

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

IRAN NEWS

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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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 renege party (and EU/E3) demonstrate credible political will to that effect. No opportunity is forever!"

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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.

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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 Saeed Irvani 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, Irvani 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 Irvani'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.

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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 Irvani, Iran's permanent ambassador to the United Nations, 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," Irvani said.

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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.

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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.

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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.

Foreign Countries Seek Investment in Iranian Ports

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Roads and Urban Development said there have been several offers from foreign companies and neighboring countries to invest in the country's ports because Iran enjoys promising port locations.

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.

Larijani 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 for the vote.

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

Larijani holds a record in serving as parliament speaker. He held the post for three terms, that is, 12 years, from 2008 to 2020.

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 Security Council.

Larijani also ran for president in 2021 but he was disqualified by the Council of Guardians.

Tasnim earlier reported that former president Hassan Rouhani also plans to take part in electoral activities in coordination with Larijani.

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

Meanwhile Larijani has reportedly denied Tasnim claim over his plan to run for the parliament.

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 progress has been made so far.

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 delegation, made the remarks in a meeting with Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (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



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 volume of our annual exchanges has reached

about 24 billion dollars. Despite all the restrictions of the past and the heavy shadow of political issues on 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 business relations."

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 Austrian ambassadors to Kerman province, saying that about 10% of the population of the province is made up of Afghan refugees and that the refugee population is more than Iranian students at many schools of the province.

Thanks to the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, all Afghan children enjoy the opportunity to have access to educational facilities equal to what 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

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.

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.

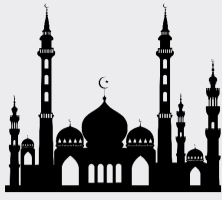
Chang Hua said that he had watched 40 Iranian movies so far, adding that the Iranian movies narrate people's daily routine and are based on reality.

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.

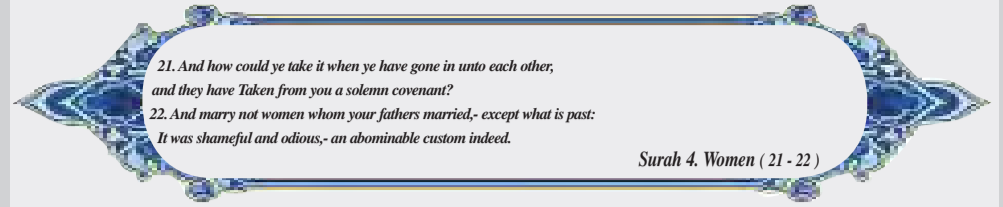
The event is underway until May 10 with contribution from Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation, Iran Organization of Cinema and Audiovisual Affairs, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Islamic Culture and Communication Organization and the Embassy of China in Tehran.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:17
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:26
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:02



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

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 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.

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

reported, the forum aimed at consolidating bilateral business relations, conducting strategic partnerships to augment the volume of investments and business activity, and accessing new economic fields.

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."

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 answered during 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 engages himself 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 improvisation 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 refused to be forced to repeat the similar pattern again and again as expected by

the audience. Obsession kills creativeness. An artist might find his style and 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 is that now 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.

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.

Sloth fur, research has found, hosts bustling communities of insects, algae, fungi and bacteria, among other microbes, some of which could pose disease risk.

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 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 next to a copy of the Holy Trinity.

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

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."

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 Oliy 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 meet their demands.

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 exports from the sanctioned country—but in order to do that, Lake Maracaibo needs to be dredged. And Venezuela will not purchase the necessary equipment to do the dredging, according to a letter Venezuela sent to Dutch shipbuilder Royal IHC, citing limited funds.

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 rate of 100,000 bpd.

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 Warns of Constitutional Crisis If Congress Fails to Act on Debt

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen issued a stark warning that a failure by Congress to act on the debt ceiling could trigger a “constitutional crisis” that also would call into question the federal government’s creditworthiness.

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 to 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 fell to 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.

