The Value of Trade Between Iran And the U.S. Stood at \$13.6m in the First Quarter of 2023, Registering a 9% Decline, IRNA Reported Citing The Latest Statistics Released by The American Statistical Association



Andrei Fursenko, Aide to the President of the Russian Federation Has Emphasized the Need to **Expand Scientific and Technological Cooperation With Iran, Especially** In the Field of Artificial Intelligence

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SPORTS Verstappen Keeps Red Bull Undefeated With Miami Win > SEE PAGE 8

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Opportunity to Revive JCPOA Not to Last Forever

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's chief nuclear negotiator says the revival of the 2015 Iran nuclear deal is possible if the US and the European signatories to the agreement have the will to reach that aim, warning that the opportunity will not last forever.

Ali Bagheri Kani, also deputy foreign minister for political affairs, made the remarks in tweets on Tuesday, marking the fifth anniversary of the United States' unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) in defiance of international criticisms.

"A critical reminder: 5 years ago, the US rendered a fatal blow to 'rule of law at the international level' by unlawfully withdrawing from JCPOA. Ever since, the US has failed to reverse its wrongful act. Iran's legitimate remedial measures will continue," he wrote.

"The full implementation of JCPOA (with effective sanctions lifting at its core) could be resumed, should the reneging party (and EU/E3) demonstrate credible political will to that effect. No opportunity is forever!' See Page 7

Borrell Hails Iran-IAEA Cooperation

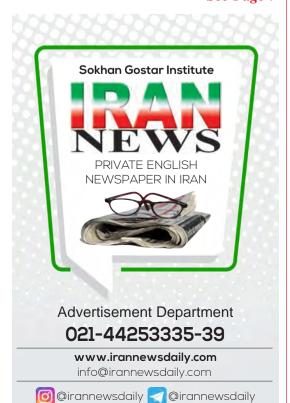
TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The European Union's foreign policy chief has welcomed on-going cooperation between Iran and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in a phone call to his Iranian counterpart, describing such continued efforts as "beneficial and positive."

Josep Borrell made the remarks during a phone conversation he initiated on Monday with Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and further underlined the significance for the EU of Tehran's 2015 nuclear agreement with world countries -- officially referred to as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA).

Borrell also pledged that the EU member nations will make every effort to return "all sides" to the negotiation table.

The U.S. unilaterally left the agreement three years after its conclusion, returning the imposed sanctions that the deal had supposedly lifted.

He also welcomed the recent normalization of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia as an important move in boosting regional stability. See Page 7



Dollar Accounts Only for Less Than 10% of Iran Foreign Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMICDESK

TEHRAN - Economy Minister economic spokesman of the government Ehsan Khandouzi says: Today, the share of the dollar in Iran's foreign trade has shrunk to less than ten percent, while two years ago, according to the information of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the dollar's share was nearly 30 percent.

Speaking in his weekly presser, the economic spokesperson of the government added: "You are aware that since 2018 and after the resumption of US sanctions against Iran, using other currencies was on the agenda of the government so that we can reduce our reliance on the dollar. Unfortunately, the processes were moving slowly, but with the seriousness that the president and the government had to speed up the reduction of the dollar in the country's trade, very good measures have been taken and the share of the dollar in Iran's trade has decreased greatly.'

Khandouzi said: "Iran is mulling the use of alternative and local currencies of trading partner countries. Another point was the connection of the country's banking network to the electronic payment network of the countries in the region, and this has happened in the case of Russia, and in the coming months, we will see that Iranian businessmen can meet their needs during their travels to Russia without using dollar-based banking systems.

Regarding the link of Iran's banking network to the banking network of other countries, including Turkey, Oman, and Iraq, the spokesman said that the CBI was also following up.

Another measure taken is the revival of mechanisms based on barter transactions between two or three countries, which reduces the need for dollars or euros, the spokesman highlighted. The Central Bank has also started good cooperation with the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) and the meeting of

the union is scheduled to be held in Tehran in May with the presence of nine countries. ACU is a payment arrangement between the central banks of Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Iran, Maldives, Myanmar, Nepal, Pakistan, and Sri Lanka.

"Bilateral or multilateral monetary agreements are being pursued by CBI, especially with countries that are our main trading partners. All of these measures have caused the share of the dollar in Iran's foreign trade to decrease by nearly a third in the last two years and reach less than ten percent, which is also not acceptable and the government is trying to seriously reduce its share," the minister underscored.

Meanwhile the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) is seriously pursuing the policy of de-dollarization and intends to use alternative options to accelerate the global trend, says CBI Governor Mohammadreza Farzin.

It should be noted that de-dollarization is one of the important policies which we are sensitive about," Farzin said on Tuesday during an open session of the parliament.

According to the CBI governor, Iran will host a meeting of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) in the near future, which will bring together all nine member states and several central bank governors from regional and Asia-Pacific countries. He added that the meeting will accelerate the global trend of de-dollarization.

The ACU aims to facilitate settlement of payments on a multilateral basis and promote the use of participants' currencies. "In fact, bartering, rather than using the dollar; reaching bilateral monetary agreements, which is being finalized with several countries; and multilateral monetary agreements are the three main topics of the aforementioned international meeting that will help materialize de-dollarization," Farzin explained.

Iran has announced its decision to move away from the US dollar and has acted on the decision in cooperation with other independent countries.

On Sunday, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi ordered the CBI to lay the ground for conducting foreign trade transactions using Iran's national currency rial.

Regional Sand and Dust Storms Impacting Its Forests

NEW YORK (IRNA) - Ambassador and Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations Amir Saeid Iravani says that regional sand and dust storms have inflicted harmful impacts on forests in Iran. Addressing the 18th session of UN Forum on Forest in New York on May 8, 2023, Iravani said that Iran has introduced measures to protect its forests over the past years.

The diplomat also called on UN member states to increase collaborations in order to pave the way for achieving global forest goals.

Following is Iravani's statement to the UN Forum on Forest:

Forests have the potential to help address the world's economic, social and environmental crises. Indeed, their ability to undertake major global challenges have been recognized in internationally agreed upon documents. We can achieve the Global Forest Goals by making concrete steps to increase our cooperation on forests at all levels. See Page 7

Iranians Will Never Forget West's Role in Saddam's **Chemical Attacks**

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's envoy to the UN says the Islamic Republic, as the main victim of chemical weapons, denounces the use of such weapons altogether as it is a serious violation of international law and a crime against humanity.

Amir Saeed Iravani, Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations Amir Saeed Iravani, made the remarks while addressing a UN Security Council meeting in New York on Monday.

He added that the use of chemical weapons constitutes a threat to international peace and security.

Pointing to the systematic use of chemical weapons against the Iranian people by former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein during the imposed war against Iran, he said Iranian people will never forget the role of certain Western countries in helping Saddam's regime to such weapons against the Iranian people.

"Because of their [West] harmful actions and double standards, the UN Security Council was unable to carry out its based charter duties to take effective action to hold perpetrators accountable for such atrocious crimes," Iravani said. See Page 7

Armenia Wants to Become Operator In Chabahar Port

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan has set up an inter-agency task force to launch a new international cargo transportation route and become an operator at Iran's Chabahar port.

The decree, which was posted on the government's website, aims to organize a multimodal high-speed route for international cargo transportation via Armenia, Armenian News Agency ARKA reported.

The task force's objectives include discussions and development of a new corridor for cargo transportation that will connect the countries of East Asia, India, and Iran with Europe through Georgia and the Black Sea, as an alternative to the North-South international transport corridor.

The task force, which will be led by the Armenian Minister of Economy, will report to the Prime Minister on a quarterly basis on the progress of the project, with final results due before November 1, 2023. The task force is also tasked to establish contacts and discuss technical and other issues with relevant departments of India, Georgia, and Iran. See Page 7

Iranian Crude Oil Output Stands at 2.56m bpd

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's crude oil production stood at 2.567 million barrels per day (bpd) in March, 8,000 bpd less than the figure for the previous month, according to OPEC's latest monthly report.

According to OPEC data, the daily production of the members of the organization was also decreased by 86,000 bpd in the said month in comparison to February. In the third month of the current year, the price of Iranian heavy crude oil registered a 3.8 percent decline to stand at \$78.8 per barrel.

According to the report, the country's average heavy crude price was \$80.67 from the beginning of 2023 up to the report's publishing day, in comparison to \$97.55

in the previous year's same period. OPEC Basket prices also fell 4.2 percent or \$3.43 to \$78.45 a barrel in March.

Iran's oil production in 2022 increased by seven percent compared to the previous year, according to OPEC's first monthly report released in 2023.

Based on the OPEC data, the Islamic Republic produced 2.554 million bpd of crude oil in 2022, 162,000 bpd more than the figure for 2021, when the output stood at 2.392 million bpd. See Page 7

Sanctioned States Should Be Free to Import Food, Medicine

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the ICRC delegation in Tehran Johannes Brewer has said that sanctioned countries around the world should not face any restrictions on supply of food and medicine.

Speaking on the occasion of the World Red Cross and Red Crescent Day on Monday, Brewer said that all countries should be able to import their essential and humanitarian needs.

He said that the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) in Iran is an apolitical organization that promulgates humanitarian rules to support individuals and groups, adding that ICRC supports the Iranian Red Crescent Society in its efforts to access humanitarian supplies, including medicines needed by patients in Iran at a time of sanctions.

Army in Possession of World's Top Missile, **Radar Systems**

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian commander says the country's Army is in possession of the world's top radar and missile systems, turning into a thorn in the eyes of the enemies.

"The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran have been increasing their deterrence power against the enemies," Commander of the Iranian Army's Air Defense Force Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi-Fard said on Tuesday.

He said that Iranian scientists and technicians have succeeded in manufacturing various defensive and military equipment.

The Armed Forces are proceeding with such a rapid move in the development of their might and deterrent power, he added.

Based on religious teachings, it is necessary to improve the country's military might in order to be used in urgent occasions, Sabahi-Fard said.

The commander added that the enemies have always cast a covetous eye on Iran given its special geographical, political and strategic position.



Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made great headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

Iran maintains that its military power poses no threat to the regional countries, saying that the Islamic Republic's defense doctrine is entirely based on deterrence.

Back in April, the Islamic Republic of Iran Army units -- the Ground Force, the Navy, the Air Force, and the Air Defense -- unveiled a broad range of advanced gear such as homegrown missiles, tanks, armored vehicles, unmanned aerial vehicles, radar systems and air defense missile systems in a military parade marking the National Army Day.

Investment in Iranian Ports TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Roads and Urban

Foreign Countries Seek

Development said there have been several offers from foreign companies and neighboring countries to invest in the country's ports because Iran enjoys promising

The 14th International Conference on Coasts, Ports and Marine Structures (ICOPMAS 2022) kicked off on May 9, at IRIB International Conference Center, Tehran.

On the sidelines of the event, and in response to Iran Press, Mehrdad Bazrpash emphasized: Being located at the perfect geographical point, Iran's ports, besides the completion of the north-south and east-west corridors and the road section, play a significant role in transporting goods from south to north of the country, CI countries, Russia, and even European countries.

He underlined: If the coastal cities of the country are developed and the population increases there, Iran will enjoy great achievements in the maritime economy.

He said that geographical states have given special importance to Iran, so the neighboring, Persian littoral and Caspian Sea states are eager to invest in Iranian ports and use Iran's maritime capacities.

Larijiani to Run for Parliamentary

Vote Slated for March 2024

TEHRAN (IFP) - Former Iranian parliament speaker

Ali Larijani is reportedly preparing to run for the next

legislative elections and plans to release a list of allies

Tasnim News Agency quoted some people "close to Larijani" as confirming the report. Tasnim did not

Larijani holds a record in serving as parliament

speaker. He held the post for three terms, that is, 12

He also had other posts such as the president of Iran's

national TV and Radio, IRIB, the minister of Islamic

Guidance and the secretary of Iran's Supreme National

Larijani also ran for president in 2021 but he was

Tasnim earlier reported that former president Hassan

Rouhani also plans to take part in electoral activities in

The parliamentary elections will be held along with the Assembly of Experts vote on March 1, 2024.

Meanwhile Larijani has reportedly denied Tasnim

Foreign Firms Renege on Promises

To Deliver Thalassemia Drugs

TEHRAN (MNA) - Prominent foreign companies that

produce medicines for thalassemia do not fully hold to

their promises to deliver the medicine, the chairman of

the Food and Drug Administration of The Islamic

The head of the Food and Drug Administration of The

Islamic Republic of Iran (FDA), Heidar Mohammadi made

the remarks on the occasion of World Thalassemia Day, noting

that the foreign firms either leave Iran's requests unanswered

and do not send the requested medicines, or deliver a limited

While pharmaceutical corporations such as Novartis

and Baxter declare that they do not impose sanctions in

the area of medicines on Iran, their actions do not

The companies claim that they do not sanction the Islamic Republic, he said, adding that they do not

Not sending chemotherapy drugs comes as Iran

amount of medicines after several months of delay.

deliver [the desirable amount of] medicine.

desperately needs the medicine, he further noted.

disqualified by the Council of Guardians.

claim over his plan to run for the parliament.

for the vote.

name the sources though.

years, from 2008 to 2020.

coordination with Larijani.

Republic of Iran (FDA) said.

Security Council.

Iran Condemns Gaza Carnage

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Ministry has strongly condemned Israel's latest terrorist aerial attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip that left dozens killed and injured.

In the early hours of Tuesday, Israel launched a number of airstrikes on several areas across Gaza, leaving 13 people killed, including three high-profile commanders of al-Quds Brigades, the military wing of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement, as well as their wives and children. Twenty people were also injured in the attacks.

Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said the Israeli action 'is a sign of the weakness of the aggressor regime against the heroic acts of resistance of the Palestinian youth in the West Bank and al-Quds," adding the airstrikes are aimed at "diverting public opinion" from the internal crisis in Israel.

Mass protests have gripped the apartheid regime since prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu announced his proposed "judicial reforms" in January.

The struggle over the plans illustrates the deep divide in Israeli society between supporters of the incumbent right-wing administration, who says the judicial changes are necessary, and the growing number of people opposed to Netanyahu's plan, who argue that the moves will help Netanyahu bypass some rules as he faces an ongoing trial for corruption.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Kanaani noted that silence and inaction of international organizations and Western countries towards Israel's "inhumane acts", which have been intensified against the Palestinian people in recent months, have emboldened the Tel Aviv regime to continue its crimes.

He called for immediate, effective, deterrent and coordinated action by Muslim countries to stop the "killing and crime machine" of the Zionist regime. "That will be recorded in history as a shameful

precedent by the false advocates of human rights." In his statement, Kanaani expressed his condolences to the bereaved families and hoped for a quick recovery for the injured.

Iran, Egypt Exploring Possibility of Meeting Between Raisi and Sisi

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iran and Egypt have been holding talks in Iraq's capital Baghdad since March to discuss normalising relations between the two regional powerhouses, Egyptian and Iraqi officials told The National. They added that Tehran and Cairo are also exploring the possibility of a meeting between Iranian and Egyptian Presidents Ebrahim Raisi and Abdel Fattah El Sisi.

The latest round of discussions began at the weekend, Egyptian officials said, although it is not clear how much

The talks have also touched on reducing tension in places where Iran wields significant influence, such as Yemen, Lebanon and Syria, by supporting allied governments or armed groups, according to the officials, who spoke on condition of anonymity because the negotiations have not been made public.

The two sides are also exploring the possibility of a meeting between Raisi and El Sisi.

The talks in Baghdad appear to be part of a continuing regional realignment in which Saudi Arabia and Iran agreed to restore diplomatic relations severed in 2016.

An Iraqi diplomat told The National that two rounds of low-level talks between Egyptian and Iranian officials were held in Baghdad in March and April this year.

"Both sides have welcomed Iraq's efforts to mediate," the diplomat continued, adding, "Both sides are putting out feelers and they are willing to move forward. There is no headway until now." The Iranian Foreign Ministry has announced that Tehran welcomes any positive development or progress that

would strengthen the relations between Iran and Egypt.

Iran and Egypt cut diplomatic ties in 1980 after Cairo admitted the former Shah of Iran and recognized Israel.

UAE Wants to Become Iran's Top Trade Partner in Region

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of the Federation of Chambers of Commerce and Industry of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) said his country is seeking to become Iran's top trading partner in the region, the ICCIMA portal reported.

Abdullah Mohamed Al Mazrouei, who visited Iran at the head of a business

(ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei in Tehran on Tuesday

During the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on the common fields of cooperation, economic relations, and how to expand commercial relations business relations."



economic relations, the UAE has always maintained its good position in relation to Iran and the mentioned issues have not been able to have a deep impact on our

between the private sectors of Iran and the UAE. Stating that the UAE is

one of the most important neighboring countries of Iran with a deep historical relationship, Shafei said: "The UAE is Iran's second trading partner in the world after China, and the exchanges has reached

Afghan Children Receive Same Education as Iranian Students

KERMAN (IRNA) - The United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Deputy Representative Inna Gladkova says that all Afghan children enjoy the opportunity to have access to educational facilities equal to what Iranian students receive Gladkova made the remarks on Tuesday during a visit along with Swiss, French and

Chinese People Fond of Iranian Films

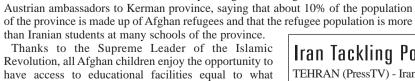
TEHRAN (IRNA) - Chinese Ambassador to Iran Chang Hua has hailed the unique characteristics of movies produced in Iran, saying that Chinese people are interested in the Iranian films.

Chang Hua said that he had watched 40 Iranian movies so far. adding that the Iranian movies narrate people's daily routine and are based on reality.

They portray social realities and family relations very well, Chang said.

The ambassador made the remarks on the sidelines of China 3rd Film Week in Tehran

The event is underway until May 10 with contribution from Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation, Iran Organization of Cinema and Audiovisual Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Culture and Communication Organization and the Embassy of China in Tehran.



Iranian students receive, she added. The UNHCR official explained the services provided by Iran

to refugees, appreciated the officials of the Islamic Republic. She also considered her presence in Kerman as a good opportunity to witness the projects carried out for the refugees as well as their challenges, noting that the UNHCR is well aware of the great efforts made by the Iranian government to serve a large population of refugees residing in Kerman.

For us at the international level, Iran's strategy of integrating a large refugee population into its national policies is of great importance, she underlined.

Iran Tackling Poverty, Social issues in City Districts

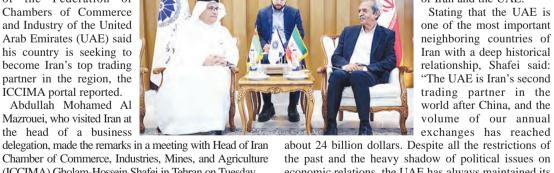
match their words, he criticized.

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has a nationwide program to tackle poverty and other social

and health issues in the so-called left-behind districts of major cities in the country. Head of Iran's Headquarters for Empowering City Districts Ali Aghamohammadi said on Monday that some 2,020 districts in various Iranian cities had been identified as part of a program to provide social and economic help to people in poorer neighborhoods.

Aghamohammadi, who serves as head of the economic group at the office of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, said major Iranian government bodies have been assigned with the responsibility to empower residents in left-behind boroughs. He said Iran's SETAD, a powerful economic organization with charity arms, has been delivering aid to residents in 440 city districts across Iran.

The official added that Iran Red Crescent Society and the Imam Khomeini Relief Foundation have also been operating in hundreds of other boroughs to provide people with financial and social assistance.

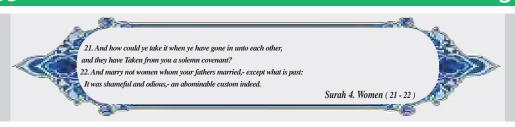


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PRAYER TIME

Noon (Zohr) 12:00
Evening (Maghreb) 19:17
Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr) 03:26

Tomorrow's Sunrise



Turkish Trade Delegation At ICC Explores Ways To Boost Trade

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – A trade delegation from Turkey comprised of activists in different economic fields visited Iran Chamber of Cooperative (ICC) in line with boosting trade exchanges and getting acquainted with capacities and capabilities of economic activists of cooperative section in Iran.

Commercial attache of Embassy of Turkey in this meeting expressed his satisfaction over his presence at the ICC and with emphasizing Iran's high capacities said that due to importance of trade with Iran, he is in Tehran and he offers consultations to Iranian and Turkish companies for broadening trade exchanges and investments.

He added that despite sanctions against Iran, this country has high capacities and it can lead to opportunities for increasing trade exchanges. He then pointed to Turkey's efforts to be a member of Europe's Custom Union and noted that cooperation with Iranian companies create good opportunities.

He reiterated that Turkey is ready to cooperate and give consultations in line with broadening trade with Iran and doors of Turkey are open to Iranian companies.

The Turkish delegation attending the ICC meeting was comprised of representatives of different economic fields of Turkey.

In the meeting, capabilities of the cooperative sector in different fields were presented



and the most important challenges ahead of economic activists were discussed.

Manager of the international affairs of the ICC Mr. Banaee Far in the meeting pointed to the existence of specialized commissions at the ICC, and said that there are 13 specialized commissions in all economic sectors which are considered as the think-tanks of the chamber.

He went on to say that the amount of import from Turkey is around \$3.3b which needs to be reconsidered. He then pointed to the capacities of MUSIAD (Independent Industrialists and Businessmen's Association) in different countries and stipulated that the capabilities and capacities of MUSIADs can be a good solution for resolving some challenges.

In the meeting some issues like defining joint projects, creating a joint desk between ICC and MUSIAD of Turkey, knowing legal and customs issues, fishery, money transfer and forex exchanges were of the topics which were discussed in this meeting

Iran, Oman
Explore
New Trade
Partnerships in
Business Forum

TEHRAN (MNA) - A Joint Iran-Oman Business Forum was held at the place of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on Monday in a bid to boost trade exchange between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Sultanate of Oman.

As the ICCIMA portal

TEHRAN (MNA) - A Joint Iran-Oman Business Forum was held at the place of the Iran Chamber of Commerce,

Several B2B meetings were held during the forum between Omani and Iranian businesspeople. The meetings targeted striking business and investment deals. As many as 250 Iranian firms took part in the event.

The forum was attended by members of the Joint Oman-Iran Business Council and a delegation of Omani private sector that is taking part at Iran Expo 2023.

Prior to the forum, ICCIMA Head Gholam-Hossein Shafeie met with his Omani counterpart to discuss avenues of mutual cooperation between the two countries' private sectors.

In this meeting, while emphasizing the need to remove trade obstacles, Shafeie said: "Attention should be paid to multilateral cooperation and joint investments so that the markets of the two countries can take advantage of each other's' business opportunities in any situation."

Resolving Problems Through Interactions Between Industry and Universities IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of MAPNA Group in the opening session of the 31st International Mechanical Engineering of Iran once again emphasized resolving the problems in the country through cooperation



between the industry and universities and academics.

Addressing the annual conference, Abbas Aliabadi expressed his satisfaction over holding mechanical

expressed his satisfaction over holding mechanical engineering conferences and termed it a good opportunity for presenting suitable solutions for the problems in the country.

He said that one of the biggest problems of the country which worsens every day is the issue of energy and its economy. He then presented some statistics and figures on this field and said that in a country like Germany each kilowatt of electricity is for 35 cents and each cubic meter of gasoline is for 2 euros while these figures in our country are totally different.

Aliabadi then pointed to some solutions in this field and said that for years this issue is criticized and there are some solutions but they are not studied.

Then Head of the Iranian Society of Mechanical Engineers emphasized the deterioration of condition in the field of water in the country and excessive and non-scientific consumption of water in the field of agriculture and the like fields and criticized them and called on engineers and elites to present some efficient solutions and reiterated that mechanical engineers should offer practical solutions for implementing them in this field. He added that the conferences should turn into scientific and practical events for studying problems in the country.

Amin Aghaei, a multi-media Iranian artist:

Fear of new experiences kills the artist's dynamism

Amin Aghaei is a celebrated multi-media Iranian artist who has studied Painting at Tehran University of Art. He has held multiple exhibitions, judged and earned prestigious international awards and has been working at his atelier in Tehran. Read our interview with him below.

Azadeh Askarifar: You seem to have experienced various fields of art. Is that right?

Amin Aghaei: I believe art is about developing ideas which requires relevant conditions and ground work. Imagine a concept in need of being conveyed rather rapidly to common people. Painting is probably not the best choice. In this case cartoon or graffiti might be more efficient. So it is vital to choose the suitable medium for each idea and this is why I have tried various media.

It appears that some of your collections are weakly related to each other.

+ It may seem so at the first look. When talking about ideas, we need to clear out which one comes first, the idea itself or the artist's outlook. I usually actualize my ideas in different media but while painting, I prioritize my own attitudes. coherence is a relative concept. Imagine you come up with an idea that is not necessarily coherent with your previous ideas and you simply dismiss it because of that. But this very idea might have been an innovation. This is a question that will be answeredduring time and an artist shouldn't bother himself with such matters.

- Then an artist should work on any idea they come up with?

+ It depends. Before anything, they need to de-

velop a sense of assessment. But if the artist engageshimself with matters irrelevant to art, they would be a kind of a slave to the outer world. I believe those artists who don't have a new thing to say, are just afraid of new things. They insist on a specific form and they are also praised and celebrated by the society. This slowly kills the artist's dynamism and liveliness because they are afraid to make a change and risk their fame or wealth. I say "no inquisitiveness, no creativeness".

— As I see it, social contents are depicted in your works, for example in the exhibitions entitled Labe Karun (lit. At the Karun's Bank, [2013]) and Az PoshteShekafe Dar be To Negah Mikonam (lit. I Am Looking at You Through the Crack of the Door, [2015])but not in your more recent works. How do you explain that?

+ Actually you are overlooking my other works. Each artwork has a spine which could be social, artistic, etc. and that is the artist's main concern. As time went by, I learned to choose the right medium for each idea. As a result, in recent years, conceptualism has strengthened in media other than painting. In addition, painting might have a lower voice but it's definitely much more persistent. I'd prefer my work to glow longer than a matchstick which is more popular in our hasty modern society. And I'm happy with my choice. However, I keep my social activity going in media such as cartoon, video art, installation, etc.

- How about sculpture?

+ For me sculpture began with a social matter. Iran has always been struggling with drought. When I read the news that water buffalo herders are mov-



ing to Iraq because of the Karun river dehydration, I came up with an idea of making river rocks into water buffalos by attaching two horns. I was going to present an installation of these stone-made buffalos and a symbolic river in Aun gallery. Then the gallery was closed. But I was really amused by the improvization and later I changed the buffalos into bronze. I mean it began with a social subject but it went on in a formalistic, primal way and it was the launch of a stone sculpture collection.

— Your first individual painting exhibition in Tehran, Labe Karun (At the Karun's Bank, [2013]) was very well received. It influenced many artists and non-artists. You didn't repeat the theme in your next exhibitions. Why did you change direction?

+ People change. I figured if I gave myself some time and space I would achieve something bigger. And I did it. I refuseto be forced to repeat the similar pattern again and again as expected by the audience. Obsession kills creativeness. An artist might find his styleand stick to it, which is great but it doesn't happen frequently. In my case, things gained significance in painting that used to seem trivial to me. But gradually I found the explanation behind it. For example, the reason behind so much empty space in both my early collections isthatnow I am more interested in the paint, its quality and identity rather than the message. Therefore, I choose other media for idea-centered works but in painting I wish to be engaged with painting itself.

- So are you considered a multi-media artist?

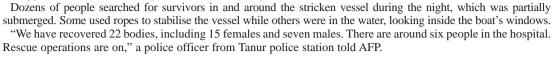
+ You can call me whatever you like. What really matters to me is the joy of creating. And I prefer being open to various media and technologies rather than standing against them. Conclusively, I owe all my thoughts and ideas to the ability in designing and drawing which itself is a powerful tool for thinking in different topics.

At Least 22 Dead After **India Boat Capsizes**

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - At least 22 people died when a double-decker tourist boat capsized in India's southern state of Kerala, officials said.

The incident happened late Sunday in Tanur, a coastal town in Kerala's

Malappuram district. Rescue operations were ongoing.





Uzbek President Calls Snap Poll Under New Constitution

TASHKENT (Dispatches) - Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev said on Monday he was calling a snap presidential election on July 9 to give himself a new mandate to help deal with "sharp and complex processes'

going on in the world.

Paris Police Under Fire



Uzbek voters approved a package of constitutional amendments in a referendum on April 30 that allows Mirziyoyev to run for two more terms, and extends each term to seven years from five. There are no big opposition figures in the Central Asian country of 35 million who could compete with Mirziyoyev, praised both at home and abroad for liberalising the former Soviet republic and opening up its economy to foreign trade and investment.

Russia Attacks Ukraine With Huge Drone Swarm



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia launched its biggest swarm of drones for months against Ukraine on Monday, the eve of Russia's May 9 holiday celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany.

Ukraine commemorated the occasion, known as Victory Day, on Monday in a symbolic break with Moscow. President Volodymyr Zelenskiy compared the Ukrainian troops currently fighting Russia with those who had battled the Nazis. Kyiv's mayor said Russia had fired 60 Iranian-made kamikaze drones at Ukrainian targets, including 36 at the capital,

all of which had been shot down. Debris hit apartments and other buildings, injuring at least five people in the city. A food warehouse was set ablaze by a missile in the Black Sea city of Odesa, where officials reported

It was the biggest drone swarm yet in a renewed Russian air campaign unleashed 10 days ago after a lull since early March. Kyiv said Moscow was also making a final push to try to capture the ruined eastern city of Bakhmut to deliver President Vladimir Putin what would be his only prize for a costly Russian winter offensive, in time for Victory Day. Moscow is preparing for Tuesday's Victory Day parade, the most important day in the calendar for Russia under Putin, who evokes the 1945 Soviet triumph over Nazi Germany in trying to rally Russians behind his invasion of Ukraine.

In a new break with Russia, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy marked Victory Day on Monday rather than Tuesday, announcing that decree a change in the date of the holiday to match the practice of Western allies. "Recalling the heroism of millions of Ukrainians in that war against Nazism, we see the same heroism in the actions of our soldiers today," said Zelenskiy, who addressed the nation from a hilltop overlooking Kyiv.

"Just as evil rushed into our towns and villages then, so it does now. As it killed our people then, so it does now," he said. "And all the old evil that modern Russia is bringing back will be defeated, just as Nazism was defeated."

The German army's surrender in 1945 took effect late at night on May 8 in Berlin, when it was already May 9 in Moscow, the date that became the Soviet holiday.

Russia foreign ministry spokeswoman Maria Zakharova said that by changing the date, Zelenskiy had betrayed the memory of Ukrainians who fought the Nazis.

"What is worse than an enemy? A traitor. That is Zelenskiy, the embodiment of Judas in the 21st century,

Ukraine, as part of the then-Soviet Union, suffered higher per capita casualties than Russia in World War Two and was one of the heartlands of European Jewry wiped out in the Holocaust.

On the day of Russia's parade, Zelenskiy will underscore Ukraine's ambition to join the West by receiving European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen, whose visit to the war zone the EU took the unusual step of announcing in advance.

Brussels marks May 9 as "Europe Day", honouring a French declaration in 1950 that led to the founding of the body that became the EU.

Russia has cancelled or curtailed some of the huge military parades that normally accompany Victory Day. Western countries say this is in part out of security concerns, in part for fear of publicising Russia's heavy casualties in Ukraine, and in part because Moscow has lost so much military hardware in its largely fruitless, grinding winter offensive.



interior minister faced questions and criticism Monday over why a march of around 600 neo-Nazis through the streets of the capital was authorized at the weekend. The rally Saturday by far-right extremists dressed in black came as authorities clamp down on protesters banging

saucepans against the government, with new restrictions put in place Monday to shield President Emmanuel

The protest was authorised by city authorities, and police could be seen patrolling nearby.

Socialist Party senator David Assouline called on Interior Minister Gerald Darmanin to "explain yourself".

"It's unacceptable to have allowed 500 neo-Nazis and fascists to parade in the heart of Paris. Their organizations, the display

Taiwan in Talks for \$500m Weapons Package From U.S.

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - Taiwan is expecting a fast-tracked \$500 million weapons package from Washington this year to make up for delays in arms procurements, the island's defense minister said.

The self-ruled, democratic island lives under constant threat of an invasion by China, which claims Taiwan as part of its territory to be seized one day -- by force if necessary

With Beijing increasing its sabre-rattling towards the island, Taiwan's key ally the United States in September approved the Taiwan Policy Act -- which would see new legislation provide billions in military aid to Taipei.

But there have been reported delays in delivering weapons, and Taiwan's Defence Minister Chiu Kuo-cheng on Monday confirmed that Washington has been discussing a separate -- and fast-tracked -- weapons package with Taipei.

"The use of the \$500 million package is aimed at prioritising supplying us with spot goods (available for immediate delivery) over any delay or late delivery in our arms procurement," Chiu told lawmakers when questioned in parliament about the "military aid" package.

"It should be implemented this year," he said, adding that the \$500 million backage "is not counted into (previous) arms sales" and that Taiwan would be sking first for its "priorities"

However, he did not elaborate on what type of equipment would be prioritised n the \$500 million weapons package, saying only that the details would be hrashed out by both sides soon.

"For the delayed arms sales, they will make up by providing some of their spot goods or simulators or training equipment," he said. "So when the arms are delivered in the future, we can start using them right away.'

The United States has for decades sold weapons to Taiwan.

But the decision in September goes a step further -- providing US security assistance to the tune of \$4.5 billion over four years, a move that has infuriated Beijing.

of their ideology, slogans, insignias are as much an insult to the dead as an incitement to racial hatred." he wrote on Twitter.

France marked its traditional May 8 public holiday on Monday to commemorate the victory of Allied forces over Nazi Germany in 1945 and the lives lost in the fight against fascism.

Ian Brossat, a spokesman for the Communist party, joked that "saucepans are clearly more dangerous than jackboots".

Left-wing charity Attac also wrote that the far right "demonstrates their hatred with complete impunity in the centre of Paris while the state is seeking to outlaw saucepan-banging."

Well-known intellectual Jacques Attali called the rally "intolerable."

The Paris police department reacted on Monday by explaining that it did not have the legal powers to prevent a demonstration unless there was a "proven risk to public order".

"Given that this demonstration had not caused any problems or public order issues during previous years, the Paris prefect was not in a position to take steps to ban it," it said in a statement.

Airstrikes Rock Sudan as Truce Talks Yield No Breakthrough

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Air strikes again shook Sudan's capital Mondaywhile the latest truce talks in Jeddah have yielded no progress, with a Saudi diplomat saying both sides consider themselves "capable of winning the battle".

Sudan was thrown into deadly chaos when fighting broke out on April 15 between the forces of army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan and his deputy turned rival Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, who heads the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

The battles have since killed hundreds, wounded thousands and left millions barricaded inside their homes amid dire shortages of water, food and basic supplies.

The feuding generals have sent representatives to Saudi Arabia for talks on establishing a humanitarian truce in an effort also backed by the United States, but to no avail so far. By Monday, the talks had yielded "no major progress", a

Saudi diplomat told AFP, speaking on condition of anonymity. "A permanent ceasefire isn't on the table... Every side believes it is capable of winning the battle," the diplomat added. In Khartoum, a city of five million, terrified residents reported more combat, now in its fourth week, as they hid out in their homes amid power outages and sweltering heat.

A southern Khartoum resident told AFP the family could hear "the sound of airstrikes which appeared to come from near a market in central Khartoum".

The fighting has sparked a mass exodus of foreigners and of Sudanese, in both air and sea evacuations and arduous overland journeys to Egypt, Chad, South Sudan and other neighbouring countries.

"It's very dangerous everywhere," said Rawaa Hamad, who escaped from Port Sudan on an evacuation flight to Qatar on Monday carrying 71 people.

In Sudan, she said, there is "no safety now, unfortunately", with its people enduring "a lack of everything -- a lack of water, lack of fuel, lack of medicine, lack of even hospitals and doctors".

The battles have killed more than 750 people and injured over 5,000, according to a count by the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

The United Nations has warned of a widening humanitarian crisis after fighting has already displaced 335,000 people and created 117,000 refugees. The UN top humanitarian official, Martin Griffiths, has travelled to the Saudi coastal city of Jeddah, the site of what Washington and Riyadh have labelled "pre-negotiation talks".

A UN official said on Monday that Griffiths had "asked to join the negotiations" between the warring sides, but that his request had not been approved so far. Saudi Arabia is pushing for "a timetable for expanded negotiations to reach a permanent cessation of hostilities", its foreign ministry said.



Chile's Far-Right Party Wins Most Seats On Constitutional Rewrite Committee

SANTIAGO (Dispatches) -Chile's far-right Republican Party finished in first place in a nationwide vote to choose the 50 members of a committee

that will draft a replacement to the country's dictatorship-era constitution, according to an official count.

The Servel election authority reported that with almost all ballots counted, the Republican Party had won 35 percent of the corresponding to 22 seats on the constitutional rewrite committee.

Traditional right-wing parties won a further 21 percent, giving conservatives an additional 11 seats, while the left-wing coalition supported by President Gabriel Boric finished with 29 percent, or 11 committee members.

It is the second time that voters in the South American country have been called to take part in the rewriting of the 1980 constitution, adopted under the Augusto Pinochet dictatorship.

In September, a previous text produced by a constitutional assembly made up mostly of political independents was rejected by 62 percent of voters. The results by the far-right Republican Party, which has always opposed the constitutional rewrite process, was "much more than any forecast had expected," Claudia Heiss, head of the Political Science program at the University of Chile, told AFP.

There were 350 people vying to be elected to the 50-member constitutional committee. "The ideas of common sense have triumphed," said Republican Party leader Jose Antonio Kast, who founded the party in 2019 and lost to Boric

in the December 2021 presidential runoff. Kast has expressed kinship with other populist conservative leaders such as Brazil's Jair Bolsonaro, Donald Trump in the United States and Spain's far-right Vox party.

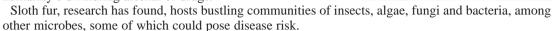
With 22 committee members, the Republican Party "does not need to negotiate with anyone, they can write the Constitution they want" and "have the power to veto any modification". Heiss said.

The new committee will be given a preliminary text, drawn up by experts, that includes 12 essential principles that cannot be modified.

The committee must then come up with a new constitution that will be put to a public vote in December. In a speech after the results were announced on Sunday. leftist Boric called for members of the committee to act "with wisdom and temperance" and to avoid the uncompromising positions that led to failure in the first rewrite attempt — then led by a leftist coalition.

Costa Rican Sloth Antibiotics Offer Hope for Human Medicine

CAHUITA (Dispatches) - The fur of Costa Rican sloths appears to harbor antibiotic-producing bacteria that scientists hope may hold a solution to the growing problem of "superbugs" resistant to humanity's dwindling arsenal of drugs.



Yet, experts say, the famously slow-moving mammals appear to be surprisingly infection-proof.

"If you look at the sloth's fur, you see movement: You see moths, you see different types of insects... a very extensive habitat," Max Chavarria, a researcher at the University of Costa Rica, told AFP.

"Obviously when there is co-existence of many types of organisms, there must also be systems that control them," he said.

Chavarria and a team took fur samples from Costa Rican two- and three-toed sloths to examine what that control system could be.

They found the possible existence of antibiotic-producing bacteria that "makes it possible to control the proliferation of potentially pathogenic bacteria... or inhibit other competitors" such as fungi, according to a study published in the journal Environmental Microbiology. The sloth is a national symbol in laid back Costa Rica, and a major tourist attraction for the Central American country.

Both the two-toed (Choloepus Hoffmanni) and three-toed (Bradypus variegatus) sloth species have seen their populations decline, according to the International Union for the Conservation of Nature's Red List of Threatened Species.

They live in the canopies of trees in the jungle on the Caribbean coast, where the climate is hot and humid. American Judy Avey runs a sanctuary in the balmy jungle to care for sloths injured after coming into contact with humans or other animals.

She treats and rehabilitates the creatures with a view to releasing them back into the wild.

"We've never received a sloth that has been sick, that has a disease or has an illness," she told AFP. "We've received sloths that had been burned by power lines and their entire arm is just destroyed... and there's no infection.

"I think maybe in the 30 years (we've been open), we've seen five animals that have come in with an infected injury. So that tells us there's something going on in their... bodily ecosystem."

Avey, who established the sanctuary with her late Costa Rican husband, Luis Arroyo, had never even heard of a sloth back home in Alaska.

Since receiving her first sloth, whom she named "Buttercup," in 1992, she has cared for around 1,000 animals. Researcher Chavarria took fur samples taken from sloths at the sanctuary to examine in his laboratory. He began his research in 2020, and has already pinpointed 20 "candidate" microorganisms waiting to be named. But he said there is a long road ahead in determining whether the sloth compounds could be useful to humans. "Before thinking about an application in human health, it's important to first understand... what type of molecules are involved," said Chavarria.

An example of this is penicillin, discovered in 1928 by British scientist Alexander Fleming, who discovered that a fungal contamination of a laboratory culture appeared to kill a disease-causing bacteria. His discovery of the world's first bacteria-killer, or antibiotic, earned him the 1945 Nobel Prize in medicine. However, microbial resistance to antibiotics has been a growing problem, meaning some medicines no longer work to fight the infections they were designed to treat.

Google to Abolish Passwords for "Passkeys"

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Good news for all the password-haters out there: Google has taken a big step towards making them an afterthought by adding "passkeys" as a more straightforward and secure way to log into its services.

Here's what you need to know:

What are passkeys?

Passkeys offer a safer alternative to passwords and texted confirmation codes. Users will not ever see them directly; instead, an online service such as Gmail will use them to communicate directly with a trusted device such as your phone or computer to log you in.

All you will have to do is verify your identity on the device using a PIN unlock code, biometrics such as a fingerprint or face scan, or a more sophisticated physical security dongle.

Google designed its passkeys to work with a variety of devices so you can use them on iPhones, Macs and Windows computers as well as Google's Android-based phones.

Why are passkeys necessary?

Thanks to clever hackers and human fallibility, passwords are just too easy to steal or defeat. And making them more complex just opens the door to users defeating themselves.

For starters, many people choose passwords they can remember – and easy-to-recall passwords are also easy to hack.

For years, analysis of hacked password caches found the most common one in use was "password123". A more recent study by the password manager NordPass found it is now just "password". This isn't fooling anyone.

Passwords are also frequently compromised in security breaches. Stronger passwords are more secure, but only if you choose ones that are unique, complex and non-obvious. And once you've settled on "erVex411\$%" as your password, good luck remembering it.

In short, passwords put security and ease of use directly at odds. Software-based password managers, which can create and store complex passwords for you, are valuable tools that can improve security. But even password managers have a master password you need to protect, and that plunges you back into the swamp. In addition to sidestepping all those problems, passkeys have one additional advantage over passwords. They're specific to particular websites, so scammer sites cannot steal a passkey from a dating site and use it to raid your bank account.

How to start using passkeys?

The first step is to enable them for your Google account. On any trusted phone or computer, open the browser and sign into your Google account. Then visit the page g.co/passkeys and click the option to "start using passkeys". Voila! The passkey feature is now activated for that account.

If you're on an Apple device, you'll first be prompted to set up the Keychain app if you're not already using it; it securely stores passwords and now passkeys as well.

The next step is to create the actual passkeys that will connect your trusted device. If you're using an Android phone that's already logged into your Google account, you're most of the way there; Android phones are automatically ready to use passkeys, though you still have to enable the function first.

Prayer for Rain, Water Rations: Catalonia Struggles With Drought

MADRID (Dispatches) - Father Antonio Rosario will call on the Lord next month to open the heavens and bring some desperately needed rain to his parish.

The priest is to lead a special procession with an effigy of the Holy Trinity, reviving a tradition in L'Espluga de Francolí dating from the 18th century. "I have already said prayers at Mass to ask for rain but this will be

"I have already said prayers at Mass to ask for rain but this will be a ceremony, in which we will take an [effigy] of the Holy Trinity from a hermitage outside the town and call for rain. Our need is so great," Father Rosario told Al Jazeera.

Spaniards have a saying that during droughts, the trees chase after the dogs. However, in this town, where no rain has fallen for more than a year, it is the people who are desperate for any sign of drops. Father Antonio Rosario poses in the Old Church of Saint Michael

Like hundreds of towns across Spain, this municipality in the hills of Catalonia has had restrictions placed on the water supply.

next to a copy of the Holy Trinity.

Authorities turn the tap off between 10pm and 7am (20:00 to 05:00 GMT), making it impossible to take a shower, clean, wash plates or put on the washing machine. Spaniards eat late, so this affects many.

During the day, villagers collect water in bottles or buckets to have enough for daily essentials.

"I must get up to go to work at 5am so I cannot have a shower before leaving home. Luckily, they have showers at the factory," said Manuel Navas, who works in a paper mill.

Juanita Pérez stores water during the day so she can clean the house or flush the toilet at night. "At first, this annoyed me. Now, you get used to it. People didn't always have running water in their houses. We must adapt to our situation," she told Al Jazeera.

Up to 10 water trucks arrive every day, each carrying between 12,000 to 29,000 litres (3,170-7,660 gallons), to bring relief to a town where the underground aquifers have run dry.

Albert Einstein visited the town 100 years ago during a tour of Spain. Now, even a genius might struggle to solve Spain's climate problem.

Ironically, L'Espluga de Francolí, about 120km (75 miles) south of Barcelona, was once famous for its water. Tourists would come here to relax in its spas because it was believed the water contained magnesium and was of medicinal value. Not any more.

What is happening in this parched Catalan town is symbolic of the way Spain is slowly drying up.

Rainfall in the Iberian Peninsula has fallen about 25 percent since October last year, said Richard Torrijo, a spokesperson for AEMET, the Spanish national weather service.

This came after 2021 was one of the driest on record.

The sequía – drought in Spanish – is made worse by the soaring temperatures, which have neared 40C (104F) in the south, making May seem more like the height of summer.



The countryside is like a tinderbox – the first forest fire of the year started in March after an unusually dry winter.

The blaze destroyed more than 30 square kilometers (11.5 square miles) of forest and forced 1,500 residents to abandon their homes near Valencia. Andalusia in the deep south and Catalonia in the north have been worst affected by the drought.

The fields outside L'Espluga de Francolí are yellow instead of green as the crops waste away.

"It is not worth my while harvesting the wheat. It is a crop which depends on rain as does the vines and the olives," Joan Arbos, who owns 40 hectares (99 acres) of farmland.

"We have had two years without proper rain but now it is very worrying. I depend on my farm for 100 percent of my income."

As the water trucks arrived to deliver their precious cargo, Xavier Rossell, who has the unenviable task of managing the water supply for the town council, said: "I feel a sense of impotence. At times, I stay awake at night thinking about it. We cannot generate water."

"We need to change our chip and value water more. The next wars will be fought over this," Rossell added.

Personnes have follow to 40.6 persons of their normal level across

Reserves have fallen to 49.6 percent of their normal level across Spain, according to government data.

But in Sau reservoir, which provides the water for Barcelona, water levels have dropped to 7 percent, the lowest in the country.

Sant Romà de Sau, an 11th-century church which was flooded along with the rest of a village when the reservoir was created in the 1960s, has emerged from the depths.

This has spawned a new "drought tourism", in which people from

reservoir to take selfies next to the building.

Authorities were forced to syphon out the fish to stop them from dying and to preserve water quality.

Barcelona make the 100-km (62-mile) journey to this remote

With no sign of rain clouds, the Catalan regional government this week broadened curbs on water use to 495 towns or villages – almost doubling the number of municipalities under "exceptional measures"

doubling the number of municipalities under "exceptional measures".

Farmers must cut water use to 40 percent of normal use, but this

was reduced to 15 percent for industrial purposes.

Watering public and private areas has been banned and fines will be introduced for towns which waste water.

Back in L'Espluga de Francolí, bar owner Gerard Griño painted a grim picture of the future. "This is a social problem. It is not just about this town, it is the same for all of Spain. People don't blame the politicians, they blame the climate," he told Al Jazeera.

Salty Water May Have Flowed Near Mars' Equator

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crusts, cracks and other geologic features on sand dunes near the Martian equator are leading researchers to believe there may have been water there much more recently than previously thought.

The features, likely caused by the movement of thawed, salty water, turned up in images taken by China's Zhurong rover. A chemical analysis from the rover shows that they may have formed as recently as 400,000 years ago, researchers report April 28 in Science Advances.

The results could help guide future missions to find life on Mars. Atmospheric conditions on Mars 400,000 years ago were similar to what's seen now, suggesting it's possible that there's still liquid, salty water at the planet's low latitudes, says Xiaoguang Qin, a geologist at the Chinese Academy of Sciences in Beijing. The Zhurong rover — China's first Mars rover — landed on the Red Planet in May of 2021 in a region called Utopia Planitia, just north of the Martian equator (SN: 5/19/21). Over nine months, the rover gathered images and

information on the chemical composition of the region's dunes and took measurements of the cracks found along the sandy surfaces.

When Qin and his team first saw the rover images they were surprised. The crust's features appeared to be related to water activity. Wind wouldn't leave those geologic tracks; it would instead erode the crust. Nor would dioxide frost; it wouldn't exist at lower latitudes. Melting pockets of frozen water best explained the features found on the dunes, the team concluded.

Turkey Not to Raise Rates to Near Inflation After Elections

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's central bank will not raise interest rates to above or near the current headline inflation after the upcoming critical elections, Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said, stressing that no one should expect such a scenario.

President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has been saying his government would not reverse the course of its economic policies and would keep favoring lower interest rates if they win the presidential and parliamentary elections slated for May 14.

Officials have asserted that the model, dubbed the "Turkey Economy Model" and unveiled in 2021, prioritizes low-interest rates to boost exports, production, investment and creates new jobs and have promised it would continue after the vote.





Uzbekistan on Course to a Better Future **With Renewed Constitution**

BY: F. TAHERPOOR

On April 30, 2023, people in the Republic of Uzbekistan by casting votes for renewing the constitution opened a new chapter in the country's history since its independence in 1991 and the country by its renewed Constitution seeks a better and bright future.

More than 85.4% of almost 19.5m eligible voters cast their ballots and 90.21% of them voted in favor of new constitution and only some 9.35% were against it. So with this landslide victory and massive turnout in the polls, Uzbekistan has chosen the path for its future and this Central Asian country seeks a new horizon in domestic and international issues.

The referendum was held in full compliance with international standards and norms, as well as the legislation of Uzbekistan. Each voter had the right to free expression of will. Almost 300 Uzbek and international journalists and reporters covered this important political event in Uzbekistan while many international observers and representatives of international organizations were present in different cities of Uzbekistan to monitor the process of the poll.

Two Iranian journalists plus some lawmakers of Iran's parliament were in Tashkent to monitor this biggest political event of Uzbekistan.

The chairman of the Central Election Commission Zainiddin Nizamkhojaev hailed the massive turnout of the people in the poll for referendum and said that everything went well and in peace and only some minor violations were detected in the poll stations.

The constitutional Constitution of the Republic of Uzbekistan Law, which was approved at the referendum on April 30, took effect on May 1, from the day the results of the referendum were announced by the Central Election Commission.

According to the Law, the new Constitution has replaced the December 8, 1992 Constitution of Uzbekistan. The December 8 remains Constitution Day.

If the previous Constitution had 128 articles, the new one has 155. The law states that the provisions of the Constitution from the moment it takes effect "act directly and regardless of the

adoption or existence of relevant laws and other regulations." The country's president Shavkat Mirziyoyev first announced plans for amending the constitution in November 2021, after being reelected for his second and final term under the previous constitution. The draft of a new constitution was published in June 2022 with plans to hold a

referendum at the end of 2022. Uzbekistan is becoming a large country, with more than half of its population consisting of young people and the new constitution is focused on meeting the demands of Uzbek people especially the young generation.

The reforms will become the most important additions and updates to Uzbekistan's Constitution since its initial ratification in 1992.

The new reforms will establish Uzbekistan as a sovereign, democratic,

legal, social and secular state with a republican form of state.

Human rights issue is one of the top reforms in the new constitution as the amendment will guarantee the presumption of innocence for all suspects and legal defendants; enable them to exercise the right to remain silent. The new constitution also prohibits the death penalty in accordance with international human rights principles.

The reforms will support Uzbekistan's growing economy and it guarantees a competitive national economy, and private entrepreneurship and poverty rights will be strengthened.

The new constitution also sees reforms in the legislative, government and judiciary issues and the powers of the parliamentary chambers are being revised and we will see some changes in the Senate as the number of senators will be reduced from 100 to 65.

By the way the reforms will affect the cabinet of ministers who are significantly strengthened by intensifying its responsibilities to the president and Oliv Majlis (parliament).

Accordingly Uzbekistan strives to strengthen and develop friendly relations with the world community, primarily with neighboring states based on cooperation, mutual support, peace and harmony.

Now Uzbek people and even people in the world expect a reformed Uzbekistan as the people with their landslide voting paved the ground of President Mirziyoyev to continue reforms for the better future of the country.

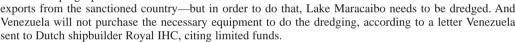
During the referendum one could see enthusiasm among Uzbek people in the poll stations which showed that they seek a real and drastic change and reform in many fields like employment, economy, social welfare, human rights and freedom of expression that the new constitution will

Of course the countdown has begun for the new horizon and prosperity of Uzbekistan in all fields and this is now up to the officials to implement the reforms thoroughly.

Chevron's Venezuelan Oil Export Hopes Hit Snag

NEW YORK (Dispatches) Chevron's plans to increase its crude oil exports from Venezuela have hit a snag, with the sanctioned South American country unable to bear the cost of dredging a key oil export inlet.

Chevron's Venezuela hopes include ramping up crude oil



Chevron paid for a measurement of the amount of sediment accumulated at the bottom of the lake-but Chevron could be forced to pay for the dredging as well if it wants to increase its exports.

Chevron asked Venezuela to dredge the inlet to prevent ships from running aground as it attempts to fulfill its ambitions of exporting between 400,000 bpd and 500,000 bpd of crude oil out of Venezuela. The U.S.-based company's current Venezuelan exports stood at 300,000 bpd, according to Bloomberg, but this is already a significant increase from Chevron's January export

Venezuela's heavy crude oil is prized by Gulf Coast refiners, who, until recently, looked to Russia's heavy grades to replace it. Last December, it was reported that several refiners were attempting to get their hands on the rare Venezuelan crude oil.

The Biden administration eased sanctions on Venezuela to allow Chevron to resume its work in Venezuela when access to Russian heavy crude was shut off by the new sanctions.

In November, the government granted Chevron a six-month license to operate in Venezuela under its joint ventures with PDVSA there. Profits from the sale of Chevron's Venezuelan-derived crude oil will go towards paying down its debt to Chevron and will not bolster state-run PDVSA's profits.

Egypt Faces First Fitch Downgrade in a Decade

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Fitch Ratings, one of the 'Big Three' credit rating agencies, downgraded Egypt's sovereign credit rating - an assessment of a country's ability to meet its foreign currency obligations from B+ to B for the first time in a decade. Fitch's decision, announced on 5 May, reflects the agency's pessimistic outlook on the Egyptian economy.

Credit rating agencies are companies that rate a state's ability to pay back its debts and assess its risk of default - affecting the debtor's chance of receiving loans or investments, which implicitly indicates how much interest they should offer to entice lenders. Fitch's rating downgrade follows those of Standard & Poor (S&P), and Moody's, the other members of the 'Big Three'.

Finance Minister, Mohamed Maait, accused the Big Three of being biased against Egypt during a live interview with TV presenter Amr Adeeb on 6 May. "There is prejudice [against Egypt]," Maait said, adding that a single day could see eight new economic reports on Egypt.

Fitch's rating downgrade, arriving seven months after changing its outlook on Egypt from 'stable' to 'negative', indicates its concerns about the country's growing foreign currency problems and its difficulty in meeting its foreign debt obligations.

"Uncertainty around Egypt's ability to meet its external financing needs has increased, reflecting still constrained prospects for market access and the lack of market

confidence in the Central Bank of Egypt's (CBE) new exchange rate regime, which has held back foreign currency inflows," the report explains.

The lack of significant reforms – Fitch cites the government's delay in fulfilling its privatization program – and several currency devaluations have adversely affected the country's economy.

Egypt has devalued its currency three times since Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, a decline that saw it lose over 70 percent of its value. Consequently, the country's inflation rate has soared to record levels, reaching 32.7 percent in March.

Fitch also notes a "marked deterioration in public debt metrics, which poses a risk to the country's medium-term debt sustainability.' The analysis coincides with the International Monetary Fund's (IMF) outlook, published on 3 May, which predicts Egypt's gross public debt to reach 92.9 percent of its GDP.

Fitch believes Egypt remains at risk by not implementing a flexible exchange rate as urged by the IMF, which could further weaken investors' confidence and delay the IMF program.

The IMF is yet to carry out the first review of an EGP 68 billion (USD 3 billion) financial lifeline for Egypt, which was expected in March. The first review, along with Persian Gulf nations delaying investment pledges, has deepened worries in the country, which continues to grapple with its worsening economic situation.



Yellen sounded the alarm over possible financial market consequences if the debt ceiling is not raised by early June, when she has said the federal government could run short of cash to pay its bills. The negotiations on the issue should not take place "with a gun to the head of the American people", Yellen told the ABC program "This Week."

Biden has asked Congress to raise the debt ceiling with no conditions. The Republican-led House of Representatives last month passed a bill that would raise the government's \$31.4 trillion debt ceiling, but the measure included sweeping spending cuts over the next decade that Biden and his fellow Democrats oppose.

Biden is preparing to meet at the White House with Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy, Republican Senate Minority Leader Mitch McConnell and top congressional Democrats to discuss the issue.

"It's Congress's job to do this. If they fail to do it, we will have an economic and financial catastrophe that will be of our own making," Yellen said.

"And we should not get to the point where we need to consider whether the president can go on issuing debt. This would be a constitutional crisis," Yellen added, alluding the delineation of powers of the executive and legislature under the U.S. Constitution.

Biden has steadfastly said he will not negotiate over the debt ceiling increase, but would discuss budget cuts after a new limit is passed. Congress has often paired debt-ceiling increases with other budget and spending measures.

Washington regularly sets a limit on federal borrowing. Currently, the ceiling is equal to roughly 120% of the country's annual economic output. The debt reached that ceiling in January and the Treasury Department has kept obligations just within the limit, but by July or August, Washington could have to stop borrowing altogether.

Under that scenario, shockwaves could ripple through global financial markets as investors question the value of U.S. bonds, which are seen as among the safest investments and serve as building blocks for the world's financial system.

The House-passed bill would pare spending to 2022 levels and then cap growth at 1% a year, repeal some tax incentives for renewable energy and stiffen work requirements for some anti-poverty programs.

India's Imports From OPEC at All-Time Low



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's oil imports from oil producers cartel OPEC's share fell to an all-time low of 46% in April as purchases of cheaper Russian oil peaked, recently released industry data has shown.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) nations, mainly in the Middle East and Africa, had a 72% share of all crude oil India imported in April 2022.

This share fellto 46% in April 2023, according to energy cargo tracker Vortexa.

OPEC made up for as much as 90% of all crude oil India imported at one point of time but this has been sliding since Russian oil became available at discount in the aftermath of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine in February last year.

OPEC supplied 2.1 million barrels per day out of 4.6 million bpd oil India imported in April. This gave it a 46% share, according to Vortexa.

Russia continued to be the single largest supplier of crude oil, which is converted into petrol and diesel at refineries, for a seventh straight month by supplying more than one-third of all oil India imported.

The imports from Russia are now more than combined purchases from Iraq and Saudi Arabia -India's biggest suppliers in the last decade.

From a market share of less than 1 per cent in India's import basket before the start of the Russia-Ukraine conflict in February 2022, Russia's share of India's imports rose to 1.67 million barrels per day in April, taking a 36% share.

Indian refiners in the past rarely bought Russian oil due to high freight costs but now they are snapping up plentiful Russian cargo available at a discount to other grades as some Western nations rejected it because of Moscow's invasion of Ukraine.

Iraqi Kurdistan to Invest In Iran's Kish Island

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iraqi Kurdistan Region has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Iran's Kish Free Zone Organization to invest in the Island.

The acting director of the Economic and Investment Department of the Kish Free Zone Organization said on Tuesday that the agreement was signed in the fields of trade, commerce, tourism, entertainment, as

well as air and sea transportation to facilitate investment in the island. Alireza Ebrahimpour said the MoU was inked on the sidelines of the IRAN EXPO 2023, adding that new air routes will be launched

between the Kurdistan Region and Kish Island according to the MoU. "Under the MoU, the two sides will also cooperate in the field of industry," he pointed out.



Kazakhstan Could See Utility Costs Surge This Summer

ASTANA (Dispatches) - A senior official in Kazakhstan has warned that household utility rates are set to rise precipitously, by up to 30 percent, this summer as the country confronts the gargantuan challenge of overhauling crucial infrastructure.

Speaking to reporters, National Economy Minister Alibek Kuantyrov said on April 26 that the government will take measures to ensure the cost increases are as painfree as possible, but that they are unavoidable.

"We have to use resources sparingly," Kuantyrov said.

Rate increases for electricity, water and gas will not rise uniformly across the country. The size of the hikes will depend on the current state of infrastructure in any given region and how much it is believed will be needed to upgrade them, the minister said.

Kuantyrov said that the central authorities will keep municipal governments in check to keep them from hiking costs in unsustainable ways.

"For example, Ekibastuz [a city in northern Kazakhstan] announced a 108 percent increase in tariffs. That is something we cannot agree to," he said.

Ekibastuz, a city of over 100,000 people, is emblematic of why the dramatic rethink on tariff policy is happening. The collapse in late November of operations at the city's power plant left most residents without central heating just as nighttime temperatures were sinking to -30 degrees Celsius (-22 Fahrenheit). The Energy Ministry later attributed the incident to deterioration of the system of pipes that delivers steam into radiators in homes throughout the city. Officials noted that a government commission had only a few months before demanded the plant's operators speed up work on repairs. The same plant suffered yet another breakdown in February.

The government has been signaling the arrival of utility hikes for some time now. In December, then-Energy Minister Bolat Akchulakov said during a Cabinet meeting that urgent financial injections needed to be made into the country's utilities infrastructure as things had reached a critical stage.



Most thermal power plants in Kazakhstan are around 50 years old and are only designed to carry on functioning for another decade, he warned.

Akchulakov further lamented that low pay earned by workers in the utilities sectors which average around 220,000 tenge (\$500) – is limiting the size of the potential

It is not just the infrastructure carrying things into people homes that is creaking. Also in December, Olga Bulavkina, a senator, talked about the worsening states of sewer networks in the regions. The situation is posing a grave threat to people's

Speaking to the Inbusiness news site in January, Timur Kosymbayev, the deputy chairman of the Natural Monopolies Regulators at the National Economy Ministry, estimated that electricity, heating, water and sewer infrastructure was across the board at around 60 percent levels of degradation.

Kosymbayev said even tariff hikes will not be enough to cover the costs of repairs and modernization. It is the companies that provide the utilities – they are typically monopolies that need to dig deep into their own cash reserves to underwrite the work.

Europe's Ambitious Hydrogen Plans Face Challenges

LONDON (Dispatches) - Europe is betting on hydrogen to cut the use of fossil fuels and achieve climate neutrality by 2050, but the hydrogen industry faces challenges in making the sector a scalable and cost-effective replacement for natural gas.

The EU's renewables strategy includes the ambition to produce 10 million tons and import 10 million tons of renewable hydrogen in the EU by the end of this decade. The European Commission has outlined a 'hydrogen accelerator' concept to scale up the deployment of green hydrogen, which, the EC says, will contribute to accelerating the energy transition and decarbonizing the EU's energy system. In March, the Commission set out new plans to incentivize and support investment in sustainable hydrogen production through a European Hydrogen Bank (EHB), an initiative aimed at accelerating investment and bridging the investment gap for the EU to reach its ambitious hydrogen targets under the REPowerEU plan.

Last month, the leaders of some of Europe's biggest economies pledged to turn the North Sea into an offshore wind, hydrogen, and carbon capture energy hub.

Armenia Wants to...

FROM PAGE 1

In April, Yerevan hosted the first political consultations in trilateral format between the Foreign Ministries of Armenia, Iran, and India. The meeting discussed new economic, regional, and communication channels, as well as the prospects for deepening trilateral cooperation in various areas.

Last year, Arsen Avagyan, Ambassador Extraordinary and Plenipotentiary of Armenia to Iran, stated that the "North-South" highway would significantly reduce the distance between Iran and Georgia. After the completion of the construction of that highway, it will be possible to deliver cargo from Chabahar, Bandar Abbas, and other southern Iranian ports to the Georgian ports of the Black Sea within 2-3 days, further continuing the route to Europe.

Main Points of Greece's May 21 Ballot

ATHENS (Dispatches) - Greece holds its most unpredictable election in over a decade on May 21.

It is expected to be a close contest between the conservative New Democracy of outgoing Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis and the left-wing Syriza of former premier Alexis Tsipras.

This is what is at stake in the ballot in the eastern Mediterranean country of 10.5 million, which is almost certain to be followed by a second election in around a month's time:

In power since July 2019, New Democracy has not once fallen behind Syriza in the polls and continues to lead by 2.5 to seven points according to different surveys

The ruling party is even seeing a small rebound since February, when the country went into collective shock and massive protests were held over the deaths of 57 people in a train collision that was Greece's worst-ever rail disaster.

In the polls, New Democracy and Syriza supporters constitute nearly 50 percent of respondents. But the determining factor is the undecided voters, who are measured at over 10 percent.

A total of 36 parties are eligible to participate in the election. Parties need a minimum three percent of the vote to enter the 300-seat parliament.

Four other parties already in parliament alongside New Democracy and Syriza are a safe bet to return - the Pasok-Kinal socialists led by former Euro MP Nikos Androulakis, the KKE communists, the Greek Solution nationalists and MeRA25, headed by left-wing, anti-austerity former finance minister

Coalition dilemma

passed by the Tsipras administration (2015-2019). Its objective is to ensure that as many parties as possible are represented in parliament, with an eye in encouraging coalition governments.

discourse and little experience with coalitions, an agreement between the parties remains a difficult equation, making a second vote all but certain.

Kyriakos Mitsotakis wants to avoid having to form a government with other parties. In his campaign speeches, he has clearly stated his preference for a second ballot, which will be held under a different electoral law passed by his own government.

This law gives a bonus of up to 30 seats to the victor, depending on the final results. The scion of a political dynasty whose father was also prime minister, Mitsotakis has said that in a second ballot, the objective of a "stable and strong right-wing government will be achievable".

Alexis Tsipras, twice elected prime minister in backto-back elections in 2015, wants to "put an end to" political families which dominate political life, cultivating "favouritism" and "corruption". He has not ruled out a coalition with the Pasok-Kinal socialists.

Recovery and inflation

After a ruinous decade of economic crisis between 2010 and 2018, Greece has experienced significant growth in recent years.

Output jumped by 5.9 percent last year, mainly fuelled by tourism, merchant shipping and construction. Mitsotakis' outgoing government forecasts 2.3-percent growth in 2023. But the country's debt, at 171.3 percent of GDP in 2022, is a longstanding concern.

Unemployment also remains high at 12.4 percent, especially among the young, nearly a quarter of whom are out of work.

An inflationary wave driven by the energy crisis and a rise in prices and housing costs is a key concern for voters. Inflation in 2002 stood at 9.6 percent.

Greece is one of the main entry points for migrants seeking to reach the European Union along a route via neighbouring Turkey. Under Mitsotakis it has adopted a hard line, sealing its borders with help from EU border agency Frontex.

The outgoing government has been accused of illegal migrant pushbacks, which it consistently denies.

Domestically, police repression intensified during the coronavirus pandemic, with its strict confinement rules.

A wiretapping scandal in which politicians and journalists were last year revealed to have been under surveillance was a serious blow to public perceptions regarding the rule of law. It was also seen as a serious violation of press freedom.

Opportunity to...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the JCPOA with six world powers. However, Washington's exit in May 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Negotiations kicked off in the Austrian capital city of Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of removing anti-Iran sanctions and examining the United States' seriousness in rejoining the accord.

The talks, however, have been at a standstill since August 2022 due to Washington's insistence on not removing all the sanctions and its failure to offer necessary guarantees that it will not abandon the deal again.

Borrell Hails...

FROM PAGE 1

Amirabdollahian, in turn, welcomed the concept of holding talks on the basis of mutual respect as a significant step in resolving differences and moving forward towards maintaining ties between the Islamic Republic and Europe, adding that "our assessment of recent talks held between Tehran and Europe remains positive."

He further said Tehran continues to welcome "constructive innovations" in its relations with European countries.

The top Iranian diplomat, however, slammed Borrel's meddling remarks in objecting to the execution of a convicted terrorist that had openly claimed responsibility for sponsoring acts of terror in Iran, and expressed regret that "some European officials appear to promote and support the "ominous phenomenon of terrorism" rather than showing resolve in countering it.

Amirabdollahian was reacting to objections over the execution of Habib Farajollah Cha'ab from the EU and some of its members.

Iranians Will Never Forget...

FROM PAGE 1

It is disturbing that the West continues to use double standards and detrimental practices, as evidenced by the politicization of the Chemical Weapons Convention and the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons (OPCW) for short-sighted political gain, he said.

The Iranian diplomat added, "Such an approach not only risks creating divisions among member states but also undermines the credibility and legitimacy of the disarmament machinery."

Elsewhere in his speech, Iravani reaffirmed Syria's commitment to its obligations under the Chemical Weapons Convention and continuation of the Arab country's constructive cooperation with OPCW.

He noted that Syria has outlined its activities related to the destruction of chemical weapons and their production facilities in its 112th and 113th monthly reports submitted to the OPCW director-general.

Iravani said that Syria has repeatedly expressed its concern about the "grave threat" of the use of chemical weapons by terrorist organizations, emphasizing, "Such a threat should not be ignored or undervalued and requires condemnation as well as an immediate action to prevent these weapons out of the terrorists' hands."

He added that Iran supports constructive dialogue between Syria and the OPCW at the highest level within a specific time frame in an attempt to resolve outstanding issues and finally close the file.

"However, any investigation must be impartial, professional, credible, and objective, and must fully comply with the Convention's requirements and procedures," he pointed out.

He urged the OPCW to remain a neutral and objective international body, guided solely by scientific and technical considerations, in its efforts to prevent the use of chemical weapons and promote the goals of the Convention.

The Iranian envoy called on all member states to uphold the principles of the Convention and work together to ensure the "impartiality, professionalism, and integrity" of the OPCW.

He warned of convening unconstructive monthly meetings on the Syrian chemical file, despite no new developments, saying, "The political approach and using double standards in this file can only jeopardize the process of addressing unresolved issues and will only serve to detract from the technical nature of the discussions at hand."

Iranian Crude Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

Citing secondary sources, the report put Iranian crude output for December 2022 at 2.574 million bpd indicating a 9,000-bpd increase compared to the figure for November. The country's heavy crude oil price also increased

by \$30.12 in 2022 to register a 43-percent rise compared to the previous year, according to OPEC. Iran sold its heavy crude oil at \$99.92 per barrel on

average in the mentioned year, compared to 2021 when the average price was \$69.8 per barrel.

Yanis Varoufakis.

The election will take place under an electoral law

But in a country with a very polarised political

Regional Sand...

FROM PAGE 1

Our forests face various challenges and threats. Among them, are sand and dust storms which have a range of harmful impacts on forests. These include damaging leaves and branches, affecting forest habitats, reducing air quality, increasing the risk of forest fires, significant soil erosion and reducing the availability of food and

To address this pressing challenge, the Islamic Republic of Iran will host an International Conference on Combatting Sand and Dust Storms, with the cooperation of UN agencies, in September 2023.

Low forest cover countries face significant challenges in sustainable forest management, including limited resources, deforestation, climate change, and limited access to markets and finance. Addressing these challenges will require significant investment and commitment at both the national and international scale.

International cooperation and the United Nations can play an important role in supporting low forest cover countries by providing technical and financial assistance, as well as promoting sustainable forest management practices.

One of Iran's environmental priorities is the sustainable forest management. In this light, we have made progress in the direction of sustainable forest management. Allow me to mention a few:

Iran has established several protected areas for forest conservation and biodiversity, has implemented community forestry programs to promote the participation of local communities in forest management, and has launched several large-scale reforestation programs to increase forest cover and combat desertification. For instance, the "National Tree Planting Day" campaign has aimed to combat deforestation and desertification as well as increase public awareness about importance of preserving the environment and natural resources through planting millions of trees across the country. Iran has also developed a National Forest Program which outlines the country's strategy for sustainable forest management.

I wish to conclude by expressing our sincere hope that, with a spirit of multilateralism, cooperation and solidarity, we can achieve our global forest goals. In this regard, the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to cooperate alongside other countries at both the regional and global level.



Man Utd Reportedly Made **Messi Contract Offer**

ONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United made contact Liwith Leo Messi's camp two years ago when he was leaving Barcelona, it has been revealed.

Messi was forced to leave Barca over the club's financial plight, eventually signing for PSG in a celebrated deal. The Sun says at the time, United made enquiries about bringing Messi to England. Indeed, the move was initiated by Messi's camp, led by his father Jorge, and they received a positive response with United making a contract offer to the Argentine.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

Switchboard:

(+98) (21) 44253448

Public Relations Tel:

(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

Public Relations Fax: (+98)(21) 44253395

Advertising Department:

Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234 Website:

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Nacho May Leave Real Madrid

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid defender Nacho Fernandez admits new contract talks with the club are continuing.

Nacho's current deal will expire at the end of June. The defender admits he's unsure if they'll reach an agreement: "I'm still talking to the club. "To be honest, I still don't know what I'll do. I will decide when everything happens." On winning the Copa del Rey, he also said: "We want to give value to the Copa del Rey. It is very important, and it has been very special because of how the games have taken place. Now we have two finals left to reach another, the Champions League."

SPORTS IRAN NEWS WEDNESDAY MAY 10, 2023

Verstappen Keeps Red Bull **Undefeated With Miami Win** MIAMI GARDENS (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen used an easy drive to keep Red Bull undefeated on the season, as the reigning two-time Formula One champion drove from ninth to the victory at the Miami Grand Prix. Red Bull has won all five races so far this season, and teammate Sergio Perez's secondplace finish in Miami was the fourth 1-2 finish for Red Bull this year. Verstappen has three

wins this season, while Perez, the pole sitter in Miami, has two.

The win was the 38th of his career for Verstappen, who tied Sebastian Vettel for most victories for Red Bull. At this pace, he'll smash Vettel's record by the end of what many critics are already complaining is a boring Red Bull-dominated season.

"I call that simply (expletive) lovely," Verstappen said on his radio. "That was a good race, a good race all around, so thank you very much. That was really, really good, also good for the team, again"

Red Bull boss Christian Horner praised Verstappen's poise over the 57-lap race that gave him his second consecutive victory in Miami.

"Well done, Max. That was a mighty middle stint, really impressive on the hard tire and thanks for racing cleanly with your teammate," Horner said.

Red Bull has said it will allow Verstappen and Perez to cleanly race for the championship, and Perez seemed poised to take the points lead in Miami by starting from the pole. Verstappen held a six-point lead in the standings over Perez at the start of the race, but was relegated to a ninth-place starting position because qualifying was cut short before his final qualifying attempt by a Charles Leclerc crash.

But the Dutchman had no problem driving through the field. He went from ninth to sixth in the first four laps, using a pass of two cars in one corner to gain ground.

He was fifth by the ninth lap, fourth on Lap 12 and finally behind Perez in second on Lap 15.

Verstappen took the lead when Perez pitted on Lap 20 and he held nearly an 18-second lead with 15 laps remaining. When he finally made his pit stop, Verstappen returned to the track in second but only 1.6 seconds behind Perez.

It took him just minutes to pass Perez for the win, taking the lead in a wheel-to-wheel battle with nine laps remaining. Although Verstappen has won from a lower starting position before, he becomes the first driver since Niki Lauda in 1984 at the French Grand Prix to win from ninth.

The victory also came on the anniversary of the 2016 announcement that Verstappen was being promoted from the junior team to Red Bull ahead of the fifth round of that season.

Verstappen now holds a 14-point lead over Perez in the standings.

Perez finished second, a full 5.3 seconds behind Verstappen.

"I tried, I gave it all," Perez said as the crowd chanted his nickname "Checo! Checo! Checo!"

Fernando Alonso was third for Aston Martin but finished 26 seconds behind. It was the fourth podium in five races for the resurgent Spaniard.

"It was not easy, it was never easy, but it was a lonely race," Alonso said. George Russell was fourth for Mercedes, followed by Carlos Sainz Jr. of Ferrari, and Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes, who drove from 13th to sixth. Leclerc was seventh, and

Alpine drivers Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon were eighth and ninth. Kevin Magnussen, driver for American team Haas, finished 10th to score a point for just

Logan Sargeant, the first American driver on the grid since 2015, finished last in his home race. Sargeant was born and raised less than 20 miles away from the circuit in



MADRID (Dispatches) - World number two Carlos Alcaraz beat lucky loser Jan-Lennard Struff 6-4 3-6 6-3 in the Madrid Open final to defend last year's title and win his fourth ATP Tour trophy of the year and his tenth overall.

Alcaraz, who had an injury-plagued start to the season, came back in top form last month to win the Barcelona Open for the second consecutive year.

The victory was the fourth ATP Masters 1000 trophy for Alcaraz, who became the youngest world number one last September when he won the U.S. Open and held that spot for 20 weeks until Novak Djokovic took it back in January.

He could reclaim the world number one spot from Djokovic if he shows up to play in Rome later this week, as he has no points to defend and the Serbian would be defending his crown and 1000 points in Italy.

In Madrid, the 20-year-old Spaniard had to play his best tennis to beat a relentless Struff in three sets in a packed Caja Magica.

Lucky loser Struff's run to the final was part of a remarkable turnaround in fortune for the German, who dropped outside the top 100 last year but is back up to 65th after reaching the quarter-finals of last month's Monte Carlo Masters.

ATP Hails New Era For Chinese Tennis

 $S^{\rm HANGHAI~(Dispatches)~-~ATP}_{\rm executives~hailed~a~"new~era"~for}$ Chinese tennis as they relaunched the lucrative Shanghai Masters after three consecutive years of Covid cancellations.

The flagship event of the men's game in the Asia-Pacific region was among many international sporting fixtures stopped by Beijing's strict anti-virus measures over the past few years.

International sports bodies have sought to bring back such events since those restrictions were lifted in December.

"We are very confident this is the moment we will start a new journey... for tennis in China," ATP CEO Massimo Calvelli said at a launch ceremony.

Elite women's tennis is also returning to China after the WTA abandoned in March a boycott it had imposed over concerns for the safety of player Peng Shuai.

Peng, a former doubles world number one, has not been seen outside China since 2021, when she made -- and then withdrew -- accusations of sexual assault against a high-ranking official.

The WTA had said it would not return to China without a formal investigation into the allegations and an opportunity to meet privately with Peng.

Calvelli, when asked why the men's game had not joined the boycott, said the ATPhad made "different considerations".

"For me the important part is the WTA is coming back, which is the right thing for the sport," he told journalists before the ceremony for the Shanghai Masters.

Calvelli pointed to the success of Chinese players as another reason it was a "special time to come back"

Wu Yibing beat US player John Isner in the Dallas Open in February to become the first Chinese player to lift an ATP tour trophy.

Zhang Zhizhen then became the first Chinese player to reach the quarterfinals of an ATP Masters 1000 event when he beat American Taylor Fritz in the Madrid Open last week.

October's Shanghai Masters will double its duration and the prize-money pool will exceed \$10 million, making it the richest sports event in Asia, the ATP said Monday.

the second time this season. Haas has used the Miami race to spotlight all its American sponsors, including Chipotle, which promised 10,000 free burritos if a Haas driver scored

Fort Lauderdale. He started last.

Murray Wins First Title Since 2019

MARSEILLE (Dispatches) - Former world number one Andy Murray won his first title since 2019 yesterday with victory at the Aix-en-Provence Challenger in France.

Three-time Grand Slam champion Murray had gone without a title since he triumphed in Antwerp in October 2019.

Murray, now ranked 52, defeated top seed Tommy Paul, the world number 17 from the United States, 2-6, 6-1, 6-2 in the final of the clay court event.

The 35-year-old Briton, who is hoping to boost his ranking to ensure a seeded spot in the Wimbledon draw in July, last won on the second-tier Challenger tour at American events in Aptos and Binghamton in 2005.

"This last year, 18 months has been a bit of struggle with my game. But my team have been there supporting me and working with me to try and get better," said Murray at the trophy presentation.

"We keep going from here."

Both Murray and Paul were looking for crucial time on clay before the French Open starts in three weeks' time.

Murray will also return to the top 50 at 42 when the new rankings are release.

Nadal Missing French Open Would Be Brutal For the Sport

MIAMI GARDENS (Dispatches) - Roger Federer said he hopes Rafa Nadal will recover in time for the French Open and that it would be a "brutal" blow for tennis if the 14-time Roland Garros champion is absent this year.

Nadal has been dealing with a hip injury he suffered at the Australian Open in January, and fears that the Spaniard may miss the Paris Grand Slam grew after he pulled out of this week's Italian Open.

Nadal skipped last week's Madrid Open and also missed tournaments at Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo and Barcelona.

"It would be brutal, it would be tough for tennis if Rafa isn't going to be there," 20-times Grand Slam winner Federer told Sky Sports yesterday at Formula One's

"I still hope so, I saw he pulled out of Rome so I wish him the best.

"Obviously Novak (Djokovic) hasn't been playing that much so I hope he's going to be strong as well and then all the young guys coming through as well," added Federer, who retired from tennis last year.

Nadal has competed at the French Open every year since winning the first of his men's record 22 major titles in Paris in 2005. The claycourt major begins on May 28.

Harden Visits With Michigan State **Shooting Victim**

DHILADELPHIA (Dispatches) - James Harden sank the overtime 3-pointer that sent the 76ers to a playoff victory and instantly waved over John Hao, a paralyzed Michigan State shooting survivor who developed a long-distance FaceTime bond with Philadelphia's star guard.



Harden had just scored 42 points, removed his sneakers, signed them and handed them to his new friend.

"He brought me good vibes, good energy," Harden said.

Hao was all smiles as he looked on from the court, a needed respite from looming rehabilitation for the international student from China who attended Game 4 as Harden's guest. Before the game, Harden leaned into Hao and got small pats on the back before resuming his pregame drills.

"You look good," Harden told Hao. The 20-year-old Hao and his parents had been invited by Harden to attend a 76ers game once he was available to travel.

Hao recently left a Chicago rehabilitation facility where he'd been since a February shooting on the East Lansing campus that killed three students and injured five others. Hao wore Harden's No. 1 Sixers jersey and attended the game with his parents. Hao's

father also wore a Harden jersey and posed for pictures as the 76ers warmed up behind him. Harden learned after the shooting that Hao was a fan of his and donated sneakers, money and then called the student to offer encouragement.