities Worth 106.776 Trillion Rials (About \$254.22m) Were Traded**

**Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani in Meeting With His Syrian Counterpart Expressed Iran's Readiness to Equip The Syrian Armed Forces With the Most Advanced Defense Weapons**

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**LeBron's Lakers rout Warriors 127-97, Take Series Lead**



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## Balance of Power Shifting From West to East

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces has said there are indications that the power of the United States and its Western allies is waning and the balance of power is shifting from the West to the East.

Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri made the remarks in a meeting with his Omani counterpart Lieutenant General Abdullah bin Khamis al-Raisi in the Omani capital Muscat on Monday.

Baqeri described the Persian Gulf and West Asia as among the most sensitive regions in the world, saying that Americans have been projecting power across the region in recent years as part of efforts to impose themselves as the dominant actor in international and regional affairs.

"Nowadays, new signs of a shift in the balance of power from the West to the East are emerging. It should be noted that the future belongs to our region and Asia," he said.

The general noted that Tehran is going to host a major conference on the new world order to be attended by several countries, including Oman. **See Page 7**

## Iran State-of-the-Art Weapons "Game Changer" in Int'l Affairs



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Head of the International Affairs department of Iran's Defense Ministry has hailed the country's advanced technology used to manufacture weapons, saying Iranian arms are today perceived as a "game changer" in the international arena.

Second Brigadier General Hamzeh Qalandari said the world was surprised by Iranian weapons after the lifting of a 13-year UN arms embargo in October 2020.

"A country that had problems in all areas and was prohibited from any technology, has today reached a place on the edge of technology, with its weapons described in international media as a 'game changer,'" he told IRNA.

"This fact led many countries to buy Iranian weapons or renovate and rebuild their own defense equipment using Iranian technology and equipment following the removal of the embargo."

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 never bow to pressure to scale down its military programs, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense.

The defense official also noted that the international community today acknowledges that Iran engaged in a true battle against terrorism and that US-assassinated General Qassem Soleimani was the greatest commander in the fight against the ominous scourge.

"Regarding the issues raised as the SCO's main goals, i.e. the fight against terrorism, extremism and separatism, perhaps no one has had the experience of a true struggle as much as the Islamic Republic of Iran does," he said.

"It is worth mentioning that today the international community acknowledges that Martyr Soleimani was the greatest commander in the fight against terrorism."

Elsewhere in his interview, Qalandari referred to the talks between Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani and his counterparts on the sidelines of a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO)'s defense ministers in the Indian capital of New Delhi late last month.

"Most of the meetings featured a serious willingness to form an alliance and improve the level of defense and security cooperation with the Islamic Republic," he said.

"All SCO countries also asked for using Iran's experience in the fight against terrorism and its spread to the region and the world. Another request, which was made in almost all meetings, was to have a close look at Iran's defense achievements."

Also in his remarks, Qalandari drew a parallel between the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), a US-led military alliance, and the SCO, a Eurasian political, economic, international security and defense organization.

Unlike NATO, the SCO has focused on expanding its influence based on cooperation rather than power and force, he said, adding that the Eurasian organization has tried to distance itself away from military issues and seek stability in conflict zones as well as joint economic cooperation.

"Perhaps the Ukraine crisis is a practical example showing that NATO's capability is declining like the power of the United States. It is contrary to the advancing path pursued by the Shanghai Cooperation Organization," he said.

## Tehran Resolved to Clarify Misunderstandings With IAEA

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani says that the country's serious policy is to resolve problems and misunderstandings with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

In his weekly press conference, Kanaani touched upon the latest regional and international issues.

Speaking about Iran's relations with IAEA, Kanaani said that Iran's serious policy is to resolve problems and misunderstandings with the agency.

"Iran is moving according to the road map that was reached during Grossi's trip to Tehran, and in this framework, executive and operational measures have been defined and we are moving forward," he emphasized.

Speaking of the recent visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Syria, Kanaani considered the visit one of the most important events in Tehran-Damascus relations.

The senior Iranian diplomat further noted that the visit had a message, and was practically a celebration of the joint victory of the Axis of Resistance.

Welcoming Syria's readmission into the Arab League, Kanaani stressed, "We hope to see the convergence of the countries of the region." **See Page 7**

## Annual Inflation Up 1.7% to 45.8% in March

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's annual inflation rate rose by 1.7% to 45.8% in the calendar month to March 20, according to figures by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

SCI figures released on Sunday showed that Iran's consumer prices index (CPI) had increased by 45% for urban households and by 50.6% for families living in rural areas of Iran in the month to late March.

The annual inflation rate of 45.8% reported for March 2023 is the highest reported by the SCI since October 2021 and the second highest since Iran began to feel the impacts of US sanctions on its economy in 2019.

Experts say high but controlled levels of inflation in Iran is a result of economic policies adopted by the Iranian government to reduce the country's dependence on oil revenues, including a decision in 2022 to dismantle a system of heavy subsidies granted to basic goods imports.

The SCI delayed its publication of monthly inflation figures for March after it decided to change its baseline year of calculating price changes from 2017 to 2021. **See Page 7**

## AEOI Plays Strategic Role To Facilitate Investment

TEHRAN (IP) - Head of Atomic Energy Organization of Iran stated that the organization has strategic role for both domestic and foreign investment.

Unveiling ceremony of two home-made technological products was held with AEOI chief in attendance on Monday.

During the ceremony, Mohammad Eslami said: "We must move strongly and prepare the ground, in electricity and radiomedical via domestic and foreign investment."

He also added: "The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran is obliged to create 10,000 megawatts of new electricity through investment and internal and external finance."

AEOI chief went on to say that investing in the field is very risky, but it has many economic advantages because it is clean energy and the country needs it.

"The Atomic Energy Organization is obliged to move in the direction and its mechanism is provided," Eslami underscored.

The vice president and Iran's Atomic Energy Organization Chief (AEOI) said that products by the country's Atomic Energy Organization can be exported because they are designed and manufactured based on the current standards and requirements of IAEA.

On the sidelines of the ceremony, Eslami in response to Iran Press stated: "For foreign investment, and in the budget law for nuclear power plants, we have predicted domestic and foreign investment."

## Ditching Dollar in Trade 'Iran's Strategic Policy'

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The strategic policy of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) is to set aside US dollar in trade and FOREX exchanges with other countries, the CBI chief said.

Mohammad Reza Farzin made the comment in his meeting with Omani Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion Qais bin Mohammad Al Yousef in Tehran on Monday.

During the meeting, Farzin pointed to the full readiness of the Central Bank of Iran to remove the US dollar from trade and economic transactions between Iran and the Sultanate of Oman.

Suitable ways have been paved for carrying out the trade and economic transactions based on the national unit of currency with trade partners including Oman completely, the governor emphasized. The Americans use the dollar as a political tool to pressurize countries while other currencies in the world are significantly growing especially in the Asia region, he continued. **See Page 7**

## IRGC Successfully Tests Indigenous Rocket With Thermobaric Warhead

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force has successfully test-launched a domestically-manufactured rocket equipped with a thermobaric warhead.

The test of the indigenous Fajr-5 (Dawn-5) rocket with a thermobaric warhead, which operates with a fuel-air explosive (FAE) system, was carried out. Fajr-5 is a 333-mm rocket, whose guided version, known as Fajr-5C, was earlier delivered to the IRGC Ground Force units and is currently furnished with a warhead with more destructive power.

The destructive power of the new thermobaric warhead, which uses oxygen from the surrounding air to generate a high-temperature explosion, is reportedly 1.5 times greater than that of trinitrotoluene (TNT) and enhances the rocket's blast radius and thermal effect.

The thermobaric explosive's lower sensitivity than TNT has made it a safer option in comparison with conventional warheads. Fajr-5 is known as the most advanced and longest-range version of the Fajr ground-to-ground rockets that have various classes with different functions. The 333-mm rocket that runs on solid fuel has single- and two-stage versions, with a range of 75 kilometers and 180 kilometers, respectively. **See Page 7**

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# Foreign Ministry Servers Not Been Hacked

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani has rejected some foreign media's claims that the servers and systems of the foreign ministry have been hacked.

All the service systems of Iran's foreign ministry are active and are being used, Kanaani said. He pointed out that only the website of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs was attacked by a hacker, the necessary measures were taken immediately and it is now available to the public.

The data released in the name of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in cyberspace is fake and unverifiable and has nothing to do with today's events and is only media hype.

## Tehran Ready to Boost Economic Ties With Muscat

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

**TEHRAN - The first vice president of the Islamic Republic of Iran described the relations between Tehran and Muscat as historical and said that efforts should be made to expand the economic relations between the two countries.**

The relations between Iran and Oman in the last few decades, despite the tensions in the Persian Gulf and U.S. efforts to intensify Iranophobia, have always been based on mutual respect and interests.

First Vice Speaker Mohammad Mokhber, in a meeting with visiting Qais bin Mohammed Al Youssef- Minister of Commerce, Industry and Investment Promotion of Oman, said that the country is ready to transform its commercial relations with Oman and improve the level of bilateral economic cooperation.

Referring to the many fields of cooperation between Iran and Oman, such as energy, industry, medicine and medical equipment, Mokhber noted that the country has made



great progress in various industrial fields and it is ready to improve cooperation with Oman in all these fields.

"Qais Bin Mohammad Al Youssef", also announced his country's determination to strengthen relations with Iran in the meeting and said that during the trip, he had been surprised by the country's industrial progress and achievements.

Qais bin Mohammad Al Youssef called for the conclusion of a preferential trade agreement between Iran and Oman and expressed hope that with the visit of the King of Oman to the country, which will happen in the near future, a new chapter of trade relations between the two countries will be opened.

### Raisi Hails Role Played By Iran's Red Crescent in Turkish, Syria Disasters

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has appreciated the Iranian Red Crescent Society for the role it played in Turkey and Syria during the recent disaster in those states.

President Raisi made the appreciation in his speech at a ceremony held in Tehran on Monday on the occasion of World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day (May 8).

Their presence in Turkey and Syria proved that Red Crescent Society is active wherever needed, the president said.

Further, he dismissed any demarcation between the Red Crescent and politics, geography and religion.

Then, the president hailed the efforts made by the staff of Iranian Red Crescent Society during the coronavirus pandemic since its onset in December 2019.

In 2022, the Iranian Red Crescent Society (IRCS) was granted Henry Davison Award, the prestigious humanitarian prize.

Raisi hails role played by Iran's Red Crescent in Turkish, Syria disasters President of the IRCS Pir-Hossein Kolivand received the award on behalf of the Iranian society during the Geneva meetings of the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC) and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) with the participation of 192 Red Cross societies worldwide.

## Uzbekistan Calls for More Tourism Ties With Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Speaker of the Legislative Chamber of the Oliy Majlis (Parliament) of Uzbekistan said tourism and economic relations are complementary and the presence of tourists will lead to the economic development of Iran and Uzbekistan.

Nurdinjon Ismoilov made the remarks during a meeting with the provincial governor of Khorasan Razavi province Yaqub Ali Nazari on Sunday in Mashhad, the capital of northeastern Iranian province where he also said that "Economic presence will also lead to an increase in tourists between Uzbekistan and Iran."

"In recent years, the relations between Iran and Uzbekistan have been developing, and we hope that these relations will expand in the future," Ismoilov added.

"The governments of Uzbekistan and Iran have cooperation plans on their agenda. Accordingly, cooperation and contacts between ministries and business people will lead to more action and a stepped-up relationship between the two countries."

The speaker also said that the two countries' parliaments and the parliamentary friendship groups play a very important role in the development of bilateral relations.

Stating that the economic relations between Iran and Uzbekistan need to be greatly expanded, Ismoilov said, "It is hoped that the economic and trade relations between the two countries will be at a favored level and



the visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Iran in the near future will lead to the signing of documents that will be followed by the boosting of the economies of the two countries."

"By traveling to Isfahan and Khorasan Razavi provinces, I was able to get acquainted with other potentials of Iran so that a more complete picture of this country can be formed for us," added the speaker of the parliament of Uzbekistan.

Yaqub Ali Nazari, for his part, referred to the tourist attractions and holy Islamic sites in Khorasan Razavi Province and stated that "The Mashhad city hosts about 30 million pilgrims every year." He added that "Every year we witness the presence of lots of people from Central Asian countries for pilgrimage and medical tourism purposes in the city of Mashhad."

"After the visit of the President of Iran to Uzbekistan, the relationship between the two countries expanded by signing documents, and we hope that after the visit of the President of Uzbekistan to Iran, more and better relations will be established between the two countries", Nazari continued.

The governor further suggested introducing a province in Uzbekistan corresponding to Razavi Khorasan so that regional development could also be advanced.

## Iran, SCO to Boost Cinema Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - The CEO of Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation expressed his hope that the joint working group to strengthen cinema with the participation of the member countries of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization will be formed more quickly.

The opening ceremony of the third China Film Week was held at the Farabi Cinema Foundation in Tehran with the presence of a group of political, cultural and artistic figures and Iranian and Chinese cinematographers.

Mahdi Javadi, the CEO of the Farabi Cinema Foundation of Iran, expressed his satisfaction that the third week of Chinese films was held in Iran and was hosted by the Farabi Cinema Foundation, saying: "Chinese culture, with its antiquity and expansion, has many human and moral aspects whose spiritual roots have created deep connections between the two cultures of Iran and China."

Javadi stated that cinema is a great opportunity to expand cultural cooperation between the two countries of Iran and China and added: "The presence of Iranian cinema in Chinese film events, including the international film festival of Shanghai, Beijing, etc., and the presence of Chinese cinema in famous Iranian festivals,

including Fajr Film Festival, Children and Youth Film Festival, Tehran Short Films over the past years, there have been many interactions between the two countries."

Mohammed Khazaei, Deputy Minister and Head of the Cinematic Organization of the Ministry of Culture and Islamic Guidance of Iran, also said: "Iranian and Chinese cinema have distinctive and brilliant characteristics and identifiers in the world."

Khazaei added: The extensive connection between Iranian and Chinese cinema is important because there are many undiscovered capacities for expansion and development in this area that can be taken into consideration. Chang Hua, the Chinese ambassador to Iran, also said: "Film is the art of light and shadow, a mirror of reality and a messenger of culture, and it plays an important role in learning about different civilizations."

Emphasizing that China and Iran have magnificent and ancient civilizations, the Chinese diplomat added: The theater of the Farabi Cinema Foundation is named after the Late Abbas Kiarostami, a great filmmaker who traveled to China four times to make films in the last two years of his life, and the filmmakers of China made a documentary film called "March with Abbas Kiarostami" with his presence.

## 370 Investment Projects Unveiled in Iran's Free Zones

TEHRAN (MNA) - Hojatollah Abdolmaleki, the Secretary of the Supreme Council of Free Trade-Industrial and Special Economic Zones, has said 370 major investment projects are going to be executed in seven free trade zones (FTZs) across the country and all investors are welcomed to participate in these projects.

Speaking on the sidelines of the Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran (Iran EXPO 2023), Abdolmaleki said the initial studies on these projects have been carried out and they will soon be started, Tasnim news agency reported.

"Preliminary justification plans have been prepared, which shows that these projects are going to be profitable. Studies related to the market, land, energy,

etc. have also been conducted," the official added.

The establishment of free trade zones in Iran dates back to the Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989 - March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

The first two free trade zones of Iran were established in the south of the country. The first one was Kish Free Trade Zone established in 1368 on Kish Island in the Persian Gulf and the second one was Qeshm Free Trade Zone established the year after on Qeshm Island in the Strait of Hormuz.

Some five other free trade zones have been also established in the country since then, including Chabahar in southeastern

Sistan-Baluchestan Province, Arvand in southwestern Khuzestan Province, Anzali in northern Gilan Province, Aras in East-Azərbayjan Province and Maku in West-Azərbayjan Province, both in the northwest of the country.

The development of existing free trade zones and the establishment of new zones has become one of the major economic approaches of the Iranian government.

In last December, Abdolmaleki said that this council is seeking to modify the country's free trade zones comprehensive law.



## UN, World Bodies Legally-Bound to Protect Palestinians Against Israeli Crimes

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran slammed the "deliberate silence" of the self-proclaimed advocates of human rights in the face of atrocities committed by the Israeli regime, saying the United Nations and other international organizations have a legal obligation to protect the people of Palestine.

"As a result of the deliberate silence of the false claimants of human rights, the assassination and killing of the Palestinian activists and people have turned into a daily behavior of the Zionists," Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani said in a post on his official Twitter account on Sunday.

He added that international bodies and the UN Security Council, in particular, have a legal responsibility to support the Palestinian people in the face of the occupying Israeli regime.

Over the past months, Israel has ramped up attacks on Palestinian towns and cities throughout the occupied territories. As a result of these attacks, dozens of Palestinians have lost their lives and many others have been arrested.

Most of the raids have focused on the West Bank cities of Nablus and Jenin, where Israeli forces have been trying to stifle a growing Palestinian resistance against occupation.

## Two Men Executed for Blasphemy, Desecration of Islamic Values

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Two men who had been convicted of blasphemy, desecration of the Holy Qur'an, and insulting Islam, Prophet Muhammad (PBUH), and other Muslim sanctities have been executed in Iran.

Mizan news agency, affiliated with the Iranian Judiciary, on Monday identified those put to death as Yousef Mehrdad and Sadrullah Fazeli Zare'. It did not say when they were executed.

The two were running dozens of online anti-religion groups dedicated to the hatred of Islam, promotion of atheism and desecration of Muslim values, Mizan noted.

Mehrdad had personally formed an online group dedicated to Islamophobia, desecration of the Holy Qur'an and disrespect for Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) and his Infallible Household (AS), and was employing two different user accounts for the purpose, according to the report.

One of the accounts was linked to an Iranian mobile phone number, while another was connected to a virtual French number.

Extensive and detailed investigations, together with his written confessions, revealed that Mehrdad had been highly active in encouragement of atheism and insult of religious sanctities.

In one instance, he burned a copy of the Qur'an - Islam's holy book - filmed the desecration and published it online.

Mehrdad was apparently the admin of at least 15 anti-Islam online groups.

He said, while being interrogated, that he had been aided and abetted by Fazeli Zare'.

The latter also used a virtual French number to run online anti-religion groups.

## Parliamentary Diplomacy Can Help Resolve Regional Water Issues

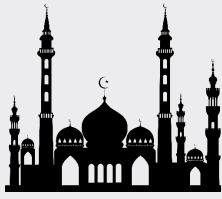
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has underscored the need for pursuing parliamentary diplomacy and utilizing the potentials of the Iranian government to resolve issues concerning water.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks in a joint session with the Agriculture, Water and Natural Resources Commission of Majlis (the Iranian parliament) on Sunday, where the minister and the legislators exchanged views on the crisis.

Touching upon efforts made by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs regarding Iran's water right from the Helmand River, the top diplomat said that the Iranian representatives have negotiated with Afghanistan's interim government in this respect.

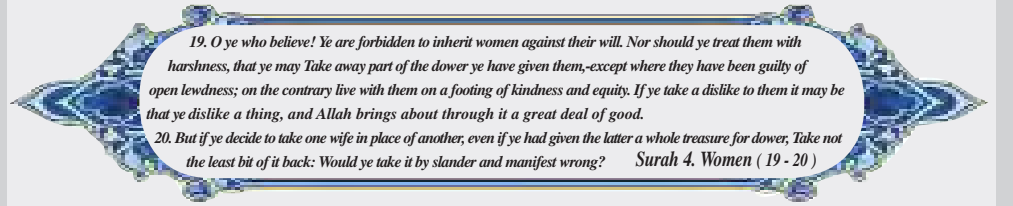
He also emphasized the necessity for activating parliamentary diplomacy and utilizing all the potentials of the Iranian administration to resolve the regional water issues.





PRAYER TIME

- Noon (Zohr) 12:00
- Evening (Maghreb) 19:16
- Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 03:27
- Tomorrow's Sunrise 05:03



## Tehran, Bishkek Explore Ways for Broadening Economic Ties

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Iran and Kyrgyzstan in the joint business forum which was held at Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) explored ways for expanding their economic ties and blamed transportation and financial transactions as major hurdles in way of broadening trade ties.**

In the Iran-Kyrgyzstan Business Forum at ICCIMA, Head of ICCIMA Gholam-Hossein Shafei said that Kyrgyzstan is special priority of Iran's private sector for broadening economic cooperation but restrictions in transportation and money transfer have made difficult increase of trade level.

He then pointed to the preferential trade agreement of Iran and the EAEU and good economic relation growth with the EAEU states and expressed hope this successful experience will continue with next steps in free trade agreement.

Shafei noted that although Iran and Kyrgyzstan have witnessed rise in trade in the past two years and their annual trade is now around \$80m, the figure does not match their economic capacities.

The ICCIMA head pointed to Kyrgyzstan's active participation in global economic interactions and the country's membership in EAEU and the Shanghai Pact and said: "Cooperation in the field of transportation and financial exchanges can be realized in the form of a comprehensive agreement with the members of the mentioned treaties."

He further expressed the Iranian private sector's readiness for active cooperation with their counterparts in Kyrgyzstan, noting that for realizing the economic goals set for the two nations, obstacles in the way of trade must be removed.

Then President of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Kyrgyz Republic T.A.Sariev, for his part, referred to Iran's high capacity for economic cooperation and noted that the level of commercial exchanges between the two countries is insufficient.

"Despite the problems and financial exchange restrictions, I believe that Iran has opened its way out of the sanctions. Kyrgyzstan can also be with Iran in this direction. By knowing more about the business opportunities of the two countries, we can find new ways to increase the level of business cooperation," he added.

He noted that representatives of 40 Kyrgyz companies are accompanying him



to Tehran to participate in the IRAN EXPO 2023, adding that Kyrgyz economic activists hope they can find their Iranian trade partners in the exhibition for joint investment and cooperation.

He reiterated that Kyrgyzstan has good opportunities for joint investment because productions in this country can be used in Kyrgyzstan and also be exported to China, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan and other Central Asian countries.

Then Kyrgyzstan Ambassador to Tehran Turdakun Sydykov, for his part, said that Kyrgyz traders in Tehran are after identifying capacities of Iran and this expo is the first step, adding that he expects such an expo to be held in Kyrgyzstan.

He then invited Iranian companies to come to Kyrgyzstan and to launch joint production line, adding that there are a large number of opportunities as the country is an EAEU member and it has preferential tariffs with Eurasia for over 1000 items of goods and therefore the opportunity for cooperation is available.

## President Visits NICICO Pavilion at IRAN EXPO 2023



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi on Sunday and in the opening of IRAN EXPO 2023 visited the pavilion of National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) and during the visit he called for accelerating developmental projects and increase of production.

President Raisi visited NICICO pavilion as one of the top companies participating in the Fifth Iran Exporting Capabilities Exhibition known as IRAN EXPO 2023.

According to reports, the CEO of NICICO Dr. Ali Rostami briefed President Raisi of capabilities of NICICO in the fields of discovery, reserves, production and developmental projects as one of the leading companies in the national industry.

Then President Raisi expressed his hope over the national copper developmental moves and emphasized handing over of mining areas by the industry, mine and trade ministry and hailed the performance of the endeavoring management and staff of copper industry.

## Monthly Tax Income Rises 49%

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's tax incomes during the first month of the current Iranian calendar year 1402 (March 21-April 20) rose 49 percent compared to the same month of the previous year, the head of the Iranian National Tax Administration (INTA) announced.

According to Mohammad-Hadi Sobhanian, INTA collected 430 trillion rials (about \$815 million) of taxes during the mentioned month, while the figure was 290 trillion rials

(about \$549.6 million) in the same time span of the past year.

Sobhanian noted that of the collected taxes, 190 trillion rials (about \$360.1 million) was related to direct taxes, and 240 trillion rials (about \$454.9 million) was the share of tax on goods and services.

Iran's tax income reached over 4.7 quadrillion rials (about \$8.9 billion) in the previous Iranian calendar year 1401, registering a 54 percent rise, year on year.

In late October 2022, former INTA Head Davoud Manzour said that INTA took serious measures for battling tax evasion in the previous year so that the organization discovered more than 170 tax evasion cases and the violators were faced with heavy penalties.

## Head of the Securities and Exchange Organization:

# NICICO Plays a Special Role in the Growth and Development of the Capital Market



after visiting this complex, in a press conference held in the presence of Dr. Ali Rostami, the CEO of National Iranian Copper Industries Company, and other deputies and managers, said: "We will help in the financing of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company in the stock exchange. Stating that the issuance of debt bonds by this company can increase the speed of its projects, he added: The NICICO is a company that through being among equity companies belongs to 50 million shareholders and is a popular company. This company has a special role in the growth and development of the capital market. The head of the Securities and Exchange Organization stated: The copper industry has a good future, and it is easy to talk about the next 40 years because investment in this industry will have a very good return. Dr. Eshghi emphasized that their position in the stock exchange organization is to prevent blind and aimless rent, and added: The rent that is distributed in the first chain of production is sold in informal markets and the profit goes to the broker's pocket. We are looking to deal with it. He said: We have a plan to finance the country's economic driving projects that we can definitely finance these plans and projects through debt and capital instruments. Dr. Eshghi also stated that they advanced the issue of the first public company project with the National Iranian Copper Industries Company and will offer it to the public, adding, "In this way, public resources and the resources that people have and want to use in a profitable investment, this tool will be provided to them. He added: "If the National Copper

Industries Company needs financial resources for its various projects, we are ready to help through the issuance of various bonds." The company received the capital and now its activities have started, and we expect that this capital company will play a more special role in this project financing process. Dr. Eshghi stated: National Iranian Copper Company is one of the big suppliers in the commodity exchange company, which offers all kinds of products in the commodity exchange, and we have always supported these financial offers, and all our efforts were to create a transparent and fair market for the seller and for the buyers of the products of the National Iranian Copper Company to create in the commodity exchange.

According to the public relations of Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex of Rafsanjan, Dr. Majid Eshghi, the head of the Securities and Exchange Organization (SEO) and his accompanying delegation, along with Dr. Ali Rostami, the CEO of the National Iranian Copper Industries Company (NICICO) and a group of board of directors and deputies of the NICICO, visited the production line and the development plans of Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex in Rafsanjan this month.

According to this report, Darrehzar beneficiation factory, Darrehza mine, Darrehzar crusher, Sarcheshmeh copper mine, two under construction Sarcheshmeh concentrate plant, three Sarcheshmeh concentrate projects, concentrate and refinery of Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex in Rafsanjan, including development projects and the production line of the complex were visited by the head of Mr. Eshghi and his accompanying delegation. In this several-hour-long visit, the deputy of operation of Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex of Rafsanjan and the related managers gave explanations about the copper production process in the complex and the progress of the development projects of the complex. Head of SEO Mr. Eshghi who has traveled to Kerman Province to visit the Sarcheshmeh Copper Complex,





## Toll From DR Congo Floods Rises to Nearly 400

KALEHE (Dispatches) - The death toll from floods and landslides triggered by heavy rain in the east of the Democratic Republic of Congo has risen to nearly 400, an official said.

At least 394 bodies have been recovered after last week's floods, said Thomas Bakenga, administrator of Kalehe territory where the affected villages are located.

He had announced a toll of at least 203 people on Saturday.

Heavy rainfall in the Kalehe region of South Kivu province on Thursday caused rivers to overflow, causing landslides that engulfed the villages of Bushushu and Nyamukubi.



## Iraq Court Issues Death Sentence to al-Hashimi's Killer

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - An Iraqi court has sentenced to death a police officer, Ahmed Hamdawi Oueid al-Kenani, who was accused of leading a group that gunned down well-known analyst and government adviser Hisham al-Hashimi three years ago in Baghdad's Ziyouna district.

A Baghdad court issued a death sentence on Sunday against al-Kenani under Iraqi counterterrorism laws, a judicial authority statement said. Al-Hashimi, a prominent academic and government adviser who was an expert on Sunni armed groups such as ISIL (ISIS) operating in Iraq and who had close contacts with top Iraqi decision-makers, was shot dead outside his home in July 2020 by four men on two motorcycles.



## Tokyo, Seoul Try to Bury Historical Hatchet



SEOUL (Dispatches) - Japan's Prime Minister Fumio Kishida said his "heart aches" for Koreans who suffered under colonialism, as Seoul and Tokyo seek a rapid reset of long-strained ties in the face of North Korean threats. Kishida was in Seoul on the first official bilateral visit by a Japanese leader to South Korea in over a decade. He met President Yoon Suk Yeol, who has made improving testy relations with Japan a top priority for his administration.

The East Asian neighbours, both crucial security allies of the United States, have long been at odds over historic issues linked to Japan's brutal 1910 to 1945 colonial occupation of the Korean peninsula, including sexual slavery and forced labour.

"My heart aches as many people went through a very difficult and sad experience in the harsh environment at that time," Kishida said, speaking after the summit with Yoon.

Yoon said Kishida's visit showed "shuttle diplomacy" -- regular mutual visits and high-level talks -- was back on track, after a lengthy pause during a bitter trade spat linked to the forced labour issue.

"Based on the friendship and trust I have with Prime Minister Kishida, I will promote deeper bilateral cooperation toward a new future," said Yoon, who was in Tokyo in March for a fence-mending visit.

Bilateral ties were torpedoed in 2018, when South Korea's Supreme Court ordered Japanese firms to compensate the wartime victims of forced labor, enraging Tokyo and triggering an escalating series of tit-for-tat economic measures.

But Yoon, who took office last year, has sought to bury the historical hatchet, earlier announcing a plan to compensate victims without direct involvement from Tokyo -- a move that was unpopular domestically, but helped improve ties with Japan.

"As the South Korean government moves forward... I am touched to see how so many people are opening their hearts to the future while not forgetting the hardships of the past," Kishida said Sunday.

Experts had widely predicted Tokyo would not offer a new apology, and Kishida stopped short of this, instead reaffirming the "heartfelt apology" made by previous administrations in Tokyo.

"There are parts of Kishida's statement that definitely fall short of our expectations," Choi Eunmi, a researcher at the Asan Institute for Policy Studies, told YTN.

"But even though he said it was his personal feeling, I would like to note his expression of sincerity. And I think this is meaningful as we are just taking our first step in restoring shuttle diplomacy."

During their March summit, Kishida and Yoon agreed to end tit-for-tat trade curbs, with Kishida inviting the South Korean leader to a G7 meeting in Hiroshima this month.

For Yoon, it is long overdue that the two countries "end the vicious cycle of mutual hostility and work together" to improve regional security, he told AFP in March before he flew to Tokyo.

## Wagner Says Russia Promises Enough Ammo To Stay in Bakhmut

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The head of the Wagner mercenary group said Russia had promised his fighters enough ammunition to stay in Bakhmut, after threatening to pull out in scathing videos.

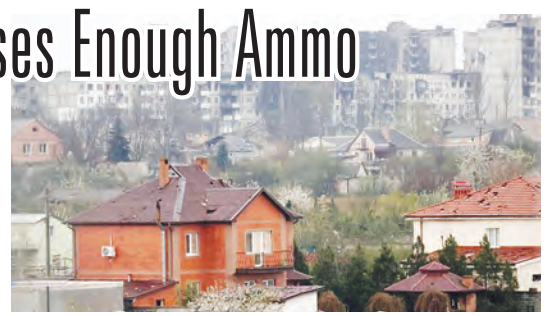
Rivalries between Yevgeny Prigozhin and the conventional army came to the surface during the battle for the eastern Ukrainian town, where Wagner is leading the assault.

It comes as Russia has reported increasing drone strikes and sabotage, amid speculations of an expected spring counteroffensive from Ukraine.

"Overnight we received a combat order... they promised to give us all the ammunition and armaments we need to continue the operations" in Bakhmut, Prigozhin said.

His group has been assured "that everything necessary will be provided," he added.

On Friday, he threatened to pull out of Bakhmut on May 10, in a series of blistering, heavily bleeped-out videos, blaming



## Arab League Re-Admits Syria After 11-Year Absence

CAIRO (Dispatches) - The Arab League welcomed back Syria's government, ending a more than decade-long suspension and securing President Bashar al-Assad's return to the Arab fold after years of isolation.

In November 2011, the 22-member body suspended Damascus over its crackdown on peaceful protests which began earlier that year and which spiralled into a civil conflict that has killed more than 500,000 people, displaced millions and battered the country's infrastructure and industry.

While the front lines have mostly quietened, large parts of the country's north remain outside government control, and no political solution has yet been reached to the 12-year-old conflict.

"Government delegations from the Syrian Arab Republic will resume their participation in Arab League meetings" starting Sunday, said a unanimous decision by the group's foreign ministers.

Assad has been politically isolated since the war began, but recent weeks have seen a flurry of diplomatic activity ahead of an Arab League summit in the Saudi city of Jeddah on May 19.

The ministers in a statement emphasized their "keenness to launch a leading Arab role in efforts to resolve" the Syria crisis and its "humanitarian, security and political consequences", noting that humanitarian aid must reach "all those in need".

They also agreed to form a ministerial committee to continue "direct dialogue with the Syrian government in order to reach a comprehensive solution".

Several Arab countries cut ties with Damascus early in the conflict, betting on Assad's demise, while some including Qatar and Saudi Arabia provided support to the Syrian opposition.

The last Arab League summit Assad attended was in 2010, while the opposition attended the pan-Arab group's summit in Doha in 2013, sparking a furious reaction from Damascus.

Defence Minister Sergei Shoigu and Chief of General Staff Valery Gerasimov for "tens of thousands" of Russian casualties.

"Their unprofessionalism is destroying tens of thousands of Russian guys and that is unforgivable," he said at the time.

In one video, Prigozhin was seen showing rows of what he said were dead Wagner fighters.

"They came here as volunteers and they are dying so you can get fat in your wood-panelled offices," he said.

On Saturday, he asked Moscow to let him hand over his positions to Chechen strongman Ramzan Kadyrov.

Kadyrov, who has ruled Russia's Muslim-majority republic Chechnya for the last decade-and-a-half, said his men were "ready to move" toward Bakhmut.

Prigozhin has for months accused the conventional army of refusing to deliver ammunition to his men.

Nevertheless, the emotive language used in Friday's videos and the personal criticism of the leaders of Russia's campaign in Ukraine were unprecedented.

## Gunman Kills Eight in Rampage at Texas Mall

AUSTIN (Dispatches) - A heavily-armed man stormed a shopping mall in the U.S. state of Texas, shooting dead eight people and wounding several others before he was killed by a police officer at the busy complex.

Video footage circulating online showed the shooter getting out of a sedan in the mall's parking lot before opening fire on people walking nearby.

An officer inside on an unrelated call quickly responded to the gunfire and "neutralized" the shooter as scenes of panic broke out at the sprawling facility in Allen, police said. The identity of the shooter was not released. His body, sprawled on a sidewalk, was one of seven deaths at the mall when more police arrived.

Two others died in the hospital while "three are in critical surgery, and four are stable," said Allen fire chief Jonathan Boyd.

The attack is the latest deadly gun violence to convulse the United States, a country awash in firearms and which has already endured 199 mass shootings this year, according to the Gun Violence Archive, a non-governmental organization which defines a mass shooting as four or more people wounded or killed.

The gunfire at Allen Premium Outlets, 35 miles (55 kilometers) north of Dallas, began around 3:30 pm (2030 GMT), when it was busy with weekend shoppers, police said.

The officer in the mall "heard gunshots, went to the gunshots, engaged the suspect and neutralized the suspect," said chief Brian Harvey of the Allen police department.

Some of the victims were as young as five years old, a hospital official told NBC News.

Texas Governor Greg Abbott called the mass shooting an "unspeakable tragedy."

President Joe Biden "has been briefed on the shooting," a White House official told reporters.

Local officials hailed the actions of the police officer who charged and killed the shooter.

"We owe a debt of gratitude to first responders that ran toward the gunfire and acted swiftly to neutralize the threat," said Keith Self, a Republican congressman whose district includes the city of Allen.

The police chief later said authorities believe the unidentified shooter "acted alone." CNN showed a cropped photograph of the apparent shooter dead on the ground, wearing tactical gear with extra magazines, and with an AR-15-style rifle at his side.

Steven Spainhouer said he rushed to the scene and performed CPR on victims before the official first responders arrived, and he was confronted with haunting, graphic images.



## Thais Queue at Temples, Schools for Early Ballots

BANGKOK (Dispatches)

- Thais queued under the blistering sun outside temples, shopping centres and schools to cast their early ballots ahead of a much-anticipated election next week.

More than two million Thais nationwide are registered to vote early ahead of the kingdom's May 14 election, which is shaping up to be a clash between army-backed establishment parties and resurgent opposition movements.

Prime Minister Prayut Chan-o-Cha, who took power in a 2014 coup before cementing control in a controversial 2019 election, has been languishing in opinion polls with voters favouring old-school opposition party Pheu Thai and the more radical Move Forward Party. But with an electoral system heavily stacked in favour of the army-backed parties, challengers must achieve a landslide victory to have any hope of forming the next government.

"I hope this election will change the country in a better way," said shopping mall worker Srisuda Wongsad, 28, after casting her ballot. She was among hundreds queuing quietly at a polling station in Bangkok's fashionable Ekkamai district to vote at the Wat That Thong.

"I am voting for a candidate and party that I like, that can answer my needs," she said.

Elsewhere in the capital, the Royal Paragon Hall shopping centre was packed with voters, albeit cooler ones, enjoying the complex's air conditioning. Temperatures across the capital soared as the day went on, with machines spraying a fine mist of water over orderly queues at the busy Ramkhamhaeng University polling station shortly before midday. But crowds were still out in force, with traffic and congestion around busy polling stations.

"I am quite excited," said first-time voter Pasawee Sriarunthai, 20, who will not be in Bangkok on May 14.

"I decide to cast my vote based on the party's policies, and I hope this election will bring the country a better future," Pasawee said.

"I want the new generation to be running the country. I want to try something new," said Nanthapon Phomput, 28, before voting at Wat That Thong.

Among the challengers are opposition party Pheu Thai, fielding Paetongtarn Shinawatra -- daughter of billionaire ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra -- as a prime ministerial candidate.





## Nicaraguan Paradise Draws Americans, Europeans Despite Political Strife



MANAGUA (Dispatches) - Tucked away in a southern corner of Nicaragua, far from the political persecution of the opposition by President Daniel Ortega, a tiny colony of Americans and Europeans have carved out a new home on the Pacific, lured by the area's natural beauty, security and tranquility.

San Juan del Sur, on the Pacific coast 140 kilometers (85 miles) south of Managua on the border with Costa Rica, is an ideal place to retire or set up a business.

While Ortega's political opponents are thrown in jail or forced into exile -- a "continuum of repression," in the words of a recent Amnesty International report -- this little corner of tropical paradise attracts foreigners to enjoy its bars, restaurants, whale watching and landscapes.

Many expats first visited as tourists before deciding to stay permanently, while other more recent arrivals were attracted by lax Covid-19 vaccine rules.

American Christina Alty came 10 years ago to surf and has since set up an estate agency.

"I like the lifestyle of Nicaragua in general, it checks all my boxes for all the outdoor things that I enjoy: the beaches, the hiking, the scenery," said Alty.

Her clients "just enjoy the different lifestyle change.

"It's a lot slower pace of life here than wherever they came from," added the 37-year-old mother of two children who study in a bilingual school in the town of 17,000 inhabitants.

While Alty strolls along the beach, tourists lounge on chairs, lie on the sand, play sports or enjoy a dip in the sea.

Two bilingual schools combine formal education with open air classes.

"We are in a very natural environment, we're four kilometers (2.5 miles) from the center of San Juan del Sur, we're surrounded by mango, almond and plum trees," Jaime Lynn Hunter, director of the Adelante school, told AFP.

"And I think parents like to send their children here because they don't feel enclosed, they have the necessary space to stretch, run and be children," added the 38-year-old, who has lived in the town for 13 years.

The school has 170 pre-school and primary pupils.

It was established in 2016 to teach English to local children with the cooperation of US and Japanese NGOs.

The pupils, 30 percent of whom are foreign, follow the Nicaraguan curriculum but classes alternate between Spanish and English from one week to the next.

"We're delighted that our children are safe here and can study in an outdoor setting, not with gates and closed doors, and they don't need to be afraid of anything more serious such as shootings, which you see a lot these days" in US schools, said Hunter.

Arriving in 2010 to work as an English teacher, Hunter married a Nicaraguan and now has two children.

"What I like here is that they still play in the street, they still go to the park. Children here are still children and this makes me think of when I was a child, when I would go out and play until it got dark."

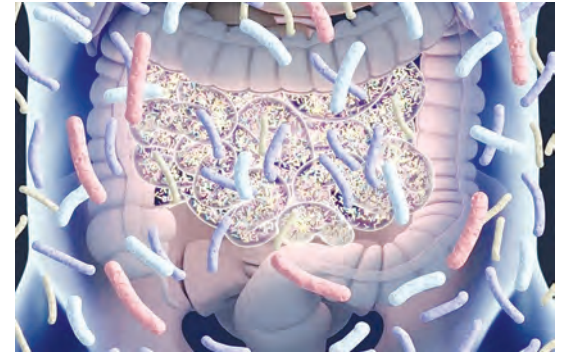
Hunter said she has always been treated well by the local population.

"When I came here, I saw people that had nothing, but they were prepared to give me everything," she said.

The other bilingual school, San Juan del Sur Day School, has 175 pupils with 43 percent coming from 17 different foreign countries, including the US, Britain and Russia.

Every year, around 30 cruise ships from the US, Canada and Europe dock at the port in San Juan del Sur, according to the tourism ministry.

## Parkinson's Disease-Like Gut Dysbiosis Detected in Early Stages of the Disease



LONDON (Dispatches) - In a recent article published in the journal *Nature Communications*, researchers performed a large cross-sectional study to profile gut microbiota dysbiosis across prodromal and early stages of Parkinson's disease (PD), REM sleep behavior disorder (RBD), first-degree relatives of RBD (RBD-FDR), and healthy controls.

PD, an alpha-synucleinopathy, typically manifests as the abnormal aggregation of alpha-synuclein ( $\alpha$ -syn) protein in the central nervous system (CNS). Dream-enactment behaviors and REM sleep without atonia characterize RBD, the most specific prodromal marker of PD. Studies have confirmed that patients with video-polysomnography (v-PSG) diagnosed with RBD also suffer from constipation and  $\alpha$ -syn pathology in ENS.

Strong scientific evidence suggests that before  $\alpha$ -syn spreads to the CNS,  $\alpha$ -syn pathology occurs in the enteric nervous system (ENS), which favors the gut-to-brain propagation of  $\alpha$ -synucleinopathy. Since gut dysbiosis occurs in parallel, researchers have long hypothesized a correlation between pathological  $\alpha$ -syn aggregation and PD-associated gut microbiota perturbations.

So, decades before motor symptoms of PD surface, constipation, the typical manifestation of a disturbed ENS due to  $\alpha$ -syn aggregation, could indicate the onset of PD. It justifies why understanding gut microbiota and host-microbiome interactions at prodromal stages of PD are significant.

In the present study, researchers formed four study groups using 452 subjects, of which they retained only 441 with a high read count for further analyses. The first group comprised 178 people with v-PSG-diagnosed RBD patients. The 36 early PD patients had premotor RBD features and clinically confirmed PD; moreover, their motor symptoms had become apparent in the past five years.

The third group had 132 patients with RBD-FDR, and the fourth healthy control group comprised 130 individuals matched to people in RBD and early PD groups for age and gender. RBD patients had a greater likelihood ratio (LR) of prodromal PD than control and RBD-FDR, while controls and RBD-FDR groups had comparable levels of total LR. The team used the updated Movement Disorder Society (MDS) research criteria (2019) to compute LR and the probability of prodromal PD. A probability of prodromal PD > 80% and 30-80% were considered as probable and possible prodromal PD, respectively.

They used the RBD questionnaire Hong Kong (RBDQ-HK) to assess the severity of RBD features among all subjects exploring its dream-associated factors and behavioral manifestations. Likewise, the team used the Rome-IV diagnostic questionnaire to diagnose bowel disorders, e.g., functional constipation, diarrhea, and irritable bowel syndrome (IBS).

Additionally, the researchers documented stool consistency, bowel movement frequency score (BSFS), and some other gastrointestinal symptoms, e.g., dysphagia. They computed Parkinsonism using the Unified Parkinson's Disease Rating Scale part III (UPDRS-III), wherein a total score > three indicated subthreshold Parkinsonism.

The team collected fresh stool samples for deoxyribonucleic acid (DNA) extraction and used a NanoDrop 2000 spectrophotometer to measure its concentrations. Finally, the team used random forest modeling to identify microbial markers that effectively distinguished RBD from controls.

Investigating gut microbiota across early PD, prodromal PD, i.e., RBD, RBD-FDR, and controls revealed that in RBD patients, the overall gut microbiota composition shifted to early PD, with depletion of butyrate-producing bacteria, and the overabundance of *Desulfovibrio*, *Collinsella*, and *Oscillospira* UCG-005.

# The Link Between Highly Processed Foods and Brain Health

LONDON (Dispatches) - Roughly 60% of the calories in the average American diet come from highly processed foods. We've known for decades that eating such packaged products — like some breakfast cereals, snack bars, frozen meals and virtually all packaged sweets, among many other things — is linked to unwelcome health outcomes, like an increased risk of diabetes, obesity and even cancer. But more recent studies point to another major downside to these often delicious, always convenient foods: They appear to have a significant impact on our minds, too.

Research from the past 10 or so years has shown that the more ultraprocessed foods a person eats, the higher the chances that they feel depressed and anxious. A few studies have suggested a link between eating UPFs and increased risk of cognitive decline.

What's so insidious about these foods, and how can you avoid the mental fallout? Scientists are still working on answers, but here's what we know so far.

In 2009, Brazilian researchers put food on a four-part scale, from unprocessed and minimally processed (like fruits, vegetables, rice and flour) to processed (oils, butter, sugar, dairy products, some canned foods, and smoked meats and fish) and ultraprocessed. "Ultraprocessed foods include ingredients that are rarely used in homemade recipes — such as high-fructose corn syrup, hydrogenated oils, protein isolates and chemical additives" like colors, artificial flavors, sweeteners, emulsifiers and preservatives, said Eurídice Martínez Steele, a researcher in food processing at University of Sao Paulo, Brazil. This classification system is now used widely by nutrition researchers.

UPFs make up a majority of the packaged foods you find in the frozen food aisles at grocery stores and on the menu at fast-food restaurants — 70% of the packaged foods sold in the United States are considered ultraprocessed. They're increasingly edging out healthier foods in people's diets and are widely consumed across socioeconomic groups.

"Ultraprocessed foods are carefully formulated to be so palatable and satisfying that they're almost addictive," said Dr. Eric M. Hecht, a public health researcher at the Schmidt College of Medicine at Florida Atlantic University. "The problem is that in order to make the products taste better and better, manufacturers make them less and less like real food."

### What effect do ultraprocessed foods have on mental health?

Recent research has demonstrated a link between highly processed foods and low mood. In one 2022 study of over 10,000 adults in the United States, the more UPFs participants ate, the more likely they were to report mild depression or feelings of anxiety. "There was a significant increase in mentally unhealthy days for those eating 60% or more of their calories from UPFs," Hecht, the study's author, said. "This is not proof of causation, but we can say that there seems to be an association."



New research has also found a connection between high UPF consumption and cognitive decline. A 2022 study that followed nearly 11,000 Brazilian adults over a decade found a correlation between eating ultraprocessed foods and worse cognitive function (the ability to learn, remember, reason and solve problems). "While we have a natural decline in these abilities with age, we saw that this decline accelerated by 28% in people who consume more than 20% of their calories from UPFs," said Natalia Gomes Goncalves, a professor at the University of São Paulo Medical School and the lead author of the study.

It's possible that eating a healthy diet may offset the detrimental effects of eating ultraprocessed foods. The Brazilian researchers found that following a healthy eating regimen, like the MIND diet — which is rich in whole grains, green leafy vegetables, legumes, nuts, berries, fish, chicken and olive oil — greatly reduced the dementia risk associated with consuming ultraprocessed foods. Those who followed the MIND diet but still ate UPFs "had no association between UPF consumption and cognitive decline," Goncalves said, adding that researchers still don't know what a safe quantity of UPFs is.

### Why might ultraprocessed foods have this effect?

It's unclear. "Many high-quality, randomized studies have shown the beneficial effect of a nutrient-dense diet on depression, but we still do not fully understand the role of food processing on mental health," said Melissa Lane, a researcher at the Food & Mood Centre at Deakin University in Australia. However, there are some clues.

Much of the research has focused on how poor gut health might affect the brain. Diets that are high in ultraprocessed foods are typically low in fiber, which is mostly found in plant-based foods like whole grains, fruits, vegetables, nuts and seeds. Fiber helps

feed the good bacteria in the gut. Fiber is also necessary for the production of short-chain fatty acids, the substances produced when it breaks down in the digestive system, and which play an important role in brain function, said Wolfgang Marx, the president of the International Society for Nutritional Psychiatry Research and a senior research fellow at Deakin University. "We know that people with depression and other mental disorders have a less diverse composition of gut bacteria and fewer short-chain fatty acids."

Chemical additives in UPFs might also have an impact on gut flora. "Emerging evidence — mostly from animal studies, but also some human data — suggests that isolated nutrients (like fructose), additives such as artificial sweeteners (like aspartame and saccharin) or emulsifiers (like carboxymethylcellulose and polysorbate-80) can negatively influence the gut microbiome," Marx said.

Poor gut microbiota diversity — as well as a diet high in sugar — may contribute to chronic inflammation, which has been linked to a host of mental and physical issues, Lane said. "Interactions between increased inflammation and the brain are thought to drive the development of depression," she said.

It's also worth considering the possibility that the link between highly processed foods and mental health works in both directions. "Diet does influence mood, but the reverse is also true," said Dr. Frank Hu, a professor of nutrition and epidemiology at the Harvard T.H. Chan School of Public Health. "When you get stressed, anxious or depressed, you tend to eat more unhealthy foods, in particular ultraprocessed foods that are high in sugar, fat and chemical additives."

### How to recognize ultraprocessed foods

The best way to identify ultraprocessed foods is to read product labels. "A long list of ingredients, and especially one that includes ingredients you would never use in home cooking," are clues that the food is ultraprocessed, said Whitney Linsenmeyer, an assistant professor of nutrition at Saint Louis University in Missouri and a spokesperson for the Academy of Nutrition and Dietetics. Chemical names, unpronounceable words, and anything you would be unlikely to find in a kitchen cabinet are often signs that a food is in the ultraprocessed category.

You can still use convenience foods to make cooking easier without resorting to ultraprocessed foods. Products such as canned beans, frozen vegetables, precooked brown rice or canned fish are all shortcut ingredients that fit well within the scope of a healthy diet, provided there aren't any industrial items on the ingredient list. "If the added ingredients are ones you would use yourself, like herbs, spices, salt or cooking oils," Linsenmeyer said, "that's an indication that the food, while processed, is not inherently bad for you."



## Philippine Inflation Slows in April

MANILA (Dispatches) - Philippine annual inflation was on track to settle within the government's 2% to 4% target in the fourth quarter after it eased further in April, officials said, building the case for pausing interest rate hikes. The consumer price index rose 6.6% in April from a year earlier thanks to lower food prices, marking the slowest pace of increase since August, while month-on-month inflation posted zero percent growth for a second consecutive month. Bangko Sentral ng Pilipinas (BSP) Governor Felipe Medalla said the month-on-month inflation trends "present an even stronger argument" for keeping interest rates unchanged at the central bank's meeting on May 18.



## Gold Investment in Turkey Reaches Phenomenal Levels in Q1

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Demand for gold in Turkey maintains an unprecedented pace as households continue to see the popular commodity as a hedge against inflation pressures.

The country's central bank also remains one of the biggest buyers of the precious metal among central banks worldwide. Bar and coin investment in Turkey reached "phenomenal levels" in the first quarter, exceeding 50 tons for the first time on record, said the World Gold Council (WGC).

Demand increased fivefold compared to a year ago and was 32% higher quarter-over-quarter, WGC said in a report. In value terms, it said an unprecedented TL 58 billion (around \$3 billion) was invested in gold.

Turkish households have been seeing gold as a haven to shield themselves from inflation, which has eased over the last six months from a peak in October last year.

According to official data, annual inflation moderated further in April, falling to 43.68%. The reading marks a notable regress from 85.51% in October last year - a 24-year peak. It fell in December and touched 50.51% by March, with a favorable base effect and a relatively stable Turkish lira.

Worldwide, investors bought 302 tons of gold bars and coins in the January-March period, the WGC said, meaning Türkiye alone accounted for one-sixth of the global demand.

The overall figure jumped 14% above the five-year average and equaled \$18.4 billion in value. The buying was spurred by strong gold prices, which reached record levels in some markets, the council noted.

Investment demand picked up in March as bank failures spread fear through markets and analysts anticipated the end of U.S. interest rate increases.

"Demand was further fueled by persistent high inflation, geopolitical risks and concern over contagion in the banking crisis," the WGC added.

Yet, it notified that demand failed to match the previous quarter's levels, as high gold prices encouraged profit-taking and sharp declines were seen in a few key markets.

Chinese were the biggest bar and coin investors in the first quarter, as demand reached 66 tons, marking a 34% jump year-over-year and a 7% rise quarter-over-quarter. It was mainly driven by China's emergence from the COVID-19 pandemic and the gold price performance.

India also remained one of the biggest gold consumers, as record high - and volatile - local prices in the first three months were the key driver of demand, which was relatively muted at 34 tons, the WGC data showed.

Yet, the demand in the March quarter marked a 17% fall to the lowest level in 10 quarters and is likely to remain subdued even during June and September quarters on record-high prices, the WGC said.

The WGC said investment demand would likely grow this year and central bank buying would remain strong, albeit below last year's high.

## Sri Lanka's Foreign Reserves Improve to \$2.69b

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Debt-ridden Sri Lanka's foreign currency reserves improved to USD 2.69 billion in March 2023 from a mere USD 50 million in May last year, giving indications of marginal improvement of the island nation's economy, data from the Central Bank said on Friday. Sri Lanka has been in financial turmoil and its total debt is USD 83.6 billion, of which foreign debt amounts to USD 42.6 billion externally and domestic debt amounts to USD 42 billion.

In April 2022, Sri Lanka declared its first-ever debt default, the worst economic crisis since its independence from Britain in 1948, triggered by forex shortages that sparked public protests.

According to Central Bank of Sri Lanka data, the island's foreign currency reserves had improved to 2.69 billion dollars in March 2023, an improvement from under 50 million in May last year. Analysts said that the USD 2.69 billion, includes a 1.4 billion US dollar currency swap from China with conditions attached to its usage. Therefore the usable reserves would be just 1.6 billion dollars, the analysts say. By May last year, the country was deeply plunged into its worst-ever economic crisis since 1948. Reserves not sufficient to pay for imports led to shortages of essentials and power cuts.

Sri Lanka was then thrown a lifeline with an Indian line of credit worth USD 4 billion which paid for the imports of essentials and fuel. This triggered public protests which culminated in the resignation of the then President Gotabaya Rajapaksa.

## Foreign Investment Increasing in Bangladesh

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Foreign investors are active in the stock market. Foreign investors' transactions have doubled in April compared to last March.

It is known that the total turnover of foreign investors in the stock market last March was Tk 87.51 crore. It increased to Tk 182 crores in April. In other words, the transactions of foreigners have increased by Tk 95 crore or 108 percent in one month. This picture is not only in the stock market, but in all sectors.

According to a recent report published by Bangladesh Investment Development Authority (BIDA), foreign investment proposals in the country increased by 126 percent in the first three months of this year (January-March) compared to the same period last year.

At this time significant amount of investment proposals have come in textile, chemical and agriculture sectors.

In this context, private research institute Center for Policy Dialogue (CPD) Fellow Dr. Mostafizur Rahman said that many big companies in the world are showing interest in Bangladesh for agricultural processing. He mentioned that Bangladesh being an agriculture dependent country has a special opportunity to use this sector. Because many countries import their necessary agricultural products from other countries. If that demand can be addressed here, it can also become a huge sector for exports.

He said that as the domestic market is growing in Bangladesh, it is several times bigger than that of Singapore. And in this market especially middle-class consumption of consumer goods has increased, great demand has been created. For that many foreign investors have already started targeting Bangladesh.

A study conducted by the Foreign Investors Chamber of Commerce and Industry (FICCI) in 2021 identified immense investment opportunities in agribusiness. According to the study, Bangladesh has the most investment opportunities in these three sectors - agriculture, digital economy and green finance.

Incidentally, 38 hi-tech parks have been constructed in the country, which have been kept open for foreign investment.

It is expected that by 2025, the export earnings in the IT products sector will become five billion dollars. A major part of this will come from foreign investment.

Besides, initiatives have been taken to attract foreigners to invest in the infrastructure sector. The government's Vision 2041 plan specifically mentions attracting foreign investment in the infrastructure sector.

## Iraq Appeals for Urgent Int'l Help as Water Crisis Worsens

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq on Saturday called for emergency assistance from the international community to help restore the flow of water in the country's two main rivers.

Prime Minister Mohammed Shia Al Sudani made the plea for "urgent international intervention" at the start of the two-day Baghdad International Water conference.

"The issue of water has become a sensitive one not only in Iraq but in all countries," Mr Al Sudani said. Water levels in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers, which account for more than 90 per cent of Iraq's freshwater reserves, have declined significantly over the years, partly as a result of the construction of dams and diversion of water upstream in Turkey and Iran.

The Prime Minister warned that a shortage of water compounded by climate change would have a substantial impact on Iraq's economic development and environment, with wider ramifications for regional stability.

Mr Al Sudani said water scarcity had an impact on internal and external security "as it affects the existence of different human activities, whether in agriculture, industry or life".

"Iraq is one of the countries that reels under the impact of the climate change and its environment has seen substantial effects that have had economic and social impacts," he added.

Iraq has the world's fifth-largest proven oil reserves but it also ranks fifth among countries most vulnerable to climate change, according to the UN.

The country's water problems have been growing worse for decades as a result of climate change, mismanagement and pollution.

Moreover, successive wars have degraded its water infrastructure, leading to losses and inefficient distribution.

These factors, combined with an outdated centuries-old water management system, have "led us to this sensitive point in the water issue at the time of climate change", Mr Al Sudani said.

He warned that overlooking the water issue "will cause Iraq to lose the elements of development and will lead to a strategically dangerous area."

Iraq is experiencing its worst drought in decades, with temperatures exceeding 50°C last summer. Many of its lakes have shrunk or dried up completely.

The Tigris and Euphrates currently receive less than 30 per cent of their normal flow from Turkey and Iran, Deputy Environment Minister Jassim Al Falahi said last month.

Drought in Iraq has revealed a 3,400 city beneath the waters of a dam on the Tigris River.

## German Factory Orders Plummet Most Since 2020



BERLIN (Dispatches) - German industrial orders suffered their biggest fall in March since 2020, official data showed Friday, fuelling fears that Europe's biggest economy is entering a sharp downturn.

New orders, which give a foretaste of industrial output, suffered a surprise drop of 10.7 percent compared with the previous month, according to provisional figures from federal statistics authority Destatis. It was the biggest decline since April 2020, when the coronavirus pandemic had just started its march round the world, prompting lockdowns and border closures.

Orders had been rising in recent months, bolstering hopes that Germany had weathered the fallout from the Ukraine war and resulting energy crisis better than feared. But the latest data rang alarm bells anew about the state of the economy, with LBBW bank economist Jens-Oliver Niklasch calling the plunge a warning for investors.

"This figure destroys what had been a good start to the year for German industry, and is a real recession signal," he said in a research note.

The decline could be seen in most areas of the manufacturing sector, Destatis said. Foreign orders were down by 13.3 percent, and domestic orders by 6.8 percent on the previous month, it said.

But the economy ministry said that new orders had been "very volatile" in recent times, and that key indicators of sentiment were continuing on an upward trend that started late last year. Many economic indicators had started rebounding after falling last year in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, lifting hopes that Germany could avoid a recession.

However the picture has been darkening again recently, with the economy narrowly dodging a recession in the first quarter, against expectations for a rebound, while exports also dropped in March.

## Global Trade Shows Signs of Recovery

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global trade is showing signs of recovery, following a projected rise in April driven by the strength of the EU's imports and exports, a study has found.

Activity is estimated to have posted a 1.5 per cent monthly growth in April, picking up "somewhat more strongly" following a period of weakness in the winter half-year, which covers October through March, the Kiel Institute for the World Economy said in its monthly update.

This is, however, down from the 2.1 per cent expansion global trade recorded in the same month in 2022, according to the Germany-based economic research institute.

Global activity was anchored by the EU, which posted positive trade figures for both exports and imports, at 2.7 per cent and 2.2 per cent, respectively, the Kiel Institute said.

Imports in Germany climbed 2.2 per cent, but exports declined 0.7 per cent, which "paints a less clearer picture" for Europe's biggest economy, it said.

Europe's biggest economy doubled its gross domestic product growth forecast for 2023 - to 0.4 per cent from 0.2 per cent in late January - after it made it through the winter period without major energy problems, Berlin said last month.

"Intra-European trade in particular is benefiting, as is France's trade in goods. But also neighbours outside the single market such as the UK, Norway and Switzerland display a positive development in April," Vincent Stamer, head of the Kiel Trade Indicator, wrote in the study.

Global trade has recovered from the effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, but has since had to face multiple macroeconomic and



geopolitical challenges, including decades-high inflation, consecutive interest rate hikes from central banks and the effects of the Russia-Ukraine war that has hit supply chains.

World trade growth is expected to decline this year to 2.4 per cent, despite an easing of supply bottlenecks, before rising to 3.5 per cent in 2024, after growing by 5.1 per cent in 2022, the International Monetary Fund said last month.

Global economic growth is projected drop to 2.1 per cent this year, compared to an earlier projection of 2.2 per cent, from 3.1 per cent in 2022, the UN Trade and Development Conference said in its latest Trade and Development Report Update released last month. The US was the only other major region tracked by Kiel to record growth in both metrics: exports inched up 0.6 per cent, while imports posted the highest growth of 3.4 per cent, the study showed.



## Iran Annual Export To Syria Up 11.4%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of Iran's export to Syria increased by 11.4 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade announced.

Ruhollah Latifi said that about 147,000 tons of non-oil commodities worth \$243.168 million were exported to Syria in the previous year, with

10.6 percent rise in weight year on year.

Iran and Syria signed 15 cooperation documents during the visit of a high-ranking Iranian delegation headed by President Ebrahim Raisi to the Arab country.

The signed documents included a comprehensive roadmap for strategic and long-term cooperation between the two countries as well as 14 other agreements and memorandums of understanding (MOU) on collaboration in various areas.



## Group Led by China, Russia Criticizes Global Institutions

PANAJI (Dispatches) - Foreign ministers from a group of nations led by China and Russia criticized on Friday the ability of world institutions to resolve geopolitical problems, including the coronavirus pandemic, and said their organization should do more to address such challenges.

Indian Foreign Minister Subramanyam Jaishankar said in remarks at a meeting of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization that the crises have disrupted global supply chains and have hit developing nations the hardest.

They have "exposed a credibility and trust deficit in the ability of global institutions to manage challenges in a timely and efficient manner," he said, adding that alternative organizations like the SCO can help address such challenges. "With more than 40% of the world's population within the SCO, our collective decisions will surely have a global impact," he said.

Russia and China founded the SCO in 2001 as a counterweight to U.S. alliances across East Asia to the Indian Ocean. The group includes the four Central Asian nations of Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan and Uzbekistan, which Russia considers its backyard. In 2017, India and Pakistan became members, and Iran and Belarus are set to join later this year.

Russia and China have sought to reduce the dominance of what they see as U.S. and Western-led global institutions and alliances, and China accuses Washington of attempting to contain its economic and military rise.

Chinese Foreign Minister Qin Gang told the foreign ministers that "the world is faced with multiple crises and challenges featuring a resurgence of the Cold War mentality, headwinds of unilateral protectionism, as well as rising hegemonism and power politics," China's official Xinhua News Agency reported.

"SCO members should support each other in safeguarding sovereignty, security and development interests, and oppose external forces interfering in regional issues," he said.

At a briefing after the meeting, Jaishankar dismissed questions about whether the SCO is anti-Western, saying, "how people perceive it is something I cannot answer for." Instead, he stressed India's "multidirectional foreign policy" and said "it's not always possible that all our partners get along with other partners."

India enjoys strong ties with Cold War ally Russia, while its relations with the United States have warmed in recent years and its ties with China have cooled over a border dispute. It is increasingly seen by the West as a counterweight to China's growing global ambitions.

Jaishankar did not mention Russia's war in Ukraine, and analysts said Moscow was unlikely to face a backlash over its invasion from the SCO and would instead use the meeting to flex its influence in the region. For Russia, the SCO remains one of the few international groups where it can still comfortably engage with members and further ties.

The visit by Pakistan's foreign minister to archrival India to attend the meeting was the first by a high-ranking Pakistani official in nearly a decade. Jaishankar stressed the need to stop cross-border terrorism in his remarks, a dig at Pakistan, which India accuses of arming and training rebels fighting for the independence of Indian-controlled Kashmir or its integration into Pakistan, a charge Islamabad denies.



"Let's not get caught up in weaponizing terrorism for diplomatic point scoring," Pakistan Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari said in his opening remarks.

Despite speculation, India and Pakistan did not hold bilateral talks on the sidelines of the meeting. "Victims of terrorism do not sit together with perpetrators of terrorism to discuss terrorism," Jaishankar said at the briefing.

Jaishankar held separate talks with his Chinese and Russian counterparts on Thursday. The meeting with Chinese Foreign Minister Qin came amid continued tensions along their disputed border, where a three-year standoff involves thousands of soldiers stationed in the eastern Ladakh region.

Qin earlier said the border situation was "stable overall" and that both sides should abide by existing agreements to "promote the further cooling and easing of the border situation and maintain sustainable peace and tranquility in the border area," according to China's Foreign Ministry.

India did not release a statement after the meeting, but Jaishankar said relations between the two countries were not normal and "cannot be if peace and tranquility in border areas is disturbed."

Qin also met with Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov on Thursday. China is the biggest buyer of Russian oil and gas exports, pumping billions of dollars into the Russian treasury and helping the Kremlin resist Western sanctions over its invasion of Ukraine.

Beijing is also trying to present itself as a global diplomatic force and has said it is willing to serve as a mediator in the war.

Last month, Chinese leader Xi Jinping said Beijing will send an envoy to Ukraine to discuss a possible political settlement.

China has blamed the U.S. and NATO for provoking Russia and refused to criticize Moscow's actions. However, it has refrained from issuing a full-throated endorsement of the invasion and is not known to have provided arms or other material assistance to the Russian military effort.

### Balance of Power Shifting...

FROM PAGE 1

He praised the cordial, friendly and close relations between Iran and Oman, stressing the need for stronger security cooperation along the common sea border.

Major General Baqeri also expressed Iran's preparedness to draw up a program for joint intelligence activities and patrol missions in the fight against drug trafficking.

He lauded the military cooperation between Tehran and Muscat, inviting the Persian Gulf kingdom to participate in joint naval exercises with Iran.

The chief of staff of Oman's armed forces stressed that unity and solidarity among regional states will guarantee security throughout the region.

The Omani general also hailed the recent reconciliation between Iran and Saudi Arabia in an agreement brokered by China, stating that the rapprochement would prevent foreign interference in the region and improve regional security.

Iran and Oman have held several joint naval drills in recent years.

### Annual Inflation...

FROM PAGE 1

The government statistics agency on Sunday published monthly CPI figures related to the calendar month to April 20.

The data showed that highest increases in consumer prices had taken place in the category of fruits and nuts in April with a rise of 15.3% and in the category of transportation costs with a 8.6% increase compared to March.

The figures showed that lowest price rises in April compared to March had been reported in education services with 0.3% and dairies and eggs with 0.3%.

### Ditching Dollar...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, Farzin pointed to the constructive talks held between Iranian and Omani officials on the development of monetary and banking relations and reiterated that Iran is ready to use bilateral and multilateral monetary treaties in trade transactions with Oman and the country's trade partners.

Emphasizing the use of joint debit cards between the monetary and banking networks of the two countries, he said necessary talks have been held in this regard with the officials of the Central Bank of Oman.

Referring to the positive negotiations between Iran and Oman last year regarding the development of monetary and banking relations along with trade relations between the two countries, Frazin stated: "Iran is ready for international methods like clearinghouses, multilateral monetary agreements and bilateral monetary agreements in trade transactions with Oman."

The CBI governor further mentioned the expansion of trade relations between Iran and Oman in the previous Iranian calendar year (ended on March 20) and said: "The trade between the two countries grew by 40 percent in the past year and reached \$1.8 billion."

He further emphasized the necessity of using joint credit cards between the monetary and banking networks of Iran and Oman in order to facilitate the commercial relations and economic activities of the two countries' businessmen and stated: "The negotiations in this regard have also been carried out with the Central Bank of Oman and Iran is ready to put the use of joint credit cards on the agenda as soon as possible."

Farzin also referred to the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) Summit, planned to be held in June in Tehran, and noted that the use of bilateral and multilateral monetary treaties between the ACU's member states will certainly result in increasing trade ties and also removal of dollar exchanges in trade transactions between these countries.

The Omani trade and economic delegation arrived in Tehran on Sunday to participate in the 5th Export Potential Exhibition of the Islamic Republic of Iran dubbed "IRAN EXPO 2023".

### IRGC Successfully Tests...

FROM PAGE 1

The new thermobaric warhead's function would make the Fajr-5 rocket a suitable weapon for the fight against terrorist groups in mountainous and impassable terrain, where terrorists usually construct their shelters and trenches.

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 never bow to pressure to scale down its military programs, including its missile power, which are entirely meant for defense.

## Iran, UN Weigh Plans to Retrofit Hospitals

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Officials from the Iranian Road Ministry and the United Nations Human Settlements Program (UN-Habitat) discussed plans for retrofitting hospitals in Iran.

Srinivasa Popuri, the senior human settlements officer at the Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP) of the United Nations Human Settlement Program, had a meeting with senior Iranian urban policy-makers at a subsidiary of the Iranian Ministry of Road and Urban Developments in Tehran on May 6 for talks about various urban agendas.

In the meeting, Iranian Deputy Road Minister Ali Nabian expressed the country's willingness for cooperation with the UN-Habitat on retrofitting hospitals against natural hazards.

The importance of retrofitting hospitals drew attention after a devastating earthquake in Bam in 2003, because the buildings designed to accommodate and treat the victims were damaged and practically out of service, Nabian said.

He noted that the 'Roads, Housing, and Urban Planning Research Center' in Iran revised the project implementation methods based on the latest approved regulations and scientific publications afterwards.

Pointing to the implementation of the second phase of the Project for Improving the Resilience of Hospitals (BEHTAB II) following the successful completion of the first phase, Nabian said that BEHTAB II is the result of mutual cooperation between Iran and UN-Habitat. He added that the studies for 11 more hospitals with over 4,000 beds are also being carried out in cooperation with the United Nations Human Settlements Office.

For his part, Popuri expressed his office's willingness for cooperation with the 'Executive Organization for

Public and Government Buildings and Infrastructures' of Iran, pledging support for and continued cooperation with this organization.

Established in August 1997, the UN-Habitat Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific (ROAP)-Fukuoka serves the Asia and the Pacific region in the implementation of the Habitat Agenda. Through its strengthened presence in the region, ROAP addresses settlement issues in developing countries in the Asia and Pacific region and promotes community-based urban development.

## Iran Ready to Ease Export of Medical Equipment to Afghanistan

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Health and Medical Education expressed Iran's readiness to facilitate the development of the export of medicine and medical equipment to Afghanistan.

Bahram Einollahi made the remarks in a meeting with Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Public Health Qalandar Ibad. The Islamic Republic of Iran has achieved remarkable success in the field of medicine and medical equipment, and 99% of the required medicines are produced inside the country, Einollahi said. He expressed hope that Iran and Afghanistan deepen their unity and progress in the field of health by holding joint scientific conferences.

It is necessary to form a joint working group between the two countries for implementing joint programs, he said. Afghanistan's Acting Minister of Public Health also expressed hope that health, medical, educational, research and pharmaceutical cooperation with Iran will be expanded.

### Tehran Resolved to...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian foreign ministry spokesman spoke about the upcoming quadrilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey, saying that Iran's top diplomat Hossein Amirabdollahian will travel to Moscow to take part in the meeting.

The meeting, in which the four top diplomats are set to discuss the Syrian issues, is slated to be held on May 10. Kanaani once again reiterated Iran's position regarding the issue and emphasized the need for settling the differences between Syria and Turkey through political means. Later in his remarks, Kanaani touched upon the status of Iran's relations with Arab countries after the recent Tehran-Riyadh agreement, saying that favorable leaps were seen in the commercial and economic fields in this regard.

Saying that the positive events that happened in the process of bilateral relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Kuwait, he said that the relations between Iran and the countries of the region are on a new upward trend.

He added that Tehran will surely take positive measures wherever it sees an opportunity that secures the joint interests of Iran and other regional countries.

Kanaani also touched upon the agreement between Iran and Iraq regarding the security of borders with the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

"In the framework of the document that was reached between the heads of the security agencies of Iran and Iraq, we defined a specific framework to resolve Iran's security concerns, and within the same framework, communications and consultations are established, and we expect that based on the signed agreement and the declared will of the authorities of the two countries, the path will proceed

seriously and we will witness the provision of Iran's needs and the resolution of Iran's security concerns," he stressed.

Answering a question about the unfriendly remarks of Azeri president Ilham Aliyev, Kanaani cited that Tehran has expressed its views on relations with Azerbaijan clearly. "The relations between the two nations are unbreakable and have deep cultural and historical roots."

Kanaani also called on the Azeri side to avoid taking actions or adopting positions that are not in the interests of the two countries and serve the interests of the parties who want to create tension and crisis in Tehran-Baku ties.

The senior Iranian diplomat went on to say that Iran is willing to resolve the issues of dispute with the Azeri side through diplomacy and emphasizes diplomatic methods to protect the interests of the two countries and good neighborliness.

Kanaani, elsewhere, reacted to the remarks of the US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan who recently claimed that the Zionist regime has the freedom of action to act against Iran's nuclear program. "The American government should be aware of the legal and judicial responsibility of such statements. Iran's nuclear activities are peaceful and we are a member of the Agency (IAEA) and NPT, and Iran's activities are under the supervision of the Agency," he stressed.

Saying that Sullivan's claims regarding Iran's peaceful nuclear program are contrary to IAEA's reports, Kanaani stressed, "We do not accept baseless claims about Iran's nuclear activities." Iran will not tolerate any aggression towards its interests, security, and assets and will respond decisively to any aggressive action, he added.



## Jung Chan-min Wins Maekyung Open

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's Jung Chan-min triumphed on home soil at the Asian Tour's GS Caltex Maekyung Open, emerging as one of his country's stars of the future.

Jung shot a final round five-under-par 66 for a tournament total of 16 under par 197 and a commanding six-shot victory at Namseoul Country Club.

"I won a big tournament wire to wire, so I feel good," said the 23-year-old, who won \$222,222 with Sunday's victory.

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**ISSN 1024-6053**  
**P.O. Box:** 15875-8551  
**Address:** No 13, Pajouhesh St.,  
Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran  
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran  
**Printed by:** Entekhab-e Rasaneh  
**Distributed by:**  
Cities of Iran Cultural and  
Artistic Institute  
**Managing Director:** Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Lyles Wins 150m at Atlanta City Games

ATLANTA (Dispatches) - Noah Lyles retained the upper hand in his rivalry with fellow American Erriyon Knighton, taking first place in the 150 metres at the Atlanta City Games as he steps up preparations to defend his 200m crown at this year's World Championships.

Lyles, bronze medalist at the Tokyo Games, scorched to victory in 14.56 seconds to become the third-fastest athlete of all time over the distance behind Jamaican Usain Bolt and compatriot Tyson Gay. The 150m is not a World Athletics-recognised event.

## LeBron's Lakers rout Warriors 127-97, Take Series Lead

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James didn't take a shot in the first quarter of Game 3 for the first time in his NBA-record 275 playoff appearances, and the Los Angeles Lakers' home crowd rumbled with mild uncertainty each time he passed the ball instead.

Turns out James and his Lakers were just taking a while to warm up before they steamrolled the Golden State Warriors.

Anthony Davis had 25 points and 13 rebounds, a slow-starting James finished with 21 points, eight assists and eight rebounds, and the Lakers took a 2-1 lead in their second-round playoff series with a 127-97 victory.

D'Angelo Russell hit five 3-pointers while scoring 21 points for the seventh-seeded Lakers, who remained unbeaten at home in the postseason with a strong defensive effort against the reigning NBA champions. Los Angeles seized control in the middle quarters, outscoring the Warriors 63-38 to turn Game 3 into a laugh.

"We're one of the best defensive teams in the league, if not the best," James said. "For us to reach our potential, we have to defend at a high level. Not one team in this league tests you more in that than Golden State, so we have to be alert for a test on every single possession."

James curiously didn't shoot the ball until well into the second quarter, yet he led the way while Los Angeles pulled away. The 38-year-old also mixed in a handful of plays that defied his age and 20 years of NBA experience, making a deft spin move and blocking a shot on the other end shortly after he leaped the front row of fans and ran well up into the stands following a deflection.

"That's just how the game was going," James said of his unusual start. "I didn't want to force it. Just let the game come to me and make my imprint when needed."

Stephen Curry scored 23 points and Andrew Wiggins had 16 in a collective stinker for the Warriors, who committed 19 turnovers and never mounted a response to the Lakers on either end in the second half. Golden State went 13 for 44 on 3-pointers



— making just 10 while the game was still competitive — after hitting 21 in each of the series' first two games in San Francisco.

Davis had an impressive bounce-back game under both baskets, blocking four shots and leading the Lakers' latest strong defensive effort. Los Angeles has built its 16-5 run since March 17 on defense, and the Warriors couldn't hit enough shots from the perimeter to counteract their disadvantages in size and athleticism.

"After that first quarter, guys just really turned it up," Lakers coach Darvin Ham said. "They dialed up their competitiveness, and their communication was great. ... We were just playing a really physical, forceful downhill game."

Klay Thompson had 15 points and seven rebounds for the Warriors, but the rest of the roster beyond their top three scorers struggled mightily, combining for just 18 points before coach Steve Kerr pulled his starters with 9:11 to play. Draymond Green had two points in 23 minutes while playing with foul trouble.

"As ugly as this was tonight, we have an opportunity to respond on Monday, so there's no point in dwelling on it and hanging our head and getting discouraged," Thompson said. "We know how to respond. We've done it in our existence for 10 years here."

The Warriors were held under 100 points for only the fifth time in 92 games this season. They also got two technical fouls for arguing with the officials, who whistled Golden State for 22 fouls to the Lakers' 21.



**Kane An Inspiration For Spurs' Squad**

LONDON (Dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur's Harry Kane is setting an example for others at the club to follow with his "elite mindset", interim manager Ryan Mason said after the striker scored the winner in a 1-0 Premier League victory over Crystal Palace.

Kane headed home in first-half injury time to score his 209th Premier League goal, one more than Wayne Rooney but still some way behind record-holder Alan Shearer's tally of 260.

"Naturally we'll all talk about Harry's goals and Harry when he plays games of football he will continue to score goals. We know that," Mason told reporters after Spurs' victory snapped a four-game winless run on Saturday.

"But also that elite mindset, that example that he sets every day in and around the place, it's great to be around. Because when you have people like that they inspire you to be better and we appreciate Harry, we value him so much at this football club."

"... you have to have 11 players that are fighting for each other and working hard as a collective to get results. When you've got your captain, your leader, your goalscorer, probably one of our best players setting that example, that's what I want."

## Alvarez Retains Undisputed Super Middleweight Crown

GUADALAJARA (Dispatches) - Saul "Canelo" Alvarez made a triumphant return to Mexico, punishing John Ryder on the way to a unanimous 12-round decision to retain his undisputed super middleweight world title.

Ryder, whose face was already a bloody mess by the time Alvarez knocked him down in the fifth round, battled gamely in the later stages but Alvarez emerged a clear winner in his first fight in his native Mexico in nearly 12 years.

Judge Jeremy Hayes scored the bout 120-107 for Alvarez while Joe Pasquale and Gerardo Martino both saw it 118-109 for the champion, who delighted a sellout crowd of some 50,000 at the open-air Akron Stadium in his hometown.

"It's a historic moment for me," Alvarez said. "I'm blessed to be here with my people who supported me from the beginning."

Alvarez improved to 59-2-2 with 39 knockouts while Ryder, the mandatory challenger, fell to 38-6 with 18 wins inside the distance. After a tentative opening round, the 32-year-old Alvarez began to open up, landing a bevy of right hands that had Ryder bleeding from the nose and mouth by the third round.

A brutal left-right combination dropped Ryder in the fifth round.

He beat the count and held on until the bell, but he was in trouble again in the sixth when another big right from Alvarez had the Briton's knees sagging.

But Ryder, nicknamed "The Gorilla," kept coming. He was down again after a right from Alvarez late in the eighth, but that was ruled a slip and he had bounced back up moments before the bell.

Shaken again in the ninth, Ryder nevertheless seemed to find a second wind. The 10th and 11th were closer and Alvarez was less effective but had more than enough to hang on.

"He's strong," Alvarez said. "I'm not surprised about it." But Alvarez, regarded by many as the best pound-for-pound fighter in boxing, was pleased with the performance after a mixed 2022.

He was well beaten by Dmitry Bivol last May after stepping up to light heavyweight before laboring to a unanimous victory over old rival Gennadiy Golovkin in September.



## Guardiola Angry Over Haaland's Penalty Gesture

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - A magnanimous gesture by Manchester United's goal-machine Erling Haaland left Pep Guardiola fuming yesterday after the Norwegian striker ignored his manager's orders to take a spot-kick and handed the ball to team mate Ilkay Gundogan.

After the German midfielder had scored a first-half brace to put the Premier League leaders 2-0 up against Leeds United, Guardiola yelled from the sidelines for Haaland to take the penalty they had been awarded in the closing minutes.

But the 22-year-old Haaland, who has already scored a Premier League single season record of 35 goals, glanced at Guardiola before handing the ball to Gundogan so that the German could complete a hat-trick.

It was a move that sent the Spanish manager into fits of rage, especially as Gundogan's effort was pushed aside by a diving Joel Robles.

"If Gundogan scores everyone is 'OK, hat-trick, well done'," Guardiola said following City's 2-1 victory.

"But a taker is a taker. At 2-0, this is a business, not a situation where we cannot forget it." The 32-year-old Gundogan felt the heat from Guardiola when he stepped up to the spot.

"First he showed to Erling that he was quite mad about that, and then also he had a go at me," Gundogan told BBC Sport. "It is what it is at the end."

"The moment Erling grabbed the ball, I was sure he was going to take it but he looked out for me. I checked with him a few times to make sure he was sure. He was certain to hand the ball to me. I was confident to score."

Haaland had several excellent scoring chances, with a shot that bounced off the crossbar and another that glanced off the post.

## Vlahovic Racially Abused as Juve Move Second

NAPLES (Dispatches) - Juventus moved up to second in Serie A after a 2-0 win at fellow Champions League chasers Atalanta, whose fans racially abused Juve goalscorer Dusan Vlahovic.

England youth international Samuel Iling-Junior netted 55 minutes into his first start in Italy's top flight before Vlahovic finished the job deep in stoppage time with his 10th league goal of a difficult season. The Serbia forward then goaded a section of the home supporters after having previously being insulted as a "gypsy", abuse which had led to the match being briefly stopped by referee Daniele Doveri.

The Italian word for gypsy is often used by sections of football supporters as a slur for players from the Balkans and Eastern Europe, regardless of their ethnicity.

"Unfortunately these chants keep happening, they need to be fought against," said Juventus coach Massimiliano Allegri to DAZN.

"I think we need to ignore them when they happen and let those in charge take action." Juve are two points ahead of Lazio who lost at AC Milan on Saturday and, as things stand, have a good chance of making the Champions League next season.

Massimiliano Allegri's side are five points in front of fifth-placed Milan but their hopes of qualifying for Europe's top club competition through league placing depend on an Italian Football Federation (FIGC) ruling on alleged illicit transfer activity.

Last month Italy's highest sporting court revoked a 15-point penalty inflicted on Juve in January by the FIGC's appeals tribunal, who have to come to a new judgement.

Juve can also qualify for the Champions League via the Europa League, with the first leg of their semi-final against Sevilla coming up in Turin on Thursday.

Atalanta's chances of making the top four were hit by their defeat, as Gian Piero Gasperini's side five points behind fourth-placed Inter and in the Europa Conference League spot.



## Arsenal Pass Newcastle Test to Keep Pressure On Man City

NEWCASTLE (Dispatches) - Arsenal kept the Premier League title race alive as Martin Odegaard's strike and Fabian Schar's own goal beat Newcastle 2-0 to close to within one point of leaders Manchester City.

City have a game in hand on top of their slender lead, but the Gunners are refusing to give up the fight in their hunt for a first league title in 19 years.

Newcastle's second home defeat of the season slows the Magpies' charge towards Champions League football next season as their lead over fifth-placed Liverpool remains three points.

Arsenal held an eight-point lead at the top of the table just a month ago but had won just one of their previous five league games to let the destiny of the title slip out of their hands. Mikel Arteta's men, though, showcased their improvement over the last 12 months since defeat at St. James' Park last season cost them a place in the top four.

"It is a big step for a young team like ours to come here and do the things we did. It shows we have come a long way," said Odegaard.

"Last year here was one of the toughest days of my career, to be honest. After dropping points against Man City, to win against Chelsea and then come here and win shows the mentality."

"We have to keep going and digging in and fight until the end. It is football, anything can happen and we need to be ready."

The visitors wobbled early on as Jacob Murphy smashed the inside of the post after just three minutes before the home side thought they had a penalty when Bruno Guimaraes' effort hit the arm of Jakub Kiwior.

However, the Polish defender was handed a reprieve by a VAR review as the ball appeared to come off his thigh first.

Having ridden their luck, Arsenal took full advantage to go in front with their first shot on goal as Odegaard took aim from long range and arched the ball low beyond Nick Pope's left hand on 14 minutes.

