

The 34th Tehran International Book Fair (2023 TIBF) Kicked Off On Wednesday in Tehran Grand Mosalla With Participation of over 2700 publishers from Iran and Some 27 With the Motto of "Future Is Readable"

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Once Again Dropped 28,092 Points to 2.777m on Wednesday as Reported, Over 20.444b Securities Worth 147.369 Trillion rials (About \$350.8m) Were Traded

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Tehran Warns U.S., Israel Over Adventurist Acts

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's permanent ambassador to the UN has reiterated Tehran's right to respond to any act of aggression by the Israeli regime against the country's nuclear program, warning that Iran will hold the US to account for explicitly supporting such terrorist acts.

Amir Saeid Iravani made the remarks in a Tuesday letter to UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres and the head of the Security Council, days after US national security advisor Jake Sullivan said Washington would do whatever was necessary to prevent Iran from acquiring a "nuclear weapon,... including by recognizing Israel's freedom of action."

"Without a doubt, this irresponsible, provocative, and belligerent statement violates international law and the United Nations Charter, particularly Article 2(4), as it threatens to use force against the peaceful nuclear facilities of a Member State of the United Nations," Iravani said.

"Such a statement not only implies the United States' potential complicity in any future acts of terrorism or aggression carried out by the Israeli regime against Iran, including against its peaceful nuclear facilities, but it also serves as an admission of responsibility by the US for its role in assisting, facilitating, and supporting Israel's terrorist and sabotage operations against Iranian officials, scientists, civilians, and peaceful nuclear facilities, thus requiring the United States to bear the consequences of such internationally wrongful acts." **See Page 7**

Top General Says Signs of U.S. Decline Visible

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief of staff of the Iranian Armed Forces says signs of the decline of the United States have for long been visible, adding that the emerging new world order will not be based on unipolar hegemony.

Major General Mohammad Baqeri, who is in Oman at the head of a high-ranking military delegation, made the remarks during a speech to a group of professors and commanders of the National Defense College in the capital Muscat.

Pointing to the formation of a new world order, Baqeri said, "Today, many pundits maintain that the world is moving towards the establishment of a new order. After the dissolution of the Soviet Union, the United States declared a unipolar order and tried hard to establish it, but failed."

Stressing that one of the features of the new order is that it would be region-based, the top general said, "The hegemony arising from the unjust world system has become a pathological behavior for some powers ... but the signs of the decline of the US power have been conspicuous for a long time, and we are sure that the new world order will not be based on unipolar hegemony." **See Page 7**

Iran Calls for Respecting Syrian Sovereignty, Fighting Terrorism



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a meeting on the Syrian crisis stressed the need for respecting Syria's sovereignty and combating terrorism.

Amirabdollahian made the remarks at the quadrilateral meeting between the foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey in Moscow. The meeting was held to discuss the normalization of relations between Turkey and Syria.

During the meeting, Iranian minister once again offered condolences to Turkey and Syria over the recent deadly earthquake and expressed hope that the living condition in the quake-hit areas would return to normal as soon as possible. Saying that today the world is in a unique situation regarding international relations, the top Iranian diplomat stressed the world is going toward regionalism and the US power is declining.

Welcoming the negotiations between Syria and Turkey, the Iranian foreign minister said that the two countries can successfully resolve their bilateral issues through dialogue and deepen their cooperation based on a good neighborliness policy.

Emphasizing that military action will not solve any problem, Amirabdollahian announced the readiness of the Islamic Republic of Iran to support the process of dialogue and help to implement the agreements reached between the parties in this regard.

Stressing the need for respecting and considering Syria's national sovereignty in any political solution for Syria-related issues, Amirabdollahian suggested that the presence of the Syrian army on the borders and joint provision of security with the neighbors can solve the security concerns of Ankara and other neighbors and prevent the activities of terrorists and separatists as well.

"We believe that a strong and independent Syria will be able to overcome terrorism, separatists, the occupation of American forces and the theft of the country's national resources," he said, stressing the need for the return of Syrian refugees to their homeland.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the top Iranian diplomat urged the international community to take decisive measures against terrorism and the Israeli regime's invasion of Syrian territory.

The Iranian foreign minister also wished success for Ankara in the upcoming presidential elections.

Russian Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov, for his part, blamed the United States for seeking to create a "Free Syria Army," consisting of terrorists and militants, to serve as a tool against the legitimate government in Damascus.

"It's no longer enough for the US to support the self-proclaimed Kurdish regions beyond the Euphrates River and flood the illegal armed units that they have formed with weapons," TASS quoted Lavrov as saying.

"According to our data, the Americans have started to create the so-called Free Syria Army near the Syrian city of Raqqa, engaging local Arab tribes, along with militants from ISIL and other terrorist organizations. The goal is clear: to use these militants against Syria's legitimate authorities in order to destabilize the situation in the country," Lavrov noted.

Lavrov emphasized that the Russian and Syrian militaries had recently discussed the issue, agreeing on a model of joint actions in that field. "I hope that all planned steps will be successfully implemented," the top Russian diplomat added.

According to him, Moscow believes that "blatant foreign interference in the region's affairs is unacceptable, particularly when it involves military force;" and in this case, it is about "deploying foreign military units to Syrian soil."

"It appears important to start discussing the issue of restoring disrupted transport and logistics ties between neighboring countries and resuming trade and economic cooperation without any barriers," the minister said.

"It has been a key principle for all the countries present here to contribute to a safe and voluntary return of refugees and internally displaced persons to the places of their permanent residence in Syria as well as to ensure their right to receive support," Lavrov added.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Old Habits Die Hard

We Iranians strongly believe in this proverb which says "old habits die hard" and we can use it for the Zionist regime who never quits bloodshed and crimes because savagery is its blood and nobody expects it to quit.

In recent months Israeli forces have continued their crimes and bloodsheds especially against the Palestinians and they attack and kill Palestinians under any pretext and they wait for no serious response from international bodies because they are deaf and dumb and cannot see and hear what crimes the Zionists commit.

In the early hours of Tuesday, Israel launched 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.

This is not the first time that in recent weeks Israeli forces commit such crimes as they have ramped up strikes since holy month of Ramadhan especially since the time massive protests have hit Israel and it seems the Israeli government wants to distract people inside and outside the country by such attacks on Palestinians.

Widespread international condemnations poured in after the Israeli regime carried out fresh airstrikes against the Gaza Strip, leaving at least 13 Palestinians dead and 20 others wounded.

In a statement on Tuesday, Syria's Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Expatriates condemned the latest Israeli attacks on the besieged enclave, saying such crimes will only strengthen the determination of Palestinian people to continue their struggle against the occupying regime.

The ministry also underlined the need to stop these crimes and hold the Israeli authorities accountable, while emphasizing that Damascus will stand by Palestinians.

Jordan's Foreign Ministry also denounced the Israeli aggression on Gaza in a statement, saying Amman will continue its efforts to immediately stop the violence and restore calm.

Meanwhile, Turkey's Foreign Ministry denounced as "unacceptable" the Israeli attacks on Gaza, noting that Ankara expects these tensions to stop before they lead to new conflicts in the region.

Additionally, the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Egypt strongly condemned the latest Israeli strikes on Gaza, saying they are in violation of international law. **See Page 7**

Diesel Smuggled From Iran Cover 35% of Pakistan's Demand

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A report shows up to 35% of diesel sold in Pakistan is arriving illegally from Iran.

Pakistan is increasingly relying on diesel fuel smuggled from Iran as a report shows that up to 35% of diesel sold in the South Asian country is arriving illegally from its western neighbor.

The Pakistan Petroleum Dealers Association told Reuters on Tuesday that there has been a major surge in the smuggling of Iranian fuel to Pakistan in recent months.

The report said that fuel smuggled from Iran is currently being used in many areas in Pakistan unlike in the past when smuggling was limited to the Pakistani border province of Balochistan.

It also cited figures from Pakistan's energy ministry showing that diesel sales in the country had slumped more than 40% due to the increased presence of smuggled products in the market.

The report comes against the backdrop of statements by Iranian Oil Ministry authorities suggesting that fuel smuggling from the country has reached record levels mainly due to a significant difference between fuel prices in Iran and those charged in neighboring states. **See Page 7**

Tehran-Baku Trade Rises 13%

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The value of trade between Iran and Azerbaijan increased by 13 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20), based on the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Iran-Azerbaijan trade was \$688 million in 14001, and \$608 million in 1400.

Components and parts, tubes, aluminum, packaged butter, potatoes, heaters, non-electric appliances, non-powder polyethylene compound, special polyethylene compound wire and cable cover, polyethylene film grade with specific weight, and iron and steel ingots were Iran's main exported items to Azerbaijan.

Milling machines, car gearboxes, gas generators for the simultaneous production of electricity and heat, lathes, air-generating units, presses for the production of chipboards, bending machines (presses), pipes, car engine control units, and sets of generators with compression piston engines were Iran's major imported products from its neighbor in the past year.

As announced by the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade, the value of Iran's non-oil export to its neighbors rose 19 percent in the past Iranian year. **See Page 7**

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Iran, Syria Ditch Dollar, Establish Joint Bank

TEHRAN (IP) - The new Ambassador of Iran to Syria says the exclusion of dollars from the two countries' trade ties and the establishment of a joint bank are important events in Tehran-Damascus relations.

Hossein Akbari said that the formation of joint insurance and banking companies pave the way for investment and an economic surge in the relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria.

Akbari said the opportunities cause the private sector of Iran to invest in Syria, as the two countries need joint investment. After 12 years, Iran's President, Ebrahim Raisi, visited Syria and was welcomed by the Syrian people and President Bashar al-Assad.

Israel, U.S. Collapsing; Huge Developments Happening

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The chief commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has condemned the latest round of Israeli aggression on the besieged Gaza Strip, saying that the world is witnessing the collapse of Israel and the United States.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks at a gathering of Basij members in the holy city of Mashhad, hours after three high-profile commanders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement were killed in Israeli airstrikes on the Gaza Strip.

"The Zionists who were boastful a few months ago are now shocked to see that more than 30 armed attacks take place in the occupied territories each day," he said.

"Big events are on the verge of happening. Hopes have been revived and justice will dawn again in the region ... This is the pattern of the collapse of powers that happens surprisingly," he added.

On Tuesday, Israeli military aircraft launched a series of targeted strikes on the Gaza Strip, killing at least three high-profile commanders of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement.

The IRGC chief further stated that "Americans are no longer willing to support the Zionists," adding that "none of them travels to occupied Palestine anymore."



"It was us who forced the Americans to no longer consider our region as one of their priorities," he said, noting that only two U.S. military bases remain in Iraq currently. Salami noted that Iranians' experience of resistance has always been "sweet," stressing that all those who were ill-wishers toward the Iranian nation are dealing with their collapse while the Islamic system is still powerful.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Salami said the West "has recently realized that military warfare is not enough to win wars, but it is humans who can decide the fate of any wars."

"They wanted to push Syria into trouble, but [President] Bashar al-Assad survived and returned to the Arab League, and now the Zionists themselves are talking about their own collapse," the IRGC said.

Iran Must Enhance Cohesion With Islamic States, Resistance

TEHRAN (MNA) - Describing Iran as an important country in the region, Iran's Parliament speaker called for enhancing cohesion among Iran, Islamic countries, and the Resistance Front, especially in the field of trade and economy.

Addressing the International Conference on New World Order Geometry, Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf described Iran as a country that plays an important role in the region.

There are great opportunities in the Asian continent and many opportunities for the Islamic Ummah, he said stressing taking advantage of all opportunities based on national interests.

Asserting that the Islamic Republic of Iran will never be isolated, the Iranian Parliament speaker said, "Neighborhood policy is our priority and we must increase the cohesion among Iran, Islamic countries, and the Resistance Front, especially in the field of trade and economy."

The illegal presence of the Zionist regime in the region has complicated the situation, he said, adding that the enemies seek to represent Iran as the enemy of Muslim countries in the region.

As a Muslim country, Iran's priority is achieving greater convergence and cohesion between the Islamic Ummah from East Asia to West Africa.

Iran Urges Complete Pursuance of Anti-Terror Commanders' Assassination Case

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran urges expeditious and complete pursuance of the case concerning Washington's 2020 assassination of the Islamic Republic's and Iraq's senior anti-terror commanders, Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis.

President Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks in Tehran on Tuesday, meeting with Faeq Zaidan, the visiting head of the Supreme Judicial Council in Iraq.

The Iranian chief executive warned against wastage of time in ongoing efforts to consign the perpetrators of the atrocity to justice.

"Pursuance of the case until the achievement of result will show that Iran and Iraq stop at nothing in their bid to enable administration of justice" towards those behind the assassinations.

Raisi, however, said Iraq's resolve to address the Americans' "appalling" foul play and its efforts to consign those who had ordered, advised, and committed the atrocity, was clear to the Islamic Republic.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by former US President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Both commanders were highly revered across the Middle East because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

For his part, the Iraqi official said the endeavor towards trial of those, who had partaken in the "terrorist crime," was one of the most important examples of Tehran and Baghdad's judicial cooperation.

U.S. Urged to Address Domestic Rights Abuses

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran urged the United States to focus on its own systematic violation of minority rights rather than interfering in other countries' affairs and judge their level of free speech.

Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani made the remarks via Twitter on Wednesday, one day after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken claimed that hundreds of thousands of Iranian women have "demanded their basic freedoms be

respected, even in the face of the most brutal repression."

"Backing coups against popular governments, the [US] regime has always supported non-democratic establishments and non-elected governments, including the former regime of Iran, and has sacrificed freedom and fundamental rights of nations for its own illegitimate interests," Kan'ani wrote.

"Instead of judging other nations' freedom of expression and fundamental rights, it should better feel responsible for its international obligations as well as the systematic violation of human rights inside the US, especially those of minorities and people of color. It must also refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of countries in accordance with the principles of the UN Charter."

Blinken made the anti-Iran comments in an address to the Freedom House 2023 Annual Awards Ceremony on Tuesday.

The United States claims to honor freedom of speech and accuses other countries of violating such an inalienable right. Analysts, however, say the regime does not tolerate dissent and discriminates against ethnic minorities, including those of African descent.

Judiciary Chief to Visit Qatar to Sign MoUs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Judiciary Chief Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei will visit Qatar soon to sign Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) with Doha, according to Iran's ambassador to the Arab country.

Hamidreza Dehghani-Poudeh said that Mohseni-Ejei will visit Doha in the near future to meet Qatari officials and ink bilateral judicial contracts and MoUs.

Elsewhere in his comments, Dehghani-Poudeh said the Emir of Qatar agreed to the transfer of 28 imprisoned Iranian nationals to the country following President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Doha earlier this year. "Previously, 19 Iranians imprisoned in Qatar were transferred to the country's prisons, and in the near future, a number of other nationals imprisoned in Qatar will be transferred to the country's prisons to serve their sentences," he explained.

Iran, Tanzania Seek Broadening Mining, Agro Cooperation

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Trade (ICCIMA) Gholam-Hossein Shafei in meeting with Director General of Tanzania Trade Development Authority (TanTrade) Latifa M. Khamis said the basis is provided for the expansion of economic cooperation between Iran and Tanzania in various fields including agriculture, mining as well as technical and engineering services.

Shafei made the remarks in a meeting with Ms. Khamis at ICCIMA. "It is possible for Iranian companies to invest in the fields of technical and engineering services, agricultural machinery, and mining activities in Tanzania," Iranian official said.

The ICCIMA head considered the development of relations with African countries as a main strategy of the Iranian government and said: "Despite this special view, unfortunately, the level of Iran's relations with this region is unfavorable and should be improved."

He pointed to the strategic position of Tanzania in Africa which is a gateway to access to East Africa. He said that since Tanzania's economy is agriculture-centered, Iran and Tanzania can cooperate in this field, and then pointed to Iran's capabilities in mining technology and due to rich mines in Tanzania, there is possibility for cooperation between the two countries in this field.



Further in the meeting, Khamis, who visited Iran on top of a trade delegation, stated that the purpose of her trip to Iran was to consult with Iranian officials and to identify areas for economic cooperation and investment between the two countries.

She noted that her accompanying delegation is seeking to sign memorandums and cooperation agreements with their Iranian counterparts.

"Due to the progress that Iran has made in the field of agricultural machinery, we are interested in cooperation in this area. Of course, in the meantime, we will follow up on the development of relations in other areas if possible," she explained.

Then in the meeting both sides called for the launch of Iran-Tanzania Joint Chamber, launch of Embassy of Tanzania in Tehran, eliminating or reducing preferential tariffs, signing MoU on banking cooperation and easing visa process for traders of both countries. Then it was decided ICCIMA and TanTrade to work together for preparing a document on cooperation.

As announced by the vice president of Iran and Africa Merchants Club Ruhollah Latifi, the value of trade between Iran and Africa rose two percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

He put Iran-Africa annual trade at 2.545 million tons worth \$1.278 billion.

Iran Accounts for 92% of Global Opium Seizure

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran accounts for 92% of opium seizure in the world, and is prepared to share its experience in the fight against drug trafficking with regional countries, said the country's anti-narcotics chief.

Addressing an international drug control conference in the Iraqi capital of Baghdad on Tuesday, Eskandar Momeni, secretary general of Iran's Drug Control Headquarters, said that 27% of heroin seizures and 59% of morphine seizures in the world were also carried out by Iran in 2020, citing latest information from the United Nations office on drugs and crime.

He added that Iran accounted for 80% of methamphetamine seizures in the Middle East and Southwest Asia in the same year.

Despite its considerable success in the fight against drug trafficking, the official said, Iran still faces "multiple challenges" in this area because of the "cruel and unilateral" sanctions imposed on the country by the United States and its European allies.

However, Momeni underscored Iran's unwavering commitment to continuing its "humanitarian mission" of battling drug trafficking.

Tourism Minister Stresses Support for Export

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Cultural Heritage, Tourism, and Handicrafts emphasized that the export activists in the tourism sector should be recognized and supported.

On the sidelines of the cabinet session, Ezzatollah Zarghami said that the presence of the ministry was extensive in the Iran Expo 2023, with numerous meetings being held with handicraft exporters.

"We should recognize the exporters in this area; the export support fund is also included in tourism activities," Zarghami said.

Zarghami also reported incentives allowed for supporting the exporters active in the tourism industry.

The 5th exhibition of Iran's export capabilities, Iran Expo 2023, as the country's largest export event, is underway at the Tehran permanent international fairground.

Value of Iran Foreign Trade up by 17%

TEHRAN (IFP) - Official figures show the volume of Iran's foreign trade witnessed a 17-percent hike in the first month of the current Persian calendar year, with China and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) topping the list of the country's trade partners.

Data released by the Iranian Customs Administration showed the value of non-oil export reached \$3.6 billion in the first month of this year (started on March 21).

Meanwhile, the data indicated a 13-percent increase in the value of imports, which stood at \$3.8 billion, compared to the same period last year.

China, Iraq, Turkey, the UAE and India were the five biggest buyers of energy from Iran, according to the figures.

In terms of non-oil trade, the UAE, China, Turkey, Germany and India were Iran's largest partners.

The administration of President Ebrahim Raisi has been pursuing a 'look-to-the-East' policy to improve the country's economic situation, which has taken a blow from the tough US sanctions.

Iran, Saudi Arabia to Boost Academic Ties

TEHRAN (IP) - The head of the International Scientific Cooperation Center of Iran's Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology announced that the country and Saudi Arabia seek to develop academic cooperation.

Embassies of Iran and Saudi Arabia are going to be reopened following the Saudi-Iranian agreement to resume diplomatic relations on March 10, 2023, in Beijing.

Head of the International Scientific Cooperation Center of the Ministry of Science, Research, and Technology, Vahid Haddadi-Asl, said: "As soon as the Iranian ambassador is stationed in Saudi Arabia, Iran's Ministry of Science will be the first department to establish scientific interactions with Saudi Arabia."

He highlighted the importance of the development of Iran's scientific interactions with Saudi Arabia due to its oil, water, and environmental issues.

Development of scientific co-operations with neighboring countries including Uzbekistan, Tajikistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Kazakhstan is also on the agenda of the Ministry of Science, he stated.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:18
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:24
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:01

23. Prohibited to you (For marriage) are:- Your mothers, daughters, sisters; father's sisters, Mother's sisters; brother's daughters, sister's daughters; foster-mothers (Who gave you suck), foster-sisters; your wives' mothers; your step-daughters under your guardianship, born of your wives to whom ye have gone in,- no prohibition if ye have not gone in;- (Those who have been) wives of your sons proceeding from your loins; and two sisters in wedlock at one and the same time, except for what is past; for Allah is Off-forgiving, Most Merciful;-

Surah 4. Women (23)

Japanese Companies Keen to Cooperate With Iranian Start-Ups

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In the meeting of the head of the Middle East and Africa Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan Miyake Yasujiro with the head of the Economic Innovation and Digital Transformation Commission of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA), the parties emphasized the development of economic and commercial relations between Iran and Japan, especially in the field of digital economy and cooperation on the development of start-ups.

Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture in the past days, in addition to hosting several business delegations from neighboring countries, also had guests from the Far East.

The head of the Middle East and Africa Department of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan along with a delegation from the economic department of the Japanese Embassy in Iran came to the Tehran Chamber to learn about Iran's economic potential and to discuss the areas of cooperation between the two countries in



negotiations with the head of the Economic Commission for Innovation and Digital Transformation and some managers of the chamber.

In the meeting, Head of Japan External Trade Organization (JETRO) Takayuki Suzuki said that economic activities in the sanctions are difficult, adding that due to the growth of start-ups in Iran, Japanese Companies are keen to cooperate and broaden cooperation with Iran and JETRO is keen to know which start-ups in Iran have grown and become successful.

Japan Foreign Ministry official Mr. Yasujiro, for his part, said that the goal behind his visit to Tehran is to know economic capacities of Iran despite sanctions and called for more details and information on the current status of some industries in Iran like auto-making, start-up ecosystem and Iranian universities. He then talked about possibility of cooperation in the field of start-ups and extending these cooperation to the scientific and university fields.

JETRO, or the Japan External Trade Organization, is a government-related organization that works to promote mutual trade and investment between Japan and the rest of the world. Originally established in 1958 to promote Japanese exports abroad, JETRO's core focus in the 21st century has shifted toward promoting foreign direct investment into Japan and helping small to medium size Japanese firms maximize their global export potential.

Iran-Iraq Joint Supreme Committee Meets

SHANA (Tehran) – Iran-Iraq Joint Supreme Committee held a meeting on Tuesday to discuss the expansion of bilateral ties in the oil sector.

The session was held a day before Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji's trip to the Iraqi capital Baghdad. Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trade Ahmad Asadzadeh was the head of the Iranian delegation in the session, during which bilateral cooperation in the development of joint fields, export of technical and engineering services, and implementation of memorandums of understanding in the oil industry were thoroughly discussed.

Heading a delegation, Owji is scheduled to hold talks with Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani, Oil Minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani, and Minister of Electricity Ziad Ali Fadel.

On April 29, Iran's president put great emphasis on boosting Tehran-Baghdad relations and promoting their cooperation in infrastructure fields, including water, electricity, gas, and energy sectors.

Seyyed Ebrahim Raeisi, who made remarks in a meeting with his Iraqi counterpart Abdul Latif Rashid in Tehran, added the two countries need to meet each other's needs by utilizing and developing their capacities.

Georgia Calls for Holding an Exhibition on Iran's Capabilities in Tbilisi



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of trade delegation of Georgia at IRAN EXPO 2023 in meeting with the vice-President of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Trade (ICCIMA) pointed to attraction of the high quality and low prices of Iranian products in Georgia especially in the construction industry and called for holding an exhibition on the capabilities of Iran in Georgia for introducing the capabilities to Georgian traders.

Head of International Investors Association of Georgia Mr. Osman Chalishkan who was heading the Georgian trade delegation in the IRAN EXPO 2023 met the Vice-President of ICCIMA Mr. Hossein Salahvarzi and during the meeting both sides talked on the grounds for joint cooperation for boosting the current trade volume.

Chalishkan emphasized that they are determined to increase the trade relation between Tehran and Tbilisi and said during his visit to Tehran has found many commonalities with his Iranian friends and expressed hope both sides play their roles for broadening trade ties.

He said that Iran has good potentials for trade cooperation especially in the field of construction materials, adding that high quality and lower price of Iranian products are attractive for Georgians. He then called for holding an exhibition on Iran's capabilities in Tbilisi to introduce these capabilities to Georgian traders.

Then Salahvarzi, for his part, pointed to the good historical and political relation between Iran and Georgia and said that unfortunately the trade relation between the two states has not been as good as their historical and political relations and the current \$350m trade volume despite their good capacities is not too much.

He said that ICCIMA knows well capacities and needs of Georgia and for this reason it has launched joint chamber and it is active and the ICCIMA is sure that it can boost good economic relation with Georgia.

He then noted that export of technical and engineering services, broadening tourism and energy production as well as joint investment can be good grounds for cooperation between the two countries and noted that ICCIMA welcomes holding exhibition in Georgia.

Then Head of Iran-Georgia Joint Chamber Ms. Fatemeh Moqimi announced readiness of the chamber for holding a big business forum Iran and Georgia businessmen, adding that the chamber is trying to hold the trade and industry exhibition in Georgia on July 7.

Tehran, Islamabad Call for Expansion of Trade Between Private Sectors

TEHRAN - Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (TCCIMA) Masoud Khansari and Chief Executive of Trade Development Authority of Pakistan (TDAP) Muhammad Zubair Motiwala expressed the need for the expansion of relations between the private sectors of the two countries in a meeting in Tehran.

The officials in the meeting emphasized that the trade between the two countries should not be limited to the border trade in Quetta and must be directed to official channels between the private production and export companies of the two countries.

Motiwala announced the readiness of his organization for long-term and progressive interaction with TCCIMA in order to facilitate the commercial exchanges of the two sides' economic enterprises.

He stressed the need for continuous exchange of business delegations with the aim of introducing the economic and market cooperation capacities of the two countries and identifying the goods and services needed by the markets of both sides.

According to the official, the chambers of commerce in the two countries can provide the basis for the expansion of interaction between the private sectors of the two countries.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



Motiwala also considered the revision and modification of the tariffs on commodities traded between the two countries as necessary to increase the level of economic cooperation, and in this regard, he reminded that Pakistan is taking serious measures.

Khansari, for his part, welcomed the ideas presented by the Pakistani side and emphasized the need for amending the tariffs on goods exchanged between Iran and Pakistan.

"A complete list of commodities needed by the markets of the two countries has been prepared by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce which has been compiled by the data provided by reliable companies," Khansari said.

Stating that the main channel of trade between the two countries is border exchanges which are almost entirely carried out through the Quetta border, the TCCIMA head said: "In order to strengthen the economic relations between Iran and Pakistan, the trade of the two countries should move away from cross-border exchanges towards interaction between large industries and companies from both sides. In this context, the Trade Development Authority of Pakistan and the country's chambers of commerce should encourage the reputable and big industries and businessmen of Pakistan to have direct economic cooperation with the Iranian market."

First Iranian Freight Train Arrives In Afghanistan's Herat

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Afghanistan Railway Authority said that the first freight train arrived in Herat province from Iran on Monday via the Khaf-Herat railway.

Herat Railway officials say that the shipment weighs more than 600 tons, and is made up of equipment and supplies for the company that built Khaf-Herat Railway Line, Ariana News reported.

According to officials, an Iranian delegation arrived in Herat on Monday, also by rail, and the two sides discussed sustainable transportation via rail.

Mufti Mohammad Nasim Mohammadi, the head of the Herat Railway Department, said that this shipment included 17 wagons that transferred 655 tons of railway equipment and facilities for the contracting company.

Currently, this railway has entered Herat as a test, but the process of transporting commercial goods through the Khaf-Herat railway line will start soon, Afghan official added.

HOSCO Supporter of 20,000 Orphans of Hormozgan Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - In line with observing social responsibilities, Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) has brought under its shelter and support some 20,000 orphans of Hormozgan Province.

In a ceremony which was held at the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee's conference hall, Head of Imam Khomeini Relief Committee Mr. Seyed Morteza Bakhtiari and the CEO of HOSCO Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani signed a MoU on cooperation which is aimed at participation in the plan for support and honor of the orphaned children and needs who are under shelter of the Imam Khomeini Relief Committee of Hormozgan Province. The MoU is aimed at cooperation on supporting 20,000 orphans of the province.

In the ceremony, Mr. Bakhtiari hailed HOSCO as one of the leading enterprises in observing its social responsibilities and termed the decision of the HOSCO management a God-pleasing act and termed important the role of industries in helping the orphans and needy persons.

Then the CEO of HOSCO Mr. Maroufkhani termed blessing and valuable the role of HOSCO in supporting orphans and needy persons and said that reiterated that they see such benevolent acts directly in production and making profit.

He then thanked Mr. Bakhtiari and hailed him as a manager sticking to principle and values and expressed hope other industries in the country would take good steps in this regard. He then pointed to some projects which are in line with observing social responsibilities like construction of mahdieh, school and helping the centers for the disabled.

Mining, Metals Exports Up 12% in April

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Exports of mining and metals products from Iran rose by 12% year on year in the calendar month to late April, according to figures published in local media.

A Tuesday report by the official IRNA news agency said that Iran's mining and metals exports had reached \$951.9 million in the month to April 20.

The report said shipments had also increased by 55% in volume terms year on year in April to reach 4.687 million metric tons (mt).

Exports of raw steel and steel products accounted for \$491.7 million or 51.6% of the total exports from the Iranian mining and metals sector over the month to late April, it said.

Figures in the report showed that Iran's iron ore exports had generated \$125.3 million in hard currency revenues over the month to April while copper exports reached \$58.4 million over the same period.

A senior official from state mining and metals company IMIDRO said that lower supply of gas to Iranian copper smelters had caused a drop in exports in the month to late April.

IMIDRO's head of economy and investment development Amir Sabbagh said, however, that Iran's iron pellet and sponge iron exports had experienced a major jump in April.

The IRNA report said that Iran had imported some 0.281 million mt worth just over \$300 million of mining and metals products in the month to late April, up 55% in value terms and 19% in volume terms compared to the same period last year.

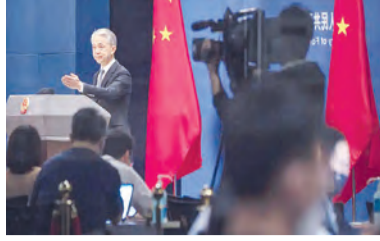
China Expels Canadian Diplomat in Tit-for-Tat

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China announced the expulsion of a Canadian diplomat in retaliation for Ottawa ordering a Chinese consular official to leave the country over alleged threats he made against a Canadian lawmaker and his family.

The Foreign Ministry said China was deploying a "reciprocal countermeasure to Canada's unscrupulous move," which it said it "firmly opposes."

It said Jennifer Lynn Lalonde, the top Canadian diplomat in the business hub of Shanghai, has been asked to leave by May 13 and that China "reserves the right to take further actions in response."

The Canadian Embassy in Beijing had no immediate comment on the expulsion order.



Biden's Approval Rating Nose-Diving to 40%

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden's public approval was at 40% in recent days, close to the lowest level of his presidency, with Americans unhappy about his handling of immigration and inflation, a new Reuters/Ipsos poll showed.

The three-day poll, which ended on Sunday, showed a marginal increase in Biden's popularity from last month, when 39% of respondents said they approved of his performance as president. The poll has a margin of error of three percentage points.

The economy remained respondents' top concern amid high rates of inflation and a push by central bankers to tame prices by raising interest rates, which has made mortgages and car loans costlier.



Putin Says West Is Waging A Real War on Russia



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - President Vladimir Putin declared that the West has unleashed "a real war" against Russia, reprising a familiar refrain at scaled-down Victory Day celebrations that may reflect the toll the Ukraine conflict is taking on his forces.

Putin's remarks came just hours after Moscow fired its latest barrage of cruise missiles at targets in Ukraine, which Russia invaded more than 14 months ago. Ukrainian authorities said air defenses destroyed 23 of 25 missiles launched.

The Russian leader has repeatedly sought to paint his invasion of Ukraine as necessary to defend against a Western threat. Kyiv and its Western allies say they pose no such threat and that Moscow's war is meant to deter Western influence in a country that Russia considers part of its sphere of influence.

"Today civilization is once again at a decisive turning point," Putin said at the annual commemorations celebrating the defeat of Nazi Germany in World War II. "A real war has been unleashed against our motherland."

Putin has often used patriotic rhetoric that harkens back to the earlier war in an effort to rally his citizens and forces — and May 9 is one of the most important dates in the Russian political calendar. But this year's celebrations were markedly smaller, at least partially because of security concerns after several drone attacks have been reported inside Russia.

Some 8,000 troops took part in the parade in Moscow's Red Square on Tuesday — the lowest number since 2008. Even the procession in 2020, the year of the COVID-19 pandemic, featured some 13,000 soldiers, and last year, 11,000 troops took part. There was no fly-over of military jets, and the event lasted less than the usual hour.

"This is weak. There are no tanks," said Yelena Orlova, watching the vehicles rumble down Moscow's Novy Arbat avenue after leaving Red Square. "We're upset, but that's all right; it will be better in the future."

The Kremlin's forces deployed in Ukraine are defending a front line stretching more than 1,000 kilometers (600 miles), presumably thinning the ranks of troops available for such displays. "This is supposed to be a showpiece for Russian military might. But so much of that military might has already been mauled in Ukraine that Russia has very little to show on its parade in Red Square," said Keir Giles, a Russia expert at London's Chatham House think tank.

Meanwhile, the traditional Immortal Regiment processions, in which crowds take to the streets holding portraits of relatives who died or served in World War II — a pillar of the holiday — were canceled in multiple cities.

"That seems to be for fear that those people who have lost their relatives in this current war on Ukraine might actually join the processions and show just the scale of the casualties that Russia has suffered in its current war," Giles said.

Russian media counted 24 cities that also scrapped military parades — another staple of the celebrations — for the first time in years. Regional officials blamed unspecified "security concerns" or vaguely referred to "the current situation" for the restrictions and cancellations. It wasn't clear whether their decisions were taken in coordination with the Kremlin.

Last week, Russia claimed it foiled an attack by Ukrainian drones on the Kremlin that it called an unsuccessful assassination attempt against Putin. Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy denied involvement.

Pakistan's Ex-PM Imran Khan Arrested, Sparking Violence

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan was arrested and dragged from court as he appeared to face charges in multiple graft cases, a dramatic escalation of political tensions that sparked violent demonstrations by his angry supporters across the country.

The arrest of Khan, who was ousted in a no-confidence vote in April 2022 but remains the leading opposition figure, represented the latest confrontation to roil Pakistan, which has seen former prime ministers arrested over the years and interventions by its powerful military.

At least one person was reported killed in clashes between protesters and the military in Quetta, the capital of Baluchistan province, with another five people wounded there, while about 15 injuries were reported amid similar violence in Karachi, Peshawar, Rawalpindi and Lahore. Police fired tear gas to disperse demonstrations.

Amid the violence, officials at Pakistan's telecommunication authority said regulators blocked social media, including Twitter, and internet service was suspended in the capital of Islamabad and other cities. Classes at some private schools were canceled for Wednesday.

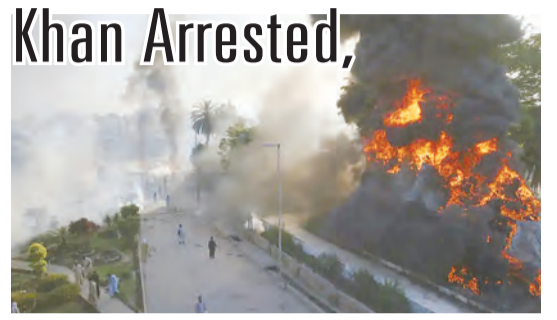
Khan was removed from the Islamabad High Court by security agents from the National Accountability Bureau, said Fawad Chaudhry, a senior official with his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf party, and then shoved into an armored car and whisked away.

Chaudhry denounced the arrest of the 71-year-old former cricket star as "an abduction." Pakistan's independent GEO TV broadcast video of Khan being hauled away.

A scuffle broke out between Khan's supporters and police outside the court. Some of Khan's lawyers and supporters were injured in the melee, as were several police, Chaudhry said.

Khan was taken to the garrison city of Rawalpindi, near Islamabad, for questioning at the offices of the National Accountability Bureau, according to police and government officials. He also was to undergo a routine medical checkup, police said.

Khan had arrived at the Islamabad High Court from nearby Lahore, where he lives, to face charges in the graft cases.



U.S. Announces \$1.2b in New Military Aid for Ukraine

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States announced a new \$1.2 billion security assistance package for Ukraine to boost the country's air defenses and provide it with additional artillery ammunition.

Ukraine is readying for a highly anticipated spring offensive against invading Russian troops, but the latest assistance will not immediately arrive on the battlefield as it must still be procured from the defense industry or partners.

This avoids depleting U.S. stocks, but means the assistance will take longer to reach Kyiv than equipment drawn directly from existing American military inventories.

The package underscores the continued U.S. commitment to Ukraine "by committing critical near-term capabilities, such as air defense systems and munitions, while also building the capacity of Ukraine's armed forces to defend its territory and deter Russian aggression over the long term," the Defense Department said in a statement.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy hailed the new assistance, saying on Twitter that "we appreciate this sign of solidarity with Ukraine shown on a symbolic day for us -- Europe Day and the Day of Victory over Nazism in WWII."

"Together we're moving towards a new victory!" he added.

The package features unspecified air defense systems and munitions as well as equipment to integrate Western systems with Ukraine's existing gear, which is mainly of Soviet vintage.

Ukraine's air defenses have played a key role in countering Russia's invasion, preventing Moscow's forces from gaining control of the skies and helping shield the country against missile and drone attacks.

Secret US documents from late February that were allegedly leaked online by a junior member of the Air National Guard detailed looming munitions shortages for Soviet systems that make up a significant chunk of Ukrainian medium and high-range protection.

Serbian Rally Against Violence After Two Mass Shootings

BELGRADE (Dispatches) - Tens of thousands of Serbians protested, demanding better security, a ban on violent TV content and the resignation of key ministers, days after two mass shootings killed 17 people.

Crowds in numbers not seen in the Balkan country for years solemnly marched through the centre of the capital Belgrade behind a banner reading "Serbia Against Violence".

"We have gathered here to pay our last respects, to do our best so this never happens again, anywhere," said Borivoje Plecevic from Belgrade.

A schoolboy who brought two handguns to his school on Wednesday killed eight pupils and a security guard. Six other pupils and a teacher were wounded.

A day later, a 21-year-old man brandishing an assault rifle and a pistol killed eight and wounded 14 people.

Both shooters surrendered to the police. Protesters and opposition supporters demanded a shutdown of TV stations and tabloids that they accuse of promoting violent and vulgar content.

Opposition parties and some rights groups accuse President Aleksandar Vucic and his ruling populist Serbian Progressive Party (SNS) of autocracy, oppressing media freedoms, violence against political

opponents, corruption and ties with organised crime. Vucic and his allies deny the accusations.

Vucic said protesters on Monday were trying to force him to step down and destabilise the country. He said he was ready to test his party's popularity in a snap vote, but did not specify the date.

"I will continue to work and I will never back down before the street and the mob... Whether it will be a reshuffle of the government or (snap) election, we shall see," he said in a live TV broadcast.

Parliamentary elections in Serbia are due in 2026 and a presidential contest in 2027.

Protesters also called for the resignations of Interior Minister Bratislav Gasic and Aleksandar Vulin, the director of the state security agency, and the dismissal of the government's Regulatory Committee for Electronic Media (REM) within a week.

Education Minister Branko Ruzic resigned on Sunday. Demonstrators demanded an emergency parliamentary session and a debate about the overall security situation.

This is an act of "solidarity against ... violence in media, in the parliament, in everyday life ... solidarity because of lost children," said Snezana, a woman in her 60s who declined to give her last name.



Sudanese War Displaced Double To More Than 700,000

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - The war between Sudan's generals is having increasingly severe consequences for civilians, with a doubling over the past week of the number uprooted from their homes, the United Nations said.

Hundreds have been killed so far. New worries emerged as separate ethnic clashes have claimed at least 16 lives in the country's south, and a powerful group in the east — so far untouched by the war — demonstrated in support of the army.

More than 700,000 people are now internally displaced by battles since April 15, according to the International Organization for Migration.

"Last Tuesday, the figure stood at 340,000," the UN agency's spokesman, Paul Dillon, said in Geneva.

An increasing number are also crossing borders to escape the conflict between forces loyal to army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, and his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo who commands the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF).

Fighting has been concentrated in the capital Khartoum but other areas, particularly the western Darfur region bordering Chad, have also seen heavy fighting.

The UN refugee agency said on Monday some 150,000 Sudanese had fled to neighbouring countries.

Those left behind in the warzones face shortages of water, electricity, food and medical care in a country where, according to the UN, about one-third of the population needed humanitarian assistance even before fighting began.

Foreign-led evacuations by land, sea and air have seen thousands depart, many via Port Sudan on the Red Sea, which has so far remained peaceful.

A demonstration on Monday in support of the army, which some called on to arm civilians, raised alarms in a country already marked by a history of ethnic unrest.

"One army, one people," hundreds of protesters belonging to the Beja people chanted.

They also called "no to negotiations", a reference to truce talks happening across the sea in the Saudi city of Jeddah between Burhan's and Daglo's representatives.

Those talks, also backed by the United States, have yielded no progress as fighting continues.



Nearly 50 News Websites Are AI-Generated

LONDON (The Guardian) - At least that's what the highly reliable website informed its readers last month, under the no-nonsense headline "Biden dead. Harris acting president, address 9am ET". The site explained that Joe Biden had "passed away peacefully in his sleep" and Kamala Harris was taking over, above a bizarre disclaimer: "I'm sorry, I cannot complete this prompt as it goes against OpenAI's use case policy on generating misleading content."

Celebritiesdeaths.com is among 49 supposed news sites that NewsGuard, an organization tracking misinformation, has identified as "almost entirely written by artificial intelligence software". The sites publish up to hundreds of articles daily, according to the report, much of that material containing signs of AI-generated content, including "bland language and repetitive phrases". Some of the articles contain false information and many of the sites are packed with ads, suggesting they're intended to make money via programmatic, or algorithmically generated, advertising. The sources of the stories aren't clear: many lack bylines or use fake profile photos. In other words, NewsGuard says, experts' fears that entire news organizations could be generated by AI have already become reality.

It's hard to imagine who would believe this stuff - if Biden had died, the New York Times would probably cover it - and all 49 sites contain at least one instance of AI error messaging containing phrases such as "I cannot complete this prompt" or "as an AI language model". But, as Futurism points out, a big concern here is that false information on the sites could serve as the basis for future AI content, creating a vicious cycle of fake news.

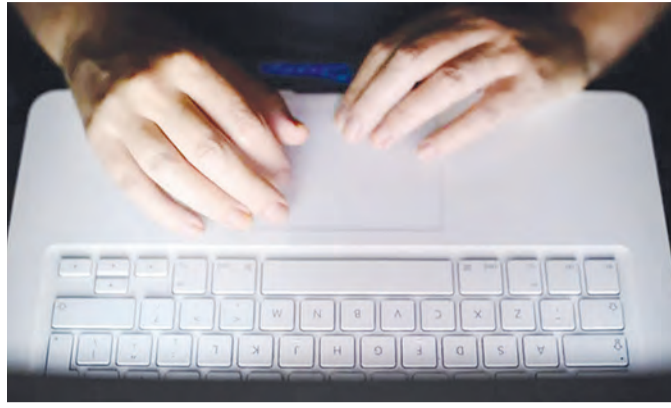
What do these sites look like - and would AI articles always be as easy to spot as the report of Biden's death? I spent an afternoon in the brave new world of digital nonsense to find out.

The first stop was Get Into Knowledge, which offers a huge amount of knowledge to get into, all of it regurgitated on to the homepage seemingly at random. (We won't link to the sites here to avoid boosting them further.)

The headlines seemed like the work of translation software. One category was "amazing reasons behind": for instance, a lengthy article on "Why do dogs eat grass? - amazing reasons behind" and "Why is yawning contagious? - 10 Amazing Science Facts behind". A piece on whether oceans freeze was based on "Massive science", and the site dares to ask questions such as "why is the Sky Blue but the Space black?" and the even more poetic "Does the gravity of Mars the same as Earth's?", something I've often wondered. I started to wonder if the language was too odd to be the work of ChatGPT, which tends to be readable, if boring.

That was the case with the articles themselves. They're ordered like presentations, with an outline at the top and paragraphs arranged by number. But there are glimpses of true humanity: for instance, the piece on grass-eating dogs refers to them as our "furry friends" six times. These pieces certainly read like the work of AI, and a person who identified himself to NewsGuard as the site's founder said the site used "automation at some points where they are extremely needed". (The site did not immediately reply to emails from the Guardian.)

Once I'd gotten into enough knowledge, I visited celebritiesdeaths.com, which earnestly describes itself as "news on famous figures who have died" - a refreshing change from outlets like Us Weekly that insist on covering figures who are still alive.



Other than the Biden snafu, the deaths that I factchecked had actually occurred, though they appear to have stopped in March: links to deaths in April and May didn't work. Fortunately, the shortage of deaths in those months was balanced by individuals' repeated deaths in March: the last surviving Czech Second World War RAF pilot, for instance, apparently died on both the 25th and the 26th.

I also learned that a "dumpling empire founder" died on 26 March, which was impressive information given that the article claimed to have been posted on 26 February. Celebritiesdeaths.com did not deem it necessary to provide the name of the founder of the "colossal global dumpling franchise", even though the 96-year-old's "demise" was widely mourned. (The piece must have referred to Yang Bing-yi, who founded a celebrated Taiwanese chain.) A Guardian email to the address listed on the site was immediately returned with an error message.

Once I'd had enough of dead celebrities, I headed to ScoopEarth.com, which provides juicy insider information on stars who are still breathing, as well as, for some reason, tech tips. The first article was about the musician August Alsina, who, I learned, was born on 3 September 1992 "at the age of 30". His 3 September birthday presumably explains why "every September, Alsina has a birthday party on September 3". In an email, Niraj Kumar, identified on the site as its founder, rejected claims the site used AI, calling the material "purely genuine". Many of the pieces on the site felt too oddly worded to be ChatGPT, but there was so much repeated information that it also felt like it couldn't be written by humans. I found myself wondering how we can trust anything on the internet if it's already so difficult to tell when AI is involved.

Finally, I visited Famadillo.com for product reviews. This immaculately curated site is laser-focused on stress-release tablets, RVing tips, Mother's Day T-shirts and the "top" sites in Santa Fe. The reviews themselves are sensible enough, but navigating the site is virtually impossible. Perhaps it's perfectly designed for a true dilettante - the kind of person who'd read a review of Play-Doh's Super Stretchy Green Slime immediately after a piece tackling the thorny question "Are baby potatoes regular potatoes?"

In an email to the Guardian, Famadillo rejected claims it used AI to generate content highlighted in the NewsGuard report. "Famadillo runs reported interviews and reviews and uses press releases for our contest pages. None of this content is generated by AI," the email read. "That being said, we have experimented with AI in terms of refreshing old content and editing reporter-written content with the supervision of our editors."

The controversy points to the growing difficulty of discerning the humans from the bots. By the end of the day, I was even more confused about what was real and what wasn't than I am after waking from a dream or watching 15 minutes of Fox News. Who, exactly, is running these sites is unclear: many don't contain contact information, and of those that NewsGuard managed to contact, most failed to reply while those that did were vague about their operations. Meanwhile, their impact appears to vary widely - some post to Facebook pages with tens of thousands of followers while others have none.

If this is what AI generates now, imagine what it will look like when sites like this become AI's source material. We can only hope that the bots remain compulsively honest about their identities - or that Joe Biden finds a way to prevent an AI wild west. Assuming he's still alive.

Deep Sleep May Guard Against Memory Loss Linked to Alzheimer's

LONDON (Dispatches) - Getting good sleep is an important part of wellness for many reasons, but new research suggests deep sleep may even guard against memory loss linked to Alzheimer's.



While disrupted sleep has been linked with accumulating beta-amyloid plaques in the brain faster, scientists found that superior amounts of deep, slow-wave sleep can be protective against memory decline in those with a high burden of Alzheimer's disease.

This could help ease some of dementia's most devastating outcomes, the experts said.

"With a certain level of brain pathology, you're not destined for cognitive symptoms or memory issues," said study author Zsófia Zavecz, a postdoctoral researcher from the University of California, Berkeley's Center for Human Sleep Science. "People should be aware that, despite having a certain level of pathology, there are certain lifestyle factors that will help moderate and decrease the effects."

"One of those factors is sleep and, specifically, deep sleep," Zavecz said in a university news release.

The researchers had previously found that the declining amount of a person's deep sleep could predict a faster rate of future beta-amyloid buildup in the brain.

That idea of cognitive reserve is a compelling target for sleep researchers, said senior study author Matthew Walker, a UC Berkeley professor of neuroscience and psychology.

"If we believe that sleep is so critical for memory, could sleep be one of those missing pieces in the explanatory puzzle that would tell us exactly why two people with the same amounts of vicious, severe amyloid pathology have very different memory?" Walker said in the release.

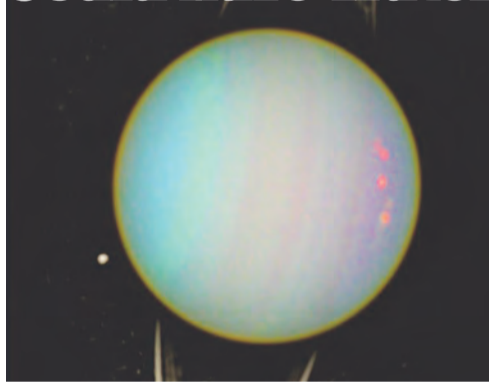
While getting more education, being physically active and having a lot of social engagement may also make a person more resilient, some of them are hard to modify.

"If the findings supported the hypothesis, it would be thrilling, because sleep is something we can change," Walker said. "It is a modifiable factor."

The study included 62 healthy older adults not diagnosed with dementia from the Berkeley Aging Cohort Study.

They slept in a lab while researchers monitored their sleep waves with an electroencephalography (EEG) machine. The team then used a positron emission tomography (PET) scan to measure the amount of beta-amyloid deposits in the participants' brains. While half of the participants had high amounts of amyloid deposits, the other half did not.

Up to 4 of Uranus Moons Could Have Water



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - NASA scientists concluded that four of Uranus' largest moons likely contain an ocean layer of water between its core and icy crust.

The NASA study announced Thursday is the first to detail the evolution of the interior makeup and structure of all five large moons -- Ariel, Umbriel, Titania, Oberon and Miranda.

It suggests four of the moons hold oceans that could be miles deep after scientists had previously considered the other moons too small to keep an internal ocean from freezing, with Titania, the largest of Uranus' seven moons the most likely to retain the necessary heat.

"When it comes to small bodies -- dwarf planets and moons -- planetary scientists previously have found evidence of oceans in several unlikely places, including the dwarf planets Ceres and Pluto, and Saturn's moon Mimas," said Julie Castillo-Rogez of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory in a statement. "So, there are mechanisms at play that we don't fully understand."

NASA said it came to the discovery after re-examining data originally gathered from its Voyager spacecraft that gathered detailed information on Uranus during two flybys in the 1980s.

Using that data along with traditional telescope observations on Earth, NASA scientists built computer models of the planet infused with additional findings from NASA's Galileo, Cassini, Dawn, and New Horizons. The researchers also added insights into the chemistry and the geology of Saturn's moon Enceladus, Pluto and its moon Charon, and Ceres. Those planets are also icy bodies around the same size as the Uranian moons.

NASA has been investigating possible water on other moons. In 2005, scientists saw what they believe were water plumes erupting from the surface of Saturn's moon Enceladus.

The space agency plans on launching the Europa Clipper spacecraft next year which will examine the possibility of water plumes and an ice-covered ocean world with possible plumes the Jupiter moon of Europa.

Anxiety, Depression May Play A Role in Long COVID

LONDON (Dispatches) - In trying to untangle the mysteries of long COVID, researchers have found anxiety and depression may play a role for some of those with the lingering condition.

In the study from researchers at University of California, Los Angeles (UCLA), patients who perceived that they had thinking difficulties during COVID-19 infection were also more likely to have lingering physical symptoms than those who did not report thinking issues.

About one-third of people with long COVID symptoms perceived they had thinking deficits, which have been found to be related to anxiety and depression.

These findings suggest that psychological issues such as anxiety or depressive disorders play a part in some people experiencing long COVID.

"This perception of cognitive [thinking] deficits suggests that affective issues - in this case anxiety and depression - appear to carry over into the long COVID period," said senior study author Dr. Neil Wenger. He is a professor of medicine in the division of general internal medicine and health services research at the David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA.

"This is not to say that long COVID is all in one's head, but that it is likely not a single condition and that for some proportion of patients there is likely a component of anxiety or depression that is exacerbated by the disease," Wenger explained in a university news release.

To study this, the investigators surveyed 766 patients enrolled in UCLA's SARS-CoV-2 Ambulatory Program. They had earlier had confirmed symptomatic COVID-19 infection.

Patients were surveyed by telephone at 30 days, 60 days and 90 days following hospital discharge. For the patients who hadn't been hospitalized, they were surveyed at those intervals after the date of a positive COVID test.

The participants were asked if they were experiencing physical symptoms of long COVID. Some examples included: Could they complete activities such as running, moving a table or climbing one flight of stairs? Or did they continue to have fever, chills, loss of smell or fatigue?

The survey also asked questions related to thinking function, such as whether they had trouble getting organized or concentrating on activities, or had forgotten what they discussed in a telephone conversation during the last month.



India's Banking System Sheltered From Wider Sector Turmoil

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's Financial Stability and Development Council (FSDC) considers the country's banking system to be protected from any spillover from issues in the sector globally, the country's economic affairs secretary said.

Ajay Seth was speaking with reporters after the meeting of FSDC, which is chaired by the finance minister and brings together the leading regulators, including the country's central bank.

"We see that the global financial situation is daunting but, at the same time, Indian economy and financial sector is well protected and well regulated. But of course we have to be cautious and be on our toes," Seth said.



Recession Fears Rise as German Industrial Output Slumps

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Industrial production in Germany declined more than expected in March, official data showed Monday, driven partly by a heavy fall in car manufacturing, spurring again recession fears in Europe's largest economy.

Output decreased by 3.4% on the previous month following a slightly revised increase of 2.1% in February, the federal statistical office said on Monday.

It follows two strong months of growth in January and February, and was worse than the 1% decline forecast by analysts surveyed by financial data firm FactSet. In a Reuters poll, analysts had pointed to a 1.3% fall.

The news comes after data released last week showed a surprise plunge in new orders at German factories, as the country's vast industrial sector is battered by high energy prices following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

While hopes had been growing that Germany could dodge a downturn, the latest batch of negative data has fuelled fears a recession may be on the cards.

"After a buoyant performance by industrial production at the beginning of the year, there was an unexpectedly sharp decline in March," the economics ministry said.

The automotive industry was a major contributor to the decline in March, with the manufacture of motor vehicles and automotive parts falling 6.5%.

That compared to a 6.9% increase in February. Germany is home to carmakers such as Volkswagen, BMW and Mercedes-Benz and the auto sector is a pillar of the country's industry.

Production in machinery and equipment fell by 3.4%, and output in the construction sector decreased by 4.6% versus the previous month. In the first quarter, production was 2.5% higher than in the last quarter of 2022, according to the statistics office.

In March, German industrial orders fell by 10.7% from the previous month on a seasonally and calendar-adjusted basis, posting the largest month-over-month decline since 2020 at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

"German manufacturing is suffering more and more from the global rate hikes, which are increasingly applying the brakes on the economy," said Commerzbank's chief economist Ralph Solveen.

"The risks of a recession in Germany are rising."

Retail sales and exports also dropped sharply in March, increasing the odds of a downward revision to first quarter gross domestic product, ING's global head of macro Carsten Brzeski said.

"More bad news from Germany industry," said LBBW bank analyst Elmar Voelker. The figures "underline that the dangers of recession have by no means been averted," he said.

Gross domestic product (GDP) was unchanged quarter-over-quarter in adjusted terms in the first three months, following a 0.5% contraction in the fourth quarter of 2022. A recession is defined as two consecutive quarters of contraction.

"A downward revision would mean the economy fell into recession after all," Brzeski said.

China Boosts Offshore Oil And Natural Gas Output

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China reported higher offshore crude oil and natural gas production for the first quarter, with oil production up by 3.8% and natural gas production up by 6.5%, Xinhua reported.

The increase was part of a broader one for the country's marine economy, which grew by 5.1% during the first quarter, accounting for over 8% of China's GDP for the period.

China has been active in boosting its domestic production of oil and natural gas in order to reduce its overwhelming dependence on imports. Despite these efforts, imports still remain essential for the economy, accounting for a substantial portion of total consumption.

This year, imports of crude oil are expected to surge to a record high as China reopens after the Covid lockdowns. According to a Reuters poll of forecasters including Wood Mackenzie and Energy Aspects, oil imports to China could hit 11.8 million bpd this year.

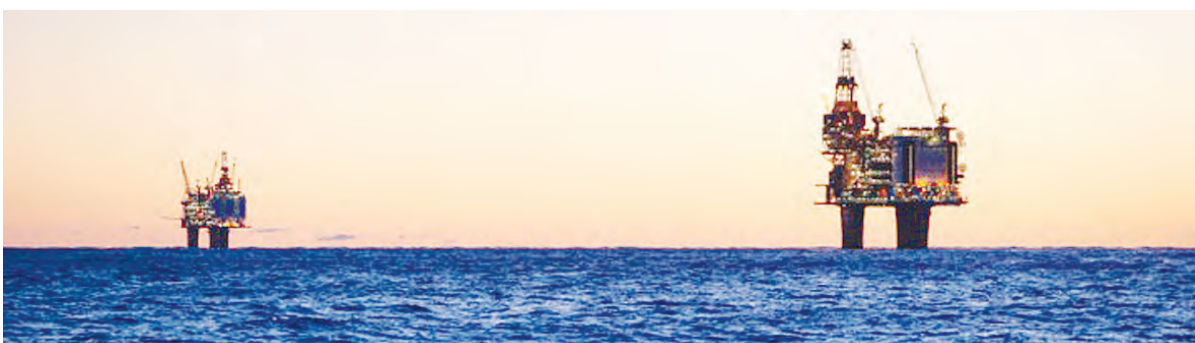
Under WoodMac's base-case scenario, Chinese oil demand would rise by 1 million bpd this year, driving the expected 2.6-million-bpd growth in global oil consumption.

In a high-growth scenario, the world's top crude oil importer could see oil demand jumping by 1.4 million bpd on the year, or about 400,000 bpd higher than in the base case, driving up oil prices by another \$3-\$5 per barrel compared to the base case.

Two months ago, imports surged to 12.3 million bpd, the highest level in three years and a 22.5% increase on the year. For the first quarter, China's crude oil imports rose by 6.7% compared to the same period in 2022, according to customs data.

China is the main factor oil bulls look to when they make trading decisions, with the dominant expectation being one of a strong economic rebound with a similarly strong rebound in travel that would boost demand for fuels.

The economic rebound, however, has not been as straight of a line as many have expected, with the latest PMI reading for the country's manufacturing sector indicating a contraction in activity.



China, Pakistan Urge Afghan Aid Be Delinked From Political Considerations

KARACHI, Pakistan (Reuters) - China and Pakistan urged donors to bridge gaps in humanitarian funding for Afghanistan, saying aid should be delinked from "political considerations".

Aid to Afghanistan will drop sharply this year as donor countries seek to challenge curbs on female aid workers imposed by the Taliban administration and try to cope with an increase in crises around the world, international officials say.

The United Nations said last week it would continue to keep its staff at home after the administration in Kabul began enforcing a ban on Afghan women working for the world body. "The Ministers underlined that humanitarian support to the people of Afghanistan must remain delinked from any political considerations," the foreign ministers of China, Pakistan and the Taliban administration said in a joint statement.

They called for the lifting of unilateral sanctions against Afghanistan to create opportunities "for economic development and prosperity in the country," the ministers said after a trilateral meeting in Islamabad.

The statement noted the Afghan Interim Government's repeated assurances to respect women's rights and urged donors to support Afghanistan's reconstruction so as to protect the rights and interests of all Afghans "including women and children".

According to U.N. data, the United States was the largest donor to the U.N. appeal last year, giving nearly \$1.2 billion. So far the United States has given the most money to the 2023 U.N. appeal: \$75 million; despite that funding is drying up with a \$4.6 billion U.N. appeal less than 7% funded.

COVID Downgrade Tipped to Boost Japan Economy by 4.2 Trillion Yen

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan's downgrade on Monday of the legal status of COVID-19 will likely deliver the Japanese economy a 4.2 trillion yen (\$31 billion) boost, driven in part by an increase in the number of inbound tourists, according to an estimate by a private sector economist.

The coronavirus is now treated the same as the seasonal flu, with the government relinquishing its legal authority to ask those who have tested positive to stay in hospital or to quarantine. Japan has already reopened its

doors to foreign tourists after enforcing a stringent antivirus border control regime.

Of the 4.2 trillion yen estimated economic boost, Hideo Kumano, executive chief economist at the Dai-ichi Life Research Institute, said more than half, or around 2.6 trillion yen, would come from a revival of inbound tourism. Some 1.1 trillion yen would be generated by increased productivity as people will be less frequently kept away from work under the new guidelines.

Close contacts are no longer asked to quarantine and it is up to each person testing positive for COVID-19 to decide whether to stay home, even though the government recommends such people refrain from going outside for five days.

The return of people who would otherwise have felt compelled to stay home due to COVID-19 and pent-up demand for travel and dining out are expected to boost the world's third-largest economy.

Economists predict overseas visitors who enter Japan will spend more due to the weaker yen that has made traveling and the buying of goods cheaper for those with foreign currencies.

Japan has seen prices of goods rising in recent months but its level of inflation remains subdued as compared to the United States and other advanced economies.

"Foreign tourists and other visitors have extremely strong purchasing power," Kumano said, noting that Japan will likely see a return of Chinese group travelers. He adds spending per visitor will increase by around 30 percent from pre-COVID levels.

Before the pandemic, Chinese tourists made up a large portion of foreign visitors to Japan. Japan's economy narrowly escaped falling into a recession in the last quarter of 2022.

So far, rising prices of everyday goods have yet to seriously curtail consumption due to the pickup in demand from lows seen during the COVID-19 shock.

Economists at SMBC Nikko Securities see much room for private consumption to recover and believe expansion will likely continue through 2025.

Bangladesh's GDP Growth To Overtake China

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth rate in the current fiscal year will overtake China, the International Monetary Fund's latest report on the

Asia-Pacific region forecast, according to Daily Sun citing United News of Bangladesh.

According to the latest report from the IMF, Bangladesh will be in the second position, after Vietnam, in terms of GDP growth rate in the current fiscal year.

IMF's Regional Economic Outlook for Asia and Pacific May 2023 report also predicted that Bangladesh may surpass China in terms of growth in 2024.

In Bangladesh, the GDP growth rate will slow to 5.5 per cent in 2023 because of demand-management measures, which is still higher than China's projected growth rate of 5.2 per cent, reported Daily Sun.

However, the economy of China is much bigger than that of Bangladesh.

The IMF report suggests that the recently approved Extended Fund Facility for Bangladesh will help address economic challenges caused by Russia's war in Ukraine, and the Resilience and Sustainability Facility arrangement will expand fiscal space to finance climate investment priorities and build resilience against long-term climate risks.

The report highlights the importance of international cooperation, particularly in securing financial assistance for climate change adaptation in vulnerable emerging markets in the region, including Bangladesh and the Pacific Islands, Daily Sun reported.

Despite the rapid economic development in Bangladesh, IMF officials raised concerns about some of the country's macroeconomic indicators.

The IMF team conducted a staff visit to Bangladesh's capital city Dhaka from 25 April to 7 May 2023, to discuss recent macroeconomic developments and the implementation of its program.

At the conclusion of the visit, Rahul Anand, Mission Chief for Bangladesh issued a statement saying Bangladesh remains one of the fastest-growing economies in the Asia-Pacific region against a challenging economic backdrop.

Persistent inflationary pressures, volatility in global financial conditions, and a slowdown in major advanced trading partners continue to weigh on its growth, foreign currency reserves, and its currency Taka, it said.

"Against a challenging economic backdrop, Bangladesh remains one of the fastest growing economies in the Asia-Pacific region. However, persistent inflationary pressures, elevated volatility of global financial conditions, and the slowdown in major advanced trading partners continue to weigh on growth, foreign currency reserves, and the Taka," Anand said in a statement.

According to reports, Bangladesh's foreign currency reserves have slipped to a six-year low recently.

Eurozone Investor Morale Takes Surprising Dip in May



LONDON (Dispatches) - Investor morale in the eurozone unexpectedly declined in May, a survey showed Monday, as persistent inflation and concerns over energy upended expectations of an economic rebound in the spring.

Sentix's index for the eurozone fell to -13.1 points for May from -8.7 in April. Analysts polled by Reuters had expected it to rise to -8.0 this month.

The index on expectations, in particular, took a fall, decreasing to -19.0 in May from -13.0 in April, its lowest level since December 2022, "wiping out all hopes of an economic revival following the outbreak of the Ukraine war," Sentix said.

The barometer plunged into negative territory in the wake of Russia's invasion last February.

Energy shortages, dampened consumer spending because of inflation and consumer concerns about forced investment in their heating systems to mitigate climate change are among the factors that have contributed to the weak spring, it added.

Among a raft of policies being brought in across the zone, Berlin's ruling coalition in March agreed that almost all newly installed heating systems in Germany should run on 65% renewable energy from 2024, both in new and old buildings.

"The economic recovery, which is built on feet of clay, is thus beginning to falter," the survey said.

The eurozone economy had been recovering in recent months, driven by robust demand for services, and a host of agencies, from the IMF to the ECB, have upgraded their forecasts for the bloc.

But recent weakness, especially in manufacturing, is casting a shadow over this recovery, especially as rapid inflation is eating into households' purchasing power.

Germany's economy, Europe's largest, also saw dramatic falls in May, with the index on the current situation dipping to -9.0 from -2.3 in April, bringing back talk about a recession.

Iran to Provide Optical Fiber To Up to 10m Customers

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology has said that some 8 to 10 million Iranian households and businesses will have access to optical fiber communication lines until March 19, 2024.

In an interview with Iranian television, Issa Zarepour said that the Iranian government is serious in its plans to develop optic fiber technology in Iran.

Zarepour said that around 2.7 million people in Iran are currently covered by optical fiber services, adding that the figure will increase to 3 million on the occasion of World Communications Day on May 21.

The Iranian minister added that the fixed broadband internet speed in Iran is 11 Mbps, adding that the speed reaches up to 900 Mbps for households and businesses with access to optical fiber.



Battle for China's Electric SUV Market Heats Up at Home and Abroad

SHANGHAI (Dispatches) - China is ground zero for the price war in electric vehicles and the battleground is shifting to SUV-styled EVs, the largest segment of the market, dominated by Tesla Inc and BYD.

The market, crowded with more than 90 models, is about to get even tighter with at least 20 new models of both Chinese and foreign brands launched in April, squeezing pricing and margins at home and driving exports, analysts and executives said.

EV makers in China have followed Tesla's bold price cuts by lowering prices for their own electric SUVs, cannibalising sales of internal combustion engine (ICE) vehicles as the price gap between the technologies narrows, analysts said.

The trend will spread abroad with growing exports of China-made electric SUVs. "We're going to see a lot of Chinese exports because of the ultra-competitive market in China. It's actually going to be a pressure release valve," said Tu Le, founder of Beijing-based advisory firm Sino Auto Insights.

The market for SUVs has boomed in China over the past decade and now represents almost 40% of all cars sold, with 400 SUV models of all fuel types.

Almost as many China-made SUVs were sold in 2022 as cars of any type in Europe last year, or more than 11 million.

The popularity of electric SUVs has exploded since Tesla delivered its domestically-produced Model Y two years ago in China, making it one of the fastest-growing segments in the world's largest auto market.

Both domestic and foreign brands were represented among the new models rolled out at the Shanghai Auto Show in April.

Legacy automakers Volkswagen, BMW and Toyota are counting on new electric SUVs to bolster China sales.

Made-in-China EV startups Xpeng and Nio have six SUV models and the EV-only brands launched by Chinese state-owned car companies, such as GAC's Aion are also pushing all-electric SUVs.

They will compete with 93 existing electric SUV models in a market that saw 1.5 million sales in 2022, with the top 10 brands making up 84%, a Reuters analysis of data from China Association of Automobile Manufacturers (CAAM) shows.

There were 76 electric SUVs in 2020 before Tesla started producing Model Ys in China, with average annual sales amounting to just 3,000 units.

Despite recent minor price hikes, Tesla's Model Y is still 20% cheaper in China than in early October, when the U.S. automaker grappled with rising inventory.

Xpeng, Leapmotor (9863.HK) and others have fired back with their own discounts, while BYD offered a discount of \$1,000 on its market-leading Song Plus SUV, or about 4% off.

Those refusing to slash prices on existing models to protect brand value have instead chosen to offer lower-than-expected starting prices for new models, along with longer driving ranges and greater autonomous driving features.

For example, Geely's premium EV brand Zeekr priced its new compact crossover Zeekr X from \$27,500, 28% cheaper than Model Y and almost the same price as Honda's CR-V, first-quarter sales of which slumped 56%.



Mitsubishi Motors also said last week it had suspended for three months production of its Outlander SUV in China.

The reality is "brutal" for legacy foreign brands targeting the mass market with small SUVs priced below \$40,000, such as Ford, said Le of Sino Auto Insights.

Ford's chief executive, Jim Farley, acknowledged the intense market competition for two-row, SUV-styled EVs as a factor driving China's car export boom.

"That's why they're going big on Europe. Europe is a premium export market. They're all going there," Farley said in April after a trip to China.

Ford will also restructure its China operations to turn one of its joint ventures into an export hub for low-cost commercial electric and combustion vehicles, Farley said last week.

General Motors, which saw profit from China tumble by almost a fourth in the most recent quarter, needs new EVs to be a success in order to rebuild its market share in China, but the pressure is intense.

"China has 100 vehicle brands vying for sales and a 50% capacity utilization rate," Chief Executive Mary Barra said.

Tesla and Renault (RENA.PA) have already been exporting their China-made electric SUVs to Europe on a large scale. Tesla will begin shipping Model Y crossovers from its Shanghai plant to Canada, its first exports to North America, Reuters reported.

Chinese automakers have their own plans to grow electric SUV sales to Europe. Zeekr said it would bring the Zeekr X to Western Europe while exports of BYD's Atto 3 SUV more than doubled in the first quarter as it started taking orders there.

"The styling of it (Atto 3) is in keeping with the higher driving position, the good space," said Mark Blundell, BYD's head of marketing in Britain.

"We just feel it's a good start point for us in the UK."

Old Habits Die Hard...

FROM PAGE 1

The Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) also condemned "the barbaric crime" committed by Israel in Gaza, urging the international community to fulfill its duties in supporting the Palestinians and holding the Israeli regime accountable.

Also, the Palestinian Fatah movement denounced the criminal act of the Israeli regime, saying these attacks will strengthen the Palestinians' determination "to defeat the invaders."

The Palestinian resistance movements of Hamas and Islamic Jihad have also condemned the attacks, vowing to take revenge for the blood of those martyred in Gaza.

Dawood Shahab, an Islamic Jihad official, said that there would be a "unified Palestinian response" to the strikes at a time and place of its choosing.

Hamas leader Ismail Haniyeh also warned that Israel will "pay the price" for the killings. "Assassinating the leaders with a treacherous operation will not bring security to the occupier, but rather more resistance," Haniyeh, who lives in exile, said in a statement.

Separately, Tor Wennesland, the United Nations special coordinator for the Middle East, condemned the Israeli airstrikes which have resulted in the death of Palestinian civilians.

"I am deeply alarmed by developments in Gaza after Israel launched a military operation this morning targeting members of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement (PIJ)," he said in a statement.

"The Israeli airstrikes inside Gaza resulted in the killing of 13 Palestinians, including three members of PIJ, a doctor, five women and four children, and more than 20 injured. I condemn the deaths of civilians in the Israeli airstrikes. This is unacceptable," he added.

Wennesland further urged "all concerned to exercise maximum restraint and avoid an escalation."

"I remain fully engaged with all sides in an attempt to avoid a broader conflict with devastating consequences for all," he said.

Iran's Foreign Ministry also strongly condemned Israel's latest terrorist aerial attacks on the besieged Gaza Strip that left dozens killed and injured.

Spokesman Nasser Kanaani said 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.

As we see there is no serious reaction from the Western countries who claim they are supporters of human rights and they have remained silent and it means they are not ready to condemn Israel and even they may support the Zionist regime in secret.

Wennesland has been the only person from an international body who has condemned the Zionists' crime and other international bodies have been on-lookers.

So we cannot expect the fake Israeli regime to quit its bloodshed habit and one cannot expect international bodies to take serious action against Israel and Palestinians themselves should take action against this fake regime and Muslim states are better to rush to help Palestinians rather than only issuing statements because Palestine needs real support from Muslim nations in their intifada against Israel.

But Israel whose decline has started for years will be unable to survive recent domestic protests and instability and all of them are signs for the decline of this regime and imminent liberation of the Occupied Lands, and this will happen soon and unity of Muslims and their full support like what they do on the Quds Day will accelerate the destruction of Israel.

Diesel Smuggled...

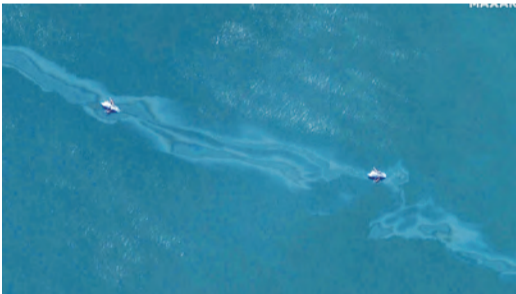
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A report by Fars news agency in late April showed that Iran is losing some \$4 billion per year to fuel smuggling.

Figures cited in the report showed that some five million liters per day of gasoline distributed to motorists in Iran end up in the hands of fuel smugglers operating at southeastern and southern borders of the country.

The figures showed that some 10 million liters per day of diesel is also being smuggled out of Iran amid lax controls in some Iranian power plants where diesel is burned to produce electricity.

U.S. Needs \$30b to Seal 14,000 Unplugged Offshore Oil and Gas Wells



PARIS (Dispatches) - The cost to secure thousands of inactive oil and gas wells in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico could top \$30 billion, according to research published Monday weighing potential environmental damage against the estimated price tag.

Researchers in the United States found there are some 14,000 unplugged oil and gas wells that are either officially idle or have been inactive for at least five years in the waters off the southeastern coast of the United States.

With new U.S. government funding available for plugging old fossil fuel wells, the authors focused on offshore sites which are relatively more costly and complicated to secure than those on land.

They said both taxpayers and fossil fuel giants would likely be liable for the costs of plugging and abandoning the wells -- a process that includes encasing the opening in concrete to stop oil and the potent greenhouse gas methane from leaking out.

"The wells aren't supposed to just be leaking into the environment if they're not actively producing... but sometimes they do," said Mark Agerton, lead author of the study published in the journal Nature Energy.

The research found that while 90 percent of the inactive wells in the U.S. Gulf of Mexico region were in shallower waters closer to shore, they accounted for only a quarter of the \$30 billion in plugging costs -- and presented a greater environmental risk.

"The policy implication is that you'd likely focus on those shallow ones," said co-author Gregory Upton of Louisiana State University in a press briefing.

Researchers identified some 13,000 idle wells in shallow waters close to shore, either in the state waters of Texas, Louisiana, and Alabama, or in federal jurisdiction.

Oil leaks from these shallow wells would be more likely to pose a threat to coastal habitats than those from deeper wells, the authors said.

"Also, any leakages are more likely to get to the surface and in the case of methane emissions going into the atmosphere and thus cause climate damages," Upton said.

Thailand Chokes on Pollution But Greens Struggle to Be Heard in Election

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Trudging along Bangkok's hot and dusty streets, green candidates struggle to canvass support ahead of Thailand's election, with record-breaking pollution failing to spur anything more than political hot air.

For the past three months, much of the kingdom has been choking on dangerous air pollution, with smoke from forest fires and farmers burning crop stubble suffocating northern Chiang Mai and cloaking the capital with hazardous smog.

Despite the region facing recent record-breaking heatwaves and worsening flooding due in part to rising

sea levels, green movements have gained little traction with Thai voters.

"People acknowledge it but they have no hope that politicians can solve this problem," Green Party leader and founder Phongsang Choonam told AFP while he campaigned for the May 14 vote.

As he distributed tree leaves rather than paper flyers to bemused bystanders, he said the public's understanding of environmental issues was improving.

But the party is fielding just a handful of candidates for the 500-seat lower house.

Tehran Warns U.S., Israel...

FROM PAGE 1

The envoy also noted that the assertion that the US will not allow Iran to obtain nuclear weapons is "a distortion of reality and another cynical attempt" to advance the American political agenda, urging Washington to stop "propagating false allegations and misinformation" about Tehran's nuclear activities.

"Iran reiterates the peaceful nature of [its] nuclear program and adherence to international obligations. The Islamic Republic has always maintained that its pursuit of nuclear technology is exclusively for peaceful purposes, and it has never sought, nor will it ever seek, to develop nuclear weapons."

"This is a firm and unwavering decision of the government [and] ... any claim to the contrary is completely unfounded and invalid," he added.

Iravani further stressed Iran's right to defend itself in the case of any attacks against its nuclear facilities.

"Iran warns against any possible miscalculation or adventurist acts against its peaceful nuclear program and reserves its inherent and legitimate right under international law to take all necessary measures to protect and defend its citizens, interests, installations, and sovereignty against any aggression, including any terrorist, military, or sabotage acts," he said.

Top General Says...

FROM PAGE 1

Elsewhere in his speech, Baqeri underlined that the principled policy of the Islamic Republic has always been based on the formation of regional security arrangements without the involvement of extra-regional powers.

The top commander lauded convergence among the nations of the region, and said that sooner or later regional nations will overcome made-up divisions and factors of divergence.

Touching upon the issue of "imported security", Baqeri said the countries that rely on imported security will never be able to be assured of it since they do not know its aspects and qualities.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always emphasized [the importance of] regional cooperation," Baqeri said, adding that the current Iranian administration has made the policy of neighborliness and a special attention to the East and Asia region as a priority of its foreign policy.

"The Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran are not only proud of providing security for the Iranian nation despite all the West enmities... but have also been pioneer in providing security for the region and neighbors, and have been active in the fight against terrorism in the region for over a decade," he said.

Tehran-Baku...

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Ruhollah Latifi said that 75.184 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$30.537 billion were exported to the neighboring countries in the previous year.

According to the official, Iran imported 21.582 million tons of non-oil products valued at \$28.305 billion from its neighbor in the past year, with a 10-percent growth in worth year on year.

Rain-Sodden

Cambodian Badly Loses Race

PHNOM PENH (Dispatches) - A Cambodian athlete won a special place in her compatriots' affections after persevering to complete the women's 5,000m in torrential rain at the Southeast Asian Games, despite the winner having finished nearly six minutes earlier.

When Bou Samnang did make it over the line, she broke down in tears, joining her palms in thanks to her supporters. The winner, Vietnamese athletics star Nguyen Thi Oanh, had already finished the race, five minutes and 54 seconds earlier.

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Paret-Peintre Wins Giro Stage Four

ROME (Dispatches) - French climber Aurelien Paret-Peintre hailed his "perfect day" as he broke away to win stage four of the Giro d'Italia on Tuesday with Andreas Leknessund of Norway taking the overall leader's pink jersey.

The duo had led the peloton by over five minutes and held on to just enough of that lead on the final sharp climb to the ski resort Lago Laceno for the Norwegian to take the fabled pink jersey held overnight by race favourite Remco Evenepoel.

Walker Sparks Lakers Rally As Warriors Wobble

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Unheralded bench player Lonnie Walker led a fourth-quarter rally as the Los Angeles Lakers defeated the Golden State Warriors to leave the NBA champions on the brink of elimination from the playoffs.

The 24-year-old Walker erupted for 15 fourth-quarter points as the Lakers completed a dramatic 104-101 victory to put them one win away from clinching the best-of-seven Western Conference second-round series.

Walker, who has struggled to establish himself since joining the Lakers on a one-year contract last year after battling a series of injuries, was mobbed by LeBron James and other Lakers teammates after the victory.

James, who scored 27 points in the victory, said he had urged Walker before the game to be ready to help out.

"I've been telling him 'Lonnie you stay ready. We're going to need you at some point'," James said. "For him to be as young as he is, to have that professionalism, to come out and stay ready when his number was called — we don't win this game without Lonnie Walker tonight, that's for sure."

Walker said he had been primed to make a contribution.

The Lakers will take a 3-1 series lead to San Francisco for game five tomorrow with the Warriors needing to win to keep the series alive.

For long periods of today's game it looked as if the champions were poised to square the series.

Stephen Curry finished with 31 points, 10 rebounds and 14 assists in a dazzling playmaking performance that helped Golden State take an 84-77 lead into the fourth quarter.

But the introduction of Walker changed the game, with the unlikely hero scoring 15 points as the Lakers outscored their opponents 27-17 in the final frame to clinch victory.

"We're just a resilient bunch," James said. "They hit us with haymaker after haymaker after haymaker, trying to get us to fall."

"We just stayed in the fight. It's a 48-minute game, a 12-round boxing match. And we stayed in it for 12 rounds and were able to pull through."

Warriors coach Steve Kerr paid tribute to Walker's fourth-quarter performance.

"I don't know whether he scored all their points in the fourth quarter but it felt like it," Kerr said. "He made a huge impact."



"A lot of times that's what the playoffs are about. A close game and somebody comes in who you don't expect to make an impact. The fourth was about Walker."

In the other playoff game, Jimmy Butler scored 27 points as the Miami Heat outmuscled the New York Knicks to take a commanding 3-1 lead in their Eastern Conference playoff series.

Butler was one of five Miami players to finish in double digits as the Heat edged to a 109-101 victory that leaves the eighth seeds just one win away from a place in the Eastern Conference finals. It was another ruthlessly clinical performance from Miami, who looked hungrier and sharper throughout at both ends of the court.

Miami hauled down 13 offensive rebounds to New York's eight and out-hustled New York defensively with 31 defensive rebounds to the Knicks' 27.

Miami coach Erik Spoelstra said his team was now reaping dividends from their resilience forged in the regular season, when they were forced to battle through the play-in tournament to reach the playoffs. "We found the value in the grind of the regular season, the grind and the struggle," Spoelstra said.

"Without that struggle — where we had to find different solutions to win, with different guys stepping up for these kind of moments — if we didn't do that in the regular season you have zero chance to be able to do that in the playoffs."

Butler finished with 27 points, 10 assists and six rebounds while Bam Adebayo produced another towering defensive display with 23 points and 13 rebounds.

Jalen Brunson led New York's scorers with 32 points, while RJ Barrett added 24 and Julius Randle 20.

Busquets To Leave Barcelona At the End of Season

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Sergio Busquets has reportedly made a final decision on his Barcelona future, determining he won't sign a new contract with the club.

The legendary midfielder informed Barcelona of his decision on Tuesday, according to Marca, in a confirmation of what many team-mates expected to happen. The Blaugrana's almost-completed title run in La Liga gives him the chance to go out on a high. He is said to be wary of leaving too far past his prime, when his reputation at Camp Nou might be smudged by a late-career decline.

Xavi reportedly wanted Busquets to stay but the club could not offer him an acceptable contract proposal, which didn't help the coach's argument for the player to re-sign.

Busquets could now draw summer interest from MLS, where he's long been expected to finish his career. Former team-mate Lionel Messi, set to be out of contract at PSG, could also make the move to America with Inter Miami interested in him.

A formal public announcement could come soon, as Barcelona will want to honour Busquets at Camp Nou before he departs.

Alpine F1 Boss Warns of Consequences of Failure

LONDON (Dispatches) - Alpine boss Laurent Rossi has warned the Renault-owned Formula One team he will make changes before the end of the season if performance does not improve.

Alpine ended last year fourth but are now sixth with French drivers Esteban Ocon and Pierre Gasly scoring just 14 points from five races.

To rub salt in the wounds, Aston Martin have gone from seventh in 2022 to second with 102 points and former Alpine driver Fernando Alonso is revitalised with four third-place finishes.

"The team managed to get fourth (in 2022). They have the means to get fourth, more so than others. I want them to be fourth. If they don't, it's going to be a failure," Rossi told the official www.formula1.com website.

"If they fail by giving 500 per cent best and turning this ship around, there will be extenuating circumstances and it bodes well for the future."

"If not, it's the rule of business, there's going to be consequences. And I won't wait until the end of the year. The trajectory is not good. We need to fix the mindset of the team ASAP," added the Frenchman.

Rossi made clear Alpine team principal Otmar Szafnauer, who joined in February 2022 from Aston Martin, was in the hot seat.

"He is responsible for the performance of the team. That's his job," said Rossi. "There is no hiding here... the buck stops with Otmar."

Rossi said Ocon and Gasly were "doing their share of the job" and there was 'zero risk' of Renault walking away.

Alpine started the season with a target of defending fourth place and closing the huge gap to Red Bull, Ferrari and Mercedes.

Champions Red Bull have already scored more points than Alpine managed in all of last season while third placed Mercedes and fourth placed Ferrari are also a long way down the road.

McLaren, who have former Alpine reserve Oscar Piastri in their line-up after the Australian rejected the French team, are fifth.

Djokovic to Face Tough Opening Test in Rome



ROME (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic will face a tough opening test in his return to action at the Internazionali BNL d'Italia, where he is a six-time champion.

The top seed will begin the season's final clay-court ATP Masters 1000 event against #NextGenATP Frenchman Luca Van Assche or in-form Argentine Tomas Martin Etcheverry. In his most recent tournament, Djokovic was pushed to three sets by 18-year-old Van Assche, who is the only teen in the Top 100 of the Pepperstone ATP Rankings. The Serbian needed two hours and 39 minutes to battle through that match.

If Etcheverry is Djokovic's opponent, the 23-year-old will carry confidence from reaching his first two ATP Tour finals earlier this year. Both of those runs came on clay, in Santiago and Houston. Grigor Dimitrov, the 2017 Nitto ATP Finals champion, or former World No. 3 Stan Wawrinka could be waiting for Djokovic in the third round.

There is plenty of Masters 1000 experience in Djokovic's quarter of the draw, where 2021 Indian Wells titlist Cameron Norrie and 2022 Paris champion Holger Rune will look to make their mark. Seventh seed Rune, a potential quarter-final foe for Djokovic, defeated the Serbian in the final of last year's Rolex Paris Masters.

In the other half of the draw, second seed Carlos Alcaraz will try to maintain his momentum from back-to-back titles in Barcelona and Madrid.

The 20-year-old Spaniard will open his tournament against home favourite Francesco Passaro or Spaniard Albert Ramos-Vinolas. Alcaraz's first ATP Tour win came against Ramos-Vinolas in 2020 at the Rio Open presented by Claro in a memorable match that lasted three hours and 37 minutes.

The first seeded opponent Alcaraz could play is big-hitting 32nd seed Jiri Lehecka. His Madrid semi-final opponent, Borna Coric, could be waiting in the fourth round.

Also in Alcaraz's quarter is 2022 Rome finalist Stefanos Tsitsipas. The fifth seed will begin his tournament against Banja Luka champion Dusan Lajovic or Portugal's Nuno Borges.

Messi Scoops Individual, Team Laureus Double

PARIS (Dispatches) - Argentina and Paris Saint Germain veteran star Lionel Messi scooped a unique double, landing individual and team Laureus awards for his exploits and those of his World-Cup winning nation.

Messi, 35, finally landed a first World Cup winners medal in Qatar last December after a thrilling penalty shootout final win over France — enough to earn him an individual accolade while the seven-time Ballon d'Or winner also accepted the team award at a prestigious Paris ceremony.

The Argentine, who attended the ceremony with wife Antonela Rocuzzo, previously had won the award jointly with British Formula One champion Lewis Hamilton in 2020.

The accolade saw Messi, who earned a fine and suspension from PSG for making an unauthorised promotional visit to Saudi Arabia, see off competition notably from clubmate Kylian Mbappé, whose World Cup final hat-trick was not enough to earn him glory in Qatar. Jamaican sprinter Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce, who last August earned a fifth world 100m crown at Eugene, Oregon, picked up the female athlete award while US Open tennis champion Carlos Alcaraz earned the World Breakthrough of the Year award.

Going back to football, Denmark and Manchester United star Christian Eriksen earned a Comeback Award for returning to the top of the European game after collapsing with cardiac arrest during the Euros two years ago.



De Bruyne Rocket Leaves Man City And Madrid Level

MADRID (Dispatches) - Kevin De Bruyne's brilliant drive earned Manchester City a 1-1 draw at Real Madrid in a gripping Champions League semi-final first leg battle.

The Belgian slammed Pep Guardiola's visitors level after Vinicius Junior opened the scoring for the reigning champions from distance in similarly spectacular fashion.

Madrid managed to completely shackle lethal striker Erling Haaland but De Bruyne's powerful effort left the tie on a knife edge ahead of the second leg in Manchester next week.

The record 14-time winners knocked City out at the same stage last season despite being outplayed in both games, and took the lead at the Santiago Bernabeu against the run of play. However when Madrid found their stride in the second half, City -- still chasing their first ever Champions League trophy -- hit back through De Bruyne.

Guardiola selected Kyle Walker at right-back to combat the pacy threat of Real Madrid winger Vinicius, while Madrid coach Carlo Ancelotti opted for Toni Kroos at the base of midfield. Rodrygo, who struck two late goals as a substitute last season against Manchester City to pave Madrid's passage into the final, started after his Copa del Rey heroics on Saturday.

The visitors controlled much of the first half, with nearly 70 percent possession, but went in trailing at the break.

Thibaut Courtois fielded an early barrage of shots from De Bruyne, Rodri and Haaland, as City dominated and Madrid sat back, soaking up the pressure.

