

**Iran Will Reportedly Receive the First batch of Russian SU-35 Fighter Jets Next Week as Tehran And Moscow Have Embarked on Deepening Cooperation Amid Massive Western Sanctions**

**Iranians Will Celebrate the National Environment Week With Holding Several Programs on June 6-12 Under the Theme of "Solutions to Plastic Pollution", Concurrent With World Environment Day**

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**Iran to Stand With Resistance Front Until Israel Fully Annihilated**

*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

TEHRAN - The commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iran will continue to provide unwavering support for the Palestinian resistance until the final annihilation of the apartheid Tel Aviv regime.

Brigadier General Esmail Qa'ani made the remarks at a ceremony in commemoration of his fallen comrades in Iran's northeastern holy city of Mashhad on Saturday.

He said Iran will continue to provide support for young Palestinian resistance forces and their "strong heroic front" to the greatest extent possible, both verbally and in practice.

The IRGC commander asserted that such support and concerted efforts will continue until the Israeli regime is fully annihilated.

Young Palestinian fighters have at times carried out more than 30 retaliatory operations in a single day against the Israeli regime in the occupied West Bank, Qa'ani said, adding that this is the fruit of the resistance front and global mobilization of Muslims. *See Page 7*

**Tehran-Riyadh Trade to Go Up After Win-Win Reconciliation**



*IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK*

TEHRAN - Finance Minister Ehsan Khandouzi has praised the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia to restore diplomatic ties, saying the detente will boost bilateral trade and investment.

Khandouzi, who arrived on Thursday in the Saudi city of Jeddah to attend the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's Annual Meetings, referred to the potential economic benefits of Tehran-Riyadh rapprochement, which was achieved on March 10 after China-mediated talks in Beijing.

"The agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia with the help of friendly countries will create more trade and investment opportunities in both states," Khandouzi said on Friday on the sidelines of the event.

"We believe that the expansion of economic ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a win-win relationship that will serve the interests of both countries as well as the region," he added.

Leading a senior economic team, Khandouzi is the first Iranian minister to visit Saudi Arabia after the signing of the agreement. He will meet with Saudi officials as well as counterparts from other Muslim nations.

He is also scheduled to speak at the annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank, a Jeddah-based bank that supports infrastructure projects with Islamic finance.

Khandouzi said last month that Iran aimed to raise its annual trade with Saudi Arabia to \$1 billion in the first step of resuming economic ties. He said this target was set by the Trade Promotion Organization of Iran (TPO) based on the two countries' capacities.

Khandouzi also said the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran is based on strengthening ties with neighboring states.

"We have had good achievements in the past 1.5 years and expect a rising growth in economic, trade, and investment ties with neighbors," he said.

Tehran believes in benefiting from the capabilities of Islamic Development Bank members, the minister said, noting that the recent meeting in Jeddah can pave the way for increased cooperation.

Pointing to Iran's progress in various technologies such as in the production of medical equipment, medicine, and power plants, as well as in bio- and nanotechnology, the minister said that Tehran is determined to share this progress with the member states and other Muslim nations.

Meanwhile Khandouzi said Iran and Saudi Arabia will have good achievements in economic relations.

Ehsan Khandouzi in an interview with Sharq Al-Awsat said: I will meet with the Minister of Economic Affairs of Saudi Arabia on the sidelines of the meeting and I believe that Iran and Saudi Arabia are on the path of interaction, and economic relations will have good results.

"The policy of President Raisi's administration is to develop relations with neighbors and Arab countries," the minister said, adding, "So, we welcome any things that lead to closer relations with neighbors and Arab countries and the development of these relations, including strengthening relations."

Responding to Sharq Al-Awsat's reporter about the solutions to the world's challenges, Khandouzi highlighted: After the coronavirus pandemic and its consequences, countries have learned to have more economic interactions.

The Minister of Economy noted: "The agenda of the government of the Islamic Republic of Iran and our proposal to overcome these crises is to use the technology of Islamic countries and expand economic interactions between the countries of the world and especially the region."

Meanwhile Khandouzi met with his Saudi counterpart in the kingdom's port city of Jeddah in the first such development to follow the conclusion of a detente between the countries under China's auspices.

The meeting took place between Khandouzi and Mohammed Aljadaan on the sidelines of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's Annual Meetings.

"The two ministers, who met for the first time in years, discussed opportunities to develop and strengthen relations between Saudi Arabia and Iran," the Saudi Gazette English-language daily reported.

Saudi Arabia severed its diplomatic relations with Iran in January 2016 after angry protesters stormed the kingdom's embassy in Tehran. The Iran protests were caused by Riyadh's execution of prominent Shia cleric Sheikh Nimr Baqir al-Nimr.

**GC Approves Establishing FTZ With EAEU**

*IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK*

TEHRAN - The Guardian Council Spokesman announced that the law on the temporary agreement to establish a free trade zone between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union and its member states was approved by the Guardian Council.

In his press brief, Hadi Tahan-Nazif further highlighted that the amendment Protocol Bill to the agreement between Iran and the Government of Iraq in order to avoid double taxation and exchange information on income and capital taxes was approved.

Tahan Nazif stated: "Temporary agreement to establish a Free Trade Zone (FTZ) between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) is extended."

On the latest issues in the Guardian Council, he said: "8 Parliament bills, 8 proposed administration amendments, and 8 inquiries which referred to the Administrative Justice Court for verification were examined by the Guardian Council." *See Page 7*

**ViewPoint**

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

**U.S. Wants Death Only for Others**

In recent decades and better to say in the recent century, the U.S. has tried to decide for other nations and it has been opposed to the sales of weapons by other countries to those countries that Washington dislikes them but the U.S. itself at the same time has continued selling weapons to its favorite countries and governments and even to dictator rulers in the world.

In recent years the administrations in Washington have not hidden their ill-intentions of selling arms to countries and nations but at the same time it has shown its opposition against other arms selling countries, in other words, it wants to monopolize the arms sales.

We know that many arms manufacturers in the U.S. are main supporters of the Republican or Democrat administrations and they spend money during the presidential elections campaigns and for this reason the U.S. Administrations try to trigger wars in any part of the world in order that these companies could sell their deadly products.

On Friday, the English daily The Independent in an article criticized the U.S. Administration for selling goods to some certain countries. The daily wrote "Since President Joe Biden came into office in 2021, he has described a "battle between democracies and autocracies" in which the U.S. and other democracies strive to create a peaceful world. The reality, however, is that the Biden administration has helped increase the military power of a large number of authoritarian countries. According to an Intercept review of recently released government data, the U.S. sold weapons to at least 57 percent of the world's autocratic countries in 2022."

It added since the end of the Cold War, the United States has been the world's biggest weapons dealer, accounting for about 40 percent of all arms exports in a given year. In general, these exports are funded through grants or sales. There are two pathways for the latter category: foreign military sales and direct commercial sales.

The U.S. government acts as an intermediary for FMS acquisitions: It buys the materiel from a company first and then delivers the goods to the foreign recipient. DCS acquisitions are more straightforward: They're the result of an agreement between a U.S. company and a foreign government. Both categories of sales require the government's approval.

Country-level data for last year's DCS authorizations was released in late April through the State Department's Directorate of Defense Trade Controls. FMS figures for fiscal year 2022 were released earlier this year through the Pentagon's Defense Security Cooperation Agency. According to their data, a total of 142 countries and territories bought weapons from the U.S. in 2022, for a total of \$85 billion in bilateral sales.

Of the 84 countries codified as autocracies under the Regimes of the World system in 2022, the United States sold weapons to at least 48, or 57 percent, of them. The "at least" qualifier is necessary because several factors frustrate the accurate tracking of U.S. weapons sales. The State Department's report of commercial arms sales during the fiscal year makes prodigious use of "various" in its recipients category; as a result, the specific recipients for nearly \$11 billion in weapons sales are not disclosed.

The Regimes of the World system is just one of the several indices that measure democracy worldwide, but running the same analysis with other popular indices produces similar results. For example, Freedom House listed 195 countries and for each one labeled whether it qualified as an electoral democracy in its annual Freedom in the World report. Of the 85 countries Freedom House did not designate as an electoral democracy, the United States sold weapons to 49, or 58 percent, of them in fiscal year 2022.

These findings contradict Biden's preferred framing of international politics as fundamentally a struggle in which the world's democracies, led by the United States, are on "the side of peace and security," as he called it in last year's State of the Union address. *See Page 7*

**Iranian Oil Tanker Retaken After 5 Years**

TEHRAN (PressTV) - An Iranian oil tanker, which was illegally seized by a foreign company five years ago, has been retaken in a joint operation by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy and Iran's Intelligence Ministry.

Mojtaba Qahremani, head of the Justice Department of Iran's southern province of Hormozgan, was cited by Tasnim news agency as saying on Friday that the 10,000-ton oil tanker Purity had returned to the country's territorial waters following a judicial order and a joint operation carried out by the IRGC Navy and Intelligence Ministry. *See Page 7*

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## Security Forces Arrest Daesh Member in Sistan and Baluchestan

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iranian security forces have arrested a member of the Takfiri Daesh terrorist group in the country's southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan.

Doostali Jalilian, the provincial police chief, was cited by Tasnim news agency as saying on Saturday that the forces found out after "technical and intelligence measures" that a Daesh member was secretly living in a village in Zabol County.

"After the close monitoring of the person's actions, his hiding place was finally identified and the Daesh member was arrested in a synergic and coordinated operation by the police and Intelligence Department," Jalilian said.

## IRGC Navy Vessels Equipped With New Long Range Cruise Missiles

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy says his force has furnished its vessels with homegrown naval cruise missiles with a range of 2,000 kilometers, amid efforts by specialists and technicians to develop state-of-the-art munitions and equipment.**

Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri told Tasnim news agency on Saturday that the missile, dubbed Qadr-474, has been installed on the indigenous Shahid Mahdavi oceangoing warship.

Built by Iranian experts and technicians, Shahid Mahdavi is a multi-purpose heavy warship for long-range operations. It weighs more than 2,100 tons and is 240 meters in length and 27 meters in width.

The warship is already armed with Abu Mahdi cruise missiles, which feature state-of-the-art technologies suitable for electronic warfare and have a range of over one thousand kilometers, as well as another domestically-developed missile with a range of 750 kilometers.

Abu Mahdi and the other two cruise missiles are smart, can be guided and go after a new target before explosion, and can be launched even from regions deep in the land and behind the mountains to hit naval targets, Tangsiri said.

The IRGC Navy commander further said that the advanced Shahid (Martyr) Soleimani patrol combat warship, named after top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qassem Soleimani who was assassinated in a US drone strike ordered by former President Donald Trump near the Baghdad International Airport in early January 2020, has also been equipped with long-range Qadr-474 cruise missiles.

The warship has been furnished with various types of missiles with ranges of 200, 300 and 750 kilometers, Tangsiri said.



The high-ranking Iranian commander noted that the IRGC Navy will take delivery of four Shahid Soleimani-class vessels in the current Iranian calendar year, which ends on March 20, 2024.

The vessels that will join the IRGC Navy fleet are Shahid Sayyad Shirazi, named after the late former deputy chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces, Shahid Bagheri drone aircraft carrier, and Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis warship.

The last warship has been named after the former deputy head of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units who was assassinated along with Lt. Gen. Soleimani in a US drone strike near Baghdad airport in January 2020.

The new military catamarans can cruise at the speed of 45 nautical knots, and can launch rockets with a range of between 300 and 750 kilometers.

The fourth indigenous warship has been named after Rais Ali Delvari, a great national hero and independence fighter who led the anti-colonial struggle in southern Iran, Tangsiri said.

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

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

## Iran Envoy, Afghanistan Ex-Official Discuss Humanitarian Aids

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian Ambassador to Kabul Hassan Kazemi Qomi in a meeting with Abdullah Abdullah, former chairman of the High Council for National Reconciliation of Afghanistan discussed humanitarian aids to Afghanistan.

Abdullah, in a tweet, said that he stressed the need for the continuation of Iran's aid to the Afghan people, as well as expanding Iran-Afghanistan relations.

On Thursday, Kazemi Qomi also met and held talks with former Afghan President Hamid Karzai.

Karzai said on Twitter that he met with Kazemi Qomi and discussed the current Afghan situation and the recent Doha meeting.

Karzai said the meeting stressed the need for the formation of a regional consensus for the solution of problems in Afghanistan. Karzai called Iran an "old, historic friend."

## Iran Navigates Round World For 1st Time in Islamic World

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's 86th Naval Fleet, including the full-Iranian Dena Destroyer, navigated around the world in a mission codenamed "360-Degree", Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says.

The remarks were made by the Chief Commander of Iran's Army Navy Force, as he elaborated on the mission of the 86th naval fleet.

Admiral Irani told the reporters in a press conference that the fleet began its mission in September 2022 from Bandar Abbas port city, southern Iran and now is in Aden Gulf after 213 days of navigation.

He said that the fleet, following maritime diplomacy, visited India, and Indonesia, and entered the Pacific Ocean for the first time while holding a joint drill there.

The commander highlighted the navigation of about 15,000 km in the Pacific Ocean and passing three great typhoons without suffering any damage.

Passing the Strait of Magellan, entering the Atlantic, visiting Brazil's Rio de Janeiro port city, and the arrival in the Aden Gulf after passing the Cape of Good Hope were other parts of the navigation, he elaborated on.

Admiral Irani said the '360-Degree' navigation's mission was to bring the message of peace and security to the world and a strong step toward the creation of Islamic Civilization, while the Islamic Republic of Iran seriously pursuing the peaceful components of the international system.

The Commander of Iran's Army Navy Force noted that the foreigners could not and did not bring security to the region, stating that the regional countries have become capable enough of getting unified and producing security in the region, with Iran being ready to share its experiences in this area.

## Economy Minister Visits Jeddah To Bolster Economic Diplomacy

TEHRAN (MNA) - Government spokesman has said that the participation of Ehsan Khandouzi in the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's Annual Meetings in Saudi Arabia is another step in strengthening economic diplomacy.

Ali Bahadori Jahromi wrote on his Twitter account on Saturday that the participation of Iranian Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance, Ehsan Khandouzi, in the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Group's Annual Meetings with the presence of officials from more than 50 countries in Saudi Arabia and talks on the sidelines of the meetings, is another step in strengthening economic diplomacy that will bring more convergence in West Asia.

Earlier on Thursday, heading a high-ranking economic delegation, Khandouzi arrived in Saudi Arabia.

## Tehran, Riyadh Discuss Latest Developments in Bilateral Relations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Saudi counterpart have discussed the latest developments in bilateral relations and underlined the need for promotion of cooperation between the two neighbors.

Amirabdollahian and Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud held talks on the phone on Friday evening.

During the telephone conversation, the Iranian foreign minister expressed his satisfaction with the progress of mutual agreements, including the face-to-face meeting of the foreign ministers of the two countries, announcement of the resumption of diplomatic relations, and dispatch of technical teams to reopen embassies and consulates.

Amirabdollahian underscored that the Islamic Republic is preparing to officially reopen its embassy and consulates in Saudi Arabia.

He described the scheduled meetings between senior Iranian and Saudi officials as a manifestation of the two sides' strong resolve to cooperate and cultivate intimate relations.

The Saudi foreign minister, for his part, emphasized that Riyadh considers bright prospects for relations with Tehran and would spare no efforts to strengthen the ties.

"We have taken good steps in the past two months, and our adherence to the signed agreements shows our steely determination," he said.

The top Saudi diplomat also pointed to Iran's age-old participation and important role in the establishment of world peace and development through multi-polar structures ever since the formation of the League of Nations, which lasted for 26 years and was replaced by the United Nations (UN) in 1946.

"Iran's interaction and presence in international multi-polar structures dates back to more than one hundred years ago. Campaigns of pressure against the Iranian government and nation have never managed to undermine the country's prominent position in international spheres," Prince Faisal noted.

Amirabdollahian announced on Thursday that Saudi Arabia had appointed a new ambassador to Tehran.

## U.S.-Imposed Sanctions Violate Human Rights

MOSCOW (IRNA) - Minister of Justice of Iran Amin Hossein Rahimi has underscored that the unilateral sanctions imposed by the United States on the country and other nations are a violation of human rights because they impede the delivery of medicines to patients.

The Iranian minister, who is on a visit to Russia to take part in the 11th St Petersburg International Legal Forum, said late on Friday that the independent and free states should jointly file lawsuits in the International Court of Justice (ICJ) and other international entities against governments that impose sanctions on them.

Addressing counterpart justice ministers participating in the forum in St. Petersburg, Rahimi spoke about the rule of law at the forum, the Iranian minister explained his proposal for the formation of a club consisting of countries that are subject to sanctioned.

Such a club of sanctioned countries would be formed in the framework of legal and judicial cooperation between governments which are victims of unilateral sanctions, he said, adding that the club could be established under the auspices of the ministries of justice of the member states.

## FM Slams Israel's Brutal Aggression

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has held separate phone conversations with the leaders of the Palestinian resistance groups on the current situation in the Gaza Strip amid Israeli strikes.

Amirabdollahian held talks with Ismail Haniyeh, the head of the political bureau of Hamas, and Ziyad al-Nakhalah, the secretary-general of Islamic Jihad.

The Iranian minister condemned Israel for the "brutal aggression" in the "targeted" assassination of resistance leaders and killing innocent Palestinian women and children. He said the Zionists had displayed weakness and frustration in the face of resistance by the Palestinians.

Haniyeh, for his part, said resistance groups are

"ready" and "coordinated" for confronting the Israeli attacks. He also praised the political stance of Iran in support of Palestine. "Resistance will determine the fate of this Zionist aggression and the Israeli regime has no other choice but to surrender," Haniyeh said.

Meanwhile, Nakhalah said the Palestinians will continue to resist until the regime accepts the conditions put forward by the resistance.

Israel continued airstrikes on Gaza for the fourth day. The latest attack on Friday claimed the lives of three Palestinians, wounding 10 others.

The Palestinian health ministry in Gaza said 33 people, including six children and three women, have been killed and over 100 wounded so far.

## Developing Startup Markets among Achievements of INOTEX

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Iran's minister of interior said that development of startup and knowledge-based companies' markets in international arenas is among the outcomes of holding the International Innovation and Technology Exhibition (INOTEX).

Speaking on the sidelines of the 12th edition of Tech Expo (INOTEX 2023), Ahmad Vahidi stated that the exhibition will encourage Small- and Medium-Sized Enterprises (SMEs) to take advantage of the world's latest technologies.

INOTEX is a venue to display a part of innovative and technological achievements of the knowledge-based companies, he emphasized.

INOTEX 2023 was inaugurated in Tehran on Tuesday, May 9, in a ceremony addressed by Vice-President for Science and Technology Rouhollah Dehghani Firouzabadi. The exhibition concluded on May 12.

Empowering entrepreneurs through presenting their achievements, financing and finding appropriate ways to develop presence in global markets and also establishing relations between different components of ecosystem of innovation and technology are among the main objectives of the exhibition.

It was held with the participation of more than 450 startups and knowledge-based companies.

## Access to Frozen Assets to Affect Iran-South Korea Ties

TEHRAN (IRNA)- The new Iranian ambassador to Seoul - Saeed Kouzehchi - has underlined that determining the situation of Iranian assets in South Korea can play a key role in enhancing mutual ties between the two nations.

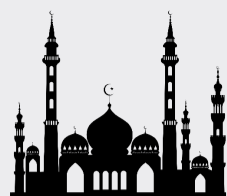
Submitting his credentials to South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol on Friday, Kouzehchi conveyed President Ebrahim Raisi's greetings to his Korean counterpart.

The new ambassador also noted that the Islamic Republic of Iran's capabilities would pave the way for the expansion of trade and economic ties between the two countries, so the Iranian assets in South Korea can play an effective role in boosting mutual cooperation.

The Korean president, for his part, congratulated the new envoy for the initiation of his diplomatic mission in Seoul. Kouzehchi used to be the head of the African economic office of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Iran and Iran's ambassador to Nigeria.







## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:21
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:21
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:59

25. If any of you have not the means wherewith to wed free believing women, they may wed believing girls from among those whom your right hands possess: And Allah hath full knowledge about your faith. Ye are one from another: Wed them with the leave of their owners, and give them their dowers, according to what is reasonable: They should be chaste, not lustful, nor taking paramours: when they are taken in wedlock, if they fall into shame, their punishment is half that for free women. This (permission) is for those among you who fear sin; but it is better for you that ye practise self-restraint. And Allah is Off-forgiving, Most Merciful. Surah 4. Women (25)

# Tehran Calls for Barter Trade With Hanoi

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Niloufar Asadi, caretaker of the international affairs department of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA), in a meeting with the head of the commercial office of the Vietnamese Embassy in Tehran, stressed the need for using barter trade as a way to increase trade relations between the two countries.**

During the meeting which was held at the place of ICCIMA in Tehran, the two sides discussed ways to develop trade between the two countries and remove the obstacles and problems facing it.

Also, during a meeting at the place of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) in previous week, the representatives of the private sectors of Iran and Vietnam discussed the ways of developing trade between the two sides.

Assadi made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran with Head of the Trade Office of the Vietnamese Embassy in Tehran Nguyen Thanh Long where the two sides explored avenues for promotion of bilateral trade and removing the obstacles on this way.

Exercising barter trade requires a specific mechanism, she said, adding that such a mechanism has to be defined by trade promotion organizations and central banks of both countries.



Assadi called on the Vietnamese side to propose a list of items for barter trade with Iran. She said that private sector actors of Iran and Vietnam can engage in a bilateral or trilateral barter trade system in which two companies supply each other with the commodities needed by one another or supply the needs of a third company.

Elaborating on the scheme, she said that, for instance, an Iranian company supplies a Vietnamese company with its needs and the Vietnamese companies provides another Iranian companies with its required commodities, while the second Iranian company pays the costs to the first Iranian company on behalf of the Vietnamese company.

The Vietnamese side Nguyen Long, said in the meantime that his country attaches special significance to trade with Iran although this trade has to take place amid the Western sanctions on Tehran.

Long said that experiences of trade with other countries, particularly Iran's neighboring countries, can prove helpful in finding solutions and devising mechanisms for trade with Iran.

He added that trade with Iran is very important for Vietnam although the trade should be continued while Tehran is under sanctions.

He added that using the trade experience of other countries as well as Iran's neighboring countries can lead to find solutions for determining mechanisms for trade and barter of goods with Iran.

He reiterated that whenever a Vietnamese trade delegation arrives in Tehran, it tries to exchange information for boosting interaction between businessmen of the two countries.

## Turkish Envoy Compares Tehran Book Fair to Big Int'l Events



**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Turkish ambassador to Tehran Hicabi Kirlangic has said that the Tehran International Book Fair is comparable with prominent book fairs in Frankfurt and Cairo.**

Kirlangic said that the Iranian book fair is a big one, noting that he made speeches at the book fair.

Kirlangic, who has also translated the Divan of Hafez, the poems written by prominent Iranian poet Hafez Shirazi (1325-1390), also noted that the book fair was held in other places in past years, but it is now being held at Imam Khomeini Mosque, which is appreciable.

The ambassador pointed to the translation project of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of Turkiye, noting that the international project helps introduce Turkish authors in Iran.

The 34th Tehran International Book Fair is underway in the Iranian capital from 20 to 30 May 2023.

## Over 90% of Iran's Demand for Animal Vaccines Met Domestically

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Acting head of Iran's Ministry of Agriculture Jihad (MAJ) Mohammad Aghamiri has said that over 90% of the animal vaccines needed in the country is supplied by domestic producers.**

Aghamiri said the annual volume of livestock vaccines produced in Iran is some 550 million doses, adding that the vaccines are produced with high quality and under strict standards.

He added that Iran imports around 50 million vials of animal vaccines per year only because local production of those vaccines is not economically justifiable.

The official said other countries in the region that have made great efforts in the field of animal vaccines are Turkey, Malaysia, and Pakistan, adding, however, that those countries still lag behind in terms of producing human and poultry vaccines.

The Razi Vaccine and Serum Research Institute, which is a subsidiary of the MAJ, is chiefly responsible for developing and production of animal vaccines in Iran.

## Iran Ready to Help Members of Islamic Development Bank

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Economy Ehsan Khandouzi has said that the Islamic Republic is ready to provide the member states of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) with the state-of-the-art advancements achieved by the Iranians.**

Khandouzi made the remarks on the sidelines of the 2023 Annual Meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia, saying that the assembly is one of the best opportunities for the member states to create joint ventures and cooperation.

The Islamic Republic is ready to transfer its advances in biotechnology, nanotechnology, pharmaceutical industries, medical equipment, manufacturing of power plant equipment, and manufacturing of oil industry catalysts to the member states of the Islamic Development Bank and other Muslim nations, he added.

## Minister Calls for Iran-UAE Joint Investments, Facilitation of Trade Ties

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Economy Minister Ehsan Khandouzi has called for joint investments by Tehran and Abu Dhabi, as well as facilitation of trade exchanges.**

Khandouzi made the remarks in a meeting with Minister of State for Financial Affairs of the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Mohamed Hadi Al Hussaini on the sidelines of the annual meeting 2023 of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) in the Saudi city of Jeddah on Friday.

The Iranian minister called for regulation of foreign investment agreements, as well as halt in double tariff between Iran and the UAE.

Iran is ready to cooperate with the UAE in joint lucrative projects, as well as joint investment in other nations, he added.

Al Hussaini, for his part, pointed to the positive impact of the resumption of ties between Riyadh and Tehran, noting that the volume of trade ties between the UAE and Iran has expanded about 40 times.

At the end of the meeting, the Iranian minister invited his Emirati counterpart to visit Tehran as soon as possible.

## Mechanism of Barter to Boost Trade Between Iran and Malaysia

**TEHRAN - Head of Europe Department of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Ms. Sima Farkhondeh Nejad in meeting with Head of Malaysia-Myanmar Business Chamber Amara Singam said that launching the mechanism of barter trade between Iran and Malaysia will lead to the boost in bilateral trade.**

In the meeting vice-president of Myanmar-Malaysia Business Chamber Itan Azizan and some Iranian economic activists were present.

In the meeting, Farkhondeh Nejad pointed to the main existing obstacles in way of broadening economic cooperation between Iran and Malaysia and said that banking restrictions is the main effective factor for the decline of international trade and therefore using national currencies as well as defining the mechanism of barter trade between the two countries will help the bilateral trade to improve.

She then pointed to the grounds for cooperation

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between the two states, noting that joint investment in the field of food and vaccines, producing halal cosmetics, health tourism, herbal medicines, handicrafts and etc. can lead to the rise in the bilateral cooperation.

She also announced readiness of the ICCIMA for holding specialized meetings in the fields for joint cooperation between Malaysian companies and specialized Iranian formations.

Then Singam, for his part, announced continuous meeting of the members of Malaysia-Myanmar Business Chamber with its Iranian counterpart in the upcoming months and invited ICCIMA to partake in the upcoming meeting of economic activists of Myanmar and Pakistan which is to be held in Malaysia.

Then Head of International Affairs of Karaj Chamber of Commerce as the assigned chamber for trade with Malaysia for broadening bilateral relations invited the visitors to visit Alborz Chamber of Commerce and to get acquainted with industrial units of this province for bilateral cooperation.

## Tehran, Baghdad to Extend Iran Gas Export Contracts for Five Years

**SHANA (Baghdad) - Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji said Tehran and Baghdad have agreed to extend the contracts on Iran's gas exports.**

He added the two deals on exporting Iran's gas to Baghdad and Basra power plants will be extended for the next five years.

Owji made the remarks in his talks with reporters following a meeting with Iraqi Minister of Electricity Ziad Ali Fadel.

The minister said the Iranian and Iraqi experts solved the problems, describing the agreement as one of the achievements of his visit to Iraq.

Pointing to a memorandum of understanding (MoU) the two neighboring countries signed to cooperate in oil, gas, and petrochemical sectors, he continued, "Iran enjoys a high status in terms of human resources and technical and engineering capacities and has agreed to exchange data with Iraq and cooperate with it in the exploration and



the integrated development of shared oil fields." According to the MoU, Iran will also help Iraq lay oil and gas pipelines and renovate its oil refineries, the minister mentioned.

The memorandum was inked between Owji and his Iraqi counterpart Hayan Abdel-Ghani in the presence of Iraq's Prime Minister Mohammed Shia al-Sudani on Wednesday.

Owji and Sudani put emphasis on the expansion of bilateral cooperation in the energy sector, urging Iran-Iraq Joint Working Group to follow up the implementation of the recent memorandum through holding regular sessions.

The Iraqi prime minister brought forward proposals to develop joint fields, train human resources, and implement petrochemical projects, which were welcomed by the visiting Iranian oil minister.

## Russian Co. to Launch Tehran-Saint Petersburg Flights

**MOSCOW (IRNA) - Nordwind Airlines, a Russian leisure airline, has announced that the company will launch its direct flights between Tehran-Saint Petersburg as of June 1.**

Nordwind Airlines declared on its Telegram channel on Friday that the flights will be carried out from Pulkovo Airport in Saint Petersburg to Tehran and vice versa.

The flights are parts of the airlines program in spring and summer, which will be conducted once a week on Thursdays.

Earlier, Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali said that the Russians were keen on increasing direct flights between Russia and different tourism destinations in Iran.

## Over \$831m Worth of Maritime, Port Projects Underway

**TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) has said over 400 trillion rials (about \$831.3 million) of maritime and port projects are currently underway in the country, the PMO portal reported on Saturday.**

According to Ali-Akbar Safaei, 180 trillion rials (about \$340 million) of such projects have also been completed and gone operational since the current government took office in August 2021.

He stated that in the international arena, with the government's policy regarding relations with the neighbors, very good links have been established with the neighboring countries in the maritime and ports sector.

"Many negotiations have been conducted with the southern and northern neighbors and it is hoped that this year we will witness a significant growth in the investment of

foreign companies and government sectors in the maritime industry and the north-south transit corridor," Safaei said.

In November 2022, PMO announced that the organization has modified its investment charter in order to facilitate foreign investment in the country's ports. "Since economic diplomacy is a major policy of the 13th government, the charter of investment in ports has been facilitated with the aim of attracting foreign investors," IRNA quoted PMO Deputy Head Jalil Eslami as saying.

Speaking in a gathering of PMO managers with oil and petrochemical industry representatives, Eslami said: "We live in a period when ports infrastructure development is very important and over the past few decades positive efforts have been made to increase the capacity of ports in the south and north of the country."



## China Special Envoy to Visit Ukraine, Russia

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China will send a special envoy to Ukraine, Russia and other European nations from Monday, Beijing said, the highest-ranking Chinese diplomat to visit the war-torn country since Moscow's invasion last year.

From Ukraine to the Middle East, Beijing in recent months has sought to position itself as a mediator with a leading role in solving the world's crises. But while China says it is a neutral party on the Ukraine war, it has been criticised for refusing to condemn Moscow for the invasion. More than a year into the war, Chinese President Xi Jinping spoke with his Ukrainian counterpart Volodymyr Zelensky by phone last month.



## Germany to Buy 18 Leopard 2 Tanks to Replenish Stocks

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany plans to buy 18 Leopard 2 tanks and 12 self-propelled howitzers to replenish stocks depleted by deliveries to Ukraine, according to procurement documents seen by Reuters.

The tanks order will come to 525 million euros (\$578 million) while the howitzers have a price tag of 190.7 million euros, all of which are to be delivered by 2026 at the latest, said the finance ministry documents meant for the parliament.

The tank purchase includes an option for another 105 tanks for about 2.9 billion euros, said a defence source, who added that the German parliament's budget committee was expected to sign off on the deal at the end of May.



## S. Africa Rejects U.S. Accusations Of Arms Shipment to Russia



JOHANNESBURG (Dispatches) - South African officials hit back at U.S. accusations that a sanctioned Russian ship had collected weapons from a naval base near Cape Town late last year, a move investors fear could lead Washington to impose sanctions.

The U.S. ambassador to South Africa said on Thursday he was confident that a Russian ship uploaded weapons from the Simon's Town base in December, suggesting the incident was not in line with Pretoria's stance of neutrality in the Ukraine conflict.

Western diplomats were alarmed at South Africa carrying out naval exercises with Russia and China this year, and at the timing of a visit by Russian Foreign Minister Sergei Lavrov.

South Africa is one of Russia's most important allies on a continent divided over its February 2022 invasion of Ukraine, but says it is impartial and has abstained from voting on U.N. resolutions on the war.

Russian President Vladimir Putin on Friday had discussed the conflict in Ukraine in a phone call with his South African counterpart Cyril Ramaphosa, the Kremlin said.

Ramaphosa's office said on Thursday that an inquiry led by a retired judge would look into the allegation. On Friday, a minister responsible for arms control and a foreign ministry spokesman said the country had not approved any arms shipment to Russia in December.

"We didn't approve any arms to Russia. ... it wasn't sanctioned or approved by us," Communications Minister Mondli Gungubele, who chaired the National Conventional Arms Control Committee (NCACC) when the alleged arms shipment to Russia took place, told 702 radio.

South Africa's defence department said on Friday it would give its side of the story to the government's inquiry.

Clayson Monyela, a spokesman for South Africa's department of international relations and cooperation (DIRCO), wrote on Twitter that his department would speak to U.S. ambassador Reuben Brigety and that Foreign Minister Naledi Pandor would talk to U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken later in the day.

Neither Gungubele nor Monyela said whether or not an unapproved shipment had left South Africa. Monyela did not respond to a request for comment.

White House National Security Council spokesman John Kirby on Friday declined to get into the specific allegations against South Africa, but reiterated the administration's position about any country aiding the Russian war effort.

"We have consistently and strongly urged countries not to provide any support for Russia's war. We don't believe that anybody, anybody should be making it easier for Mr. Putin to kill innocent Ukrainian people, period," Kirby said.

He declined to comment on the possibility that the shipment was a private transaction and not approved by the South African government.

After leaving Simon's Town, Refinitiv shipping data show the vessel, the "Lady R", sailed north to Mozambique, spending Jan. 7 to 11 in the port of Beira before continuing to Port Sudan on the Red Sea.

The data show it arrived in the Russian port of Novorossiysk on the Black Sea on Feb. 16.

The United States placed the Lady R and Transmorflot LLC, the shipping company it is linked to, under sanctions in May 2022 on the grounds the company "transports weapons for the (government of Russia)".

## Russia Acknowledges Retreat North of Bakhmut

KYIV (Dispatches) - Moscow acknowledged that its forces had fallen back north of Ukraine's battlefield city of Bakhmut after a new Ukrainian offensive, in a retreat that the head of Russia's Wagner private army called a rout.

The setback for Russia, which follows similar reports of Ukrainian advances south of the city, suggests a coordinated push by Kyiv to encircle Russian forces in Bakhmut, Moscow's main objective for months during the war's bloodiest fighting. It means both sides are now reporting the biggest Ukrainian gains in six months, although Ukraine has given few details and played down suggestions a huge, long-planned counteroffensive had officially begun.

Russian Defence Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov said Ukraine had launched an assault north of Bakhmut with more than 1,000 troops and up to 40 tanks, a scale that if confirmed would amount to the biggest Ukrainian offensive since November.

The Russians had repelled 26 attacks but troops in one area had fallen back to regroup in more favourable positions near the Berkhivka reservoir northwest of Bakhmut, Konashenkov said.

Yevgeny Prigozhin, head of the Wagner forces that have led the campaign in the city, said in an audio message: "What Konashenkov described, unfortunately, is called 'a rout' and not a regrouping".

In a separate video message, Prigozhin said the Ukrainians had seized high ground overlooking Bakhmut and opened the main highway leading into the city from the West.

"The loss of the Berkhivka reservoir - the loss of this territory they gave up - that's 5 sq km, just today," Prigozhin said.

"The enemy has completely freed up the Chasiv Yar-Bakhmut road which we had blocked. The enemy is now able to use this road, and secondly they have taken tactical high ground under which Bakhmut is located," said Prigozhin, who has repeatedly denounced Russia's regular military over the past week for failing to supply his men in Bakhmut.

Reuters was not able to independently verify the situation in the area.

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## Fresh Clashes on Armenia-Azerbaijan Border

YEREVAN (Dispatches) - Fresh border fighting erupted Friday between Armenian and Azerbaijani forces, both sides said, a day after deadly clashes threatened to derail EU-led weekend peace talks between the two countries.

The Caucasus neighbours are locked in a decades-long territorial dispute over Azerbaijan's Armenian-populated region of Nagorno-Karabakh, over which they have fought two wars.

On Friday morning, "Azerbaijani Armed Forces violated the ceasefire in the direction of Sotk (eastern part of the state border) using UAVs (drones)," said a defence ministry statement from Yerevan.

Two of its soldiers had been wounded and one was in critical condition, it added.

Later Friday, the ministry said Azerbaijani forces had opened fire using heavy weapons on the Armenian positions near the village of Kut, in the Gegharkunik province near the border with Azerbaijan.

Azerbaijan's defense ministry said: "Armenian armed forces opened fire from trench mortars on Azerbaijani positions" at the border.

On Thursday, an Azerbaijani serviceman was killed and four Armenian troops were wounded during border clashes.

Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan and Azerbaijani President Ilham Aliyev are scheduled to meet Sunday in Brussels for talks led by European Council President Charles Michel.

The rival leaders have also agreed to jointly meet the leaders of France and Germany on the sidelines of a European summit in Moldova on June 1, according to the EU. On Thursday, Pashinyan accused Azerbaijan of seeking to undermine the talks in Brussels. He warned there was "very little" chance of signing a peace deal with Azerbaijan at the meeting.

A draft agreement "is still at a very preliminary stage and it is too early to speak of an eventual signature", Pashinyan said.

The EU-led diplomacy comes after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken brought the Azerbaijani and Armenian foreign ministers to Washington for talks in early May.

## Thai Army Chief Says No Coup as Election Looms

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand's army chief has pledged not to stage a coup, as political parties geared up for final campaign rallies today ahead of an election that could see the military-backed government voted out.

General Nongpan Jitkaewthae made the pledge despite the army seizing power a dozen times in Thailand in the past century, most recently in 2014.

Voters are predicted to deliver a heavy defeat to the government of former army chief and coup leader Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-cha, fuelling fears the military may actually seek to cling on to power.

But Nongpan told reporters on Thursday there would be no return to military rule, saying that the coups of the past were "very negative".

"There shouldn't be (a coup) any more. For me, this word should be deleted from the dictionary," he said.

Sunday's election is a clash between the opposition led by Pheu Thai, fronted by the 36-year-old daughter of ex-premier Thaksin Shinawatra, and the older conservative royalist-military establishment embodied by Prayut.

Pheu Thai is well ahead in the polls, but winning most seats in the lower house is no guarantee of taking power. The prime minister will be chosen by the 500 elected MPs and 250-strong senate — whose members were appointed by Prayut's junta, stacking the deck in favour of army-linked parties.

Pheu Thai is urging supporters to deliver a landslide victory to stop the military keeping them out of power, as happened in 2019 when Prayut rode senate support to become prime minister at the head of a complex multi-party coalition.

Thousands of supporters are expected to turn out at noisy and colourful final rallies for the main parties later today.

It is the final big push in the first election since pro-democracy protests nearly three years ago rocked the kingdom with unprecedented calls for reforms to the powers of ultra-wealthy King Maha Vajiralongkorn.

Pheu Thai's main opposition rival, the Move Forward Party, appears to have harnessed much of the energy of the youth-led protest movement, which voiced deep disaffection with the old political system.

Prayut, 69, has billed himself as the man with the experience needed to steer the country through turbulent times.

But he has overseen economic stagnation and a massive spike in the use of draconian royal defamation laws.

More than 200 people have been charged with insulting the monarchy in the wake of the 2020 protests.

Rights groups accuse Prayut's military-backed government of abusing the laws to crack down on dissent.

Thailand over the last two decades has been locked in a cycle of street protests, coups and court orders dissolving political parties.



## Pakistan Court Orders Imran Khan's Release on Bail

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - A Pakistani court ordered former Prime Minister Imran Khan's release on bail for two weeks, his lawyer said, after his arrest in a land fraud case ignited deadly protests and a tussle with the military.

The arrest, which the Supreme Court ruled "invalid and unlawful" a day earlier, has fuelled instability in the nation of 220 million at a time of economic crisis, with record inflation, anaemic growth and delayed IMF funding.

Khan welcomed the court's order and said the judiciary was Pakistan's only protection against the "law of the jungle".

"I must say I expected this from our judiciary, because the only hope now left — the only thin line between a banana republic and a democracy is the judiciary," he told journalists in the court premises.

"Otherwise there is no rule of law here. It is a complete law of the jungle. Might is right, you can be picked up."

Khan, 70, is a cricket hero-turned-politician who was ousted as prime minister in April 2022 in a parliamentary no-confidence vote and who is Pakistan's most popular leader according to opinion polls.

Khan was expected to walk out of court soon, broadcaster ARY news reported, with his Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party workers expecting him to deliver a speech following his release.

Police officers stand in a position to stop the supporters of Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan as he appeared before the Supreme Court in Islamabad.

The former premier entered court earlier on Friday wearing dark glasses and a sky blue shalwar kameez - the loose shirt and trousers popular in Pakistan - and a dark waistcoat, surrounded by lawyers and security forces, TV footage showed.

He was seen in footage waving at cameras and making a victory sign with his fingers as he walked into court. Meanwhile his supporters clashed with police elsewhere in the capital, where a police van was set ablaze, broadcaster Geo TV reported.

After the court order was announced, Interior Minister Rana Sanaullah said: "We have instructed our forces out there that court orders should be followed and there shouldn't be any violation of the court ruling".





## Google Launches a Smarter Bard in Race to Catch Up With Microsoft-backed ChatGPT

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Google said it is opening Bard, a rival to Microsoft-backed ChatGPT, to 180 countries as it expands use of artificial intelligence across its platform.

Executives at an annual Google developers conference in Silicon Valley said that generative AI will also be used to supercharge the tech giant's leading search engine. "We have been applying AI for a while, with generative AI we are taking the next step," Google chief executive Sundar Pichai told thousands of developers gathered for the event.

"We are reimagining all our core products, including search," he said. Google is racing to catch up with rival Microsoft, which has rushed to integrate ChatGPT-like powers in a wide array of its products, including the Bing search engine.

Microsoft's dash into AI came despite fears about the technology's potential threat to society, including its impact on the spread of disinformation and whether it could make whole categories of jobs obsolete.

Cathy Edwards of Google Search said the new experience would be akin to a search that is "supercharged" by a conversational bot.

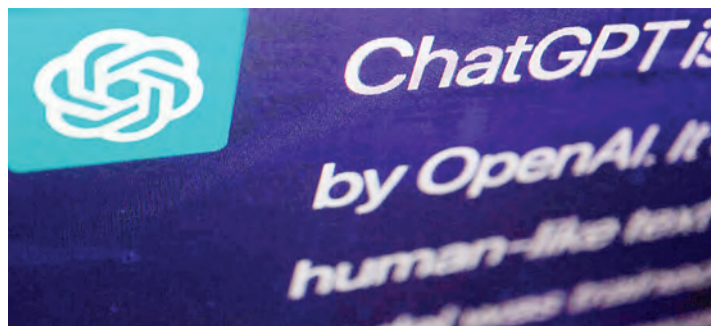
Other Google executives laid out how generative AI is being woven into Gmail, photo editing, online work tools and more.

The company's AI efforts would be carried out in a "bold and responsible" way, senior product director Jack Krawczyk said during a briefing.

Google's expansion meant it removed a waitlist for Bard, letting users around the world engage with it in English after months of testing it out in the US and Britain. Bard will be modified to support 40 languages in coming months, according to Krawczyk. "We're excited to get Bard into more people's hands," Krawczyk said. "We're pretty fired up about where Bard is going."

Google also announced browser "extensions" that will imbue apps and services such as Gmail and Maps with AI features. Bard technology will enable features such as filling in text to help draft emails and suggesting ideas for artwork by scrutinizing a picture of available supplies.

Google is also letting partners build such extensions, including one from Adobe that will let users generate images, Krawczyk said. The tech titan also unveiled new Pixel devices including a \$1,799 foldable smartphone with a bendable screen that is the size of a tablet computer when opened.



"You're getting the best of both worlds," Google senior vice president of devices Rick Osterloh said of the Fold. "It's a powerful smartphone when it's convenient and an immersive tablet when you need one."

Google also added a new tablet and a lower-priced version of its flagship smartphone to the Pixel lineup.

Google's announcements came a week after rival Microsoft expanded public access to its generative artificial intelligence programs, which are powered by models made by OpenAI, the company behind ChatGPT.

"This could be a defining moment in the AI battle with Google and Microsoft going head-to-head for market share," Wedbush analyst Dan Ives said in a note to investors.

Microsoft's early investment in OpenAI gave it a head start "in this Game of Thrones Battle for Big Tech with Google now playing major catchup mode," the analyst added.

AI-enhanced features of Microsoft's Bing search engine and Edge internet browser recently became open for anyone. The services have been enhanced with the ability to work with images as well as text, and Microsoft intends to add video to the mix.

Despite the rollouts by two of the world's biggest companies, risks from AI include its potential uses for disinformation, with voice clones, deep-fake videos and convincing written messages.

A range of experts in March urged a pause in the development of powerful AI systems to allow time to make sure they are safe.

Their open letter, signed by more than 1,000 people, including billionaire Elon Musk and Apple cofounder Steve Wozniak, was prompted by generative AI technology from Microsoft-backed firm OpenAI.

A prominent computer scientist often dubbed "the godfather of artificial intelligence" recently quit his job at Google to speak out about the dangers of the technology.

Geoffrey Hinton, who created some of the technology underlying AI systems, maintained that the existential threat from AI is "serious and close."

## Health Experts Must Raise Alarm On AI Threats

PARIS (Dispatches) - Health professionals must warn the world about the dangers of artificial intelligence (AI), a group of academics wrote, as clamors grow for work on the technology to be halted.

The academics wrote in the *BMJ Global Health* journal that time was running out to take action because corporations, the military and governments were working so fast to develop AI tools.

AI exploded into the public consciousness last year with ChatGPT, a bot capable of generating tracts of coherent text from short prompts.

The wild popularity of the bot sparked a race between tech giants like Google and Microsoft to embed AI in everything from spreadsheets to search tools, and prompted investors to pour money into AI startups.

But the health academics pointed to a range of threats, including powerful AI surveillance systems being developed in dozens of countries, killer robots and disinformation.

For healthcare, they wrote, people with darker skin were at serious risk of harm or reduced care because the datasets used to "train" AI algorithms were often biased.

They argued that "the window of opportunity to avoid serious and potentially existential harms is closing".

The authors, led by Frederik Federspiel of the London School of Hygiene and Tropical Medicine and David McCoy of the United Nations University in Kuala Lumpur, wrote that global cooperation would be needed.

"Healthcare professionals have a key role in raising awareness and sounding the alarm on the risks and threats posed by AI," they wrote in an analysis piece.

"If AI is to ever fulfil its promise to benefit humanity and society, we must protect democracy, strengthen our public-interest institutions, and dilute power so that there are effective checks and balances."

Concern about the direction of AI research is prompting alarm even among those at the centre of the field.

Earlier this month, computer scientist Geoffrey Hinton, often dubbed "the godfather of AI", quit his job at Google to warn of the "profound risks to society and humanity" of the technology.

In March, billionaire Elon Musk — whose Tesla carmaker deploys AI systems — and hundreds of experts called for a pause in AI development to allow time to make sure the technology was safe and properly regulated.



## Taiwan's Wind Industry Braves Cross-Strait Risks in Clean Energy Boom

TAIPEI (Dispatches) - In the port city of Taichung on Taiwan's west coast, a crane hoists into place the end section of a white wind turbine tower that stands almost a hundred meters tall.

The turbine will be one of 111 spinning at a multi-billion dollar offshore wind project located up to 60 kilometers into the Taiwan Strait, which is being built by Denmark's Orsted and will supply enough electricity for a million homes.

The wind farms are part of Taiwan's ambitious push to power its massive tech industry with renewable energy and sit in a waterway that has become a focal point of tensions between Beijing and Washington.

For now, the economic arguments for developments like Orsted's trump concerns about placing critical energy assets in what some security analysts believe could one day become a theatre of war.

"It's a huge demand, less supply situation," Christy Wang, general manager of Orsted Taiwan, said. Orsted monitors cross-strait tensions closely, but has not changed its strategy for Taiwan, Wang said, adding that the lifetime of a wind farm is decades.

"Obviously, the project is here for the long term," she said.

The project is the largest outside of Europe for Orsted, the world's biggest offshore wind firm, and its second in Taiwan since entering in 2016, drawn by the fast and consistent winds, government support for renewables and clear regulation.

Since then, the global geopolitical mood has changed significantly with Russia's invasion of Ukraine reframing the way businesses see political risk.

But even as heightened military pressure from Beijing - which fired missiles over Taipei in August - has increased demand for war coverage, developers remain largely undeterred and continue to vie for capacity in Taiwan.

For Taiwan, which imports 98% of its energy, offshore wind is crucial to strengthening energy security and is expected to generate about T\$1 trillion (\$32.6 billion) in investments by 2025, Lee Chun-li, deputy director-general of Taiwan's Bureau of Energy, told Reuters.

Next in Orsted's pipeline is its third project in Taiwan, with expected completion in 2025. All the power produced by that 920-megawatt farm for two decades has already been purchased by Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC) (2330.TW), the world's largest contract chipmaker.

TSMC, which accounted for 6.4% of Taiwan's electricity consumption in 2021, told Reuters it continues to pursue long-term green power contracts in Taiwan, aiming to drive the development of domestic renewables.

Joseph Wu, vice president at chipmaker Nanya Technology Corp and chair of SEMI Taiwan's sustainable manufacturing committee, said while his company has signed smaller contracts with solar and onshore wind firms, offshore wind could secure greater capacity as pressure to use green energy grows.

Taiwan's colossal appetite for renewables has helped make it one of the leading offshore wind markets outside Europe, but the industry also faces pandemic-related delays, soaring costs and supply issues.

With large swathes of Taiwan's territorial waters restricted due to defense, shipping and other uses, offshore wind developers will soon run out of space.

To reach its 2050 carbon neutrality target and generate 40-55 gigawatts (GW) through wind power, Taiwan is amending the law to allow the construction of wind farms beyond 12 nautical miles from its territorial baseline and plans to announce a tender for floating wind demonstration projects at the end of this year.

New floating wind technology will enable deployment into deeper waters, where developers can't install fixed-bottom turbines.



Spanish developer BlueFloat Energy entered Taiwan last year and plans to bid for the floating demonstration project and then for a 1GW project 25 kilometres off the coast of Hsinchu, Taiwan's tech hub.

"Real estate for fixed-bottom is becoming exhausted, so you're moving into deeper waters just by progression," said BlueFloat country manager Michael Pinkerton.

Already looking at other sites in Taiwan, Pinkerton said the government will evaluate the risks and determine how far out they can build. "If it's closer to China, so be it."

China, which regards Taiwan as its own territory, has never renounced the use of force to bring the democratic island under its control. Taiwan's government rejects Chinese sovereignty claims, saying only the island's people can decide their future.

While most developers are not scared off by the prospect of war, some are looking to insurance as a way to hedge against the possibility.

"There is no insurance you can't buy. It's a question of whether you want to pay the price," insurance broker Clive Lin told offshore wind developers in a packed lecture hall in Taipei.

Lin, chief technology officer at Alexander Leed Risk Services, recalled how a decade ago he shrugged off foreign investors' questions about the risk of war with China.

"Now, many foreign developers in Taiwan are asking if they can buy insurance for geopolitical risk," spurred by large payouts from the Ukraine war, he said.

Orsted's Wang said its wind farms "have insurance coverage for all relevant risks" but did not provide details. An Orsted spokesperson declined to comment on whether the company has political risk insurance for its Taiwan projects.

Three foreign energy firms, including two offshore wind developers, had inquired with Leed about political risk insurance for their Taiwan projects since last year, but so far the initial responses from insurers had been negative, Lin told Reuters.

## Melting Glacier Sea Level Rise Could Be 200% Worse Than Expected

LONDON (Dispatches) - Scientists could have been underestimating the melting of the Greenland ice sheet by 200% meaning that sea levels could rise quicker than previously anticipated, according to a study.

New research on how the 'grounding line' - where an ice sheet transitions from being grounded to floating - works hints that glaciers could melt far faster than expected.

Researchers working on the Petermann Glacier in northwest Greenland found that the grounding line moves and enables warm water to reach under the glacier.

The new study shows that warm ocean water intrudes beneath the ice through preexisting subglacial channels, with the highest melt rates occurring at the grounding zone.

Researchers at the University of California, Irvine (UCI) and NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory said their findings could mean that the climate community has been vastly underestimating the magnitude of future sea level rise caused by polar ice deterioration. Using satellite radar data from three European missions, the UCI/NASA team learned that Petermann Glacier's grounding line shifts substantially during tidal cycles, allowing warm seawater to intrude and melt ice at an accelerated rate.

The results are published in the *Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences*.

Lead author Enrico Ciraci, UCI assistant specialist in Earth system science and NASA postdoctoral fellow said, "Petermann's grounding line could be more accurately described as a grounding zone, because it migrates between 2 and 6 kilometers (1.2 miles to 3.7 miles) as tides come in and out."



## Interest Rate Hikes Out of Question for Turkey

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Treasury and Finance Minister Nureddin Nebati said that Turkey would stick to its low-interest rates policy, the core of the government's economic policies it says will be pursued in case of a win in the critical elections this week.

The government has favored lower borrowing costs as part of its economic program unveiled in 2021 to boost exports, production and investment and create new jobs. President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan has insisted that high borrowing costs cause high inflation, rejecting economic thinking that suggests raising interest rates helps curb price increases.



## China's Slow Consumer Inflation, Deepening Factory Gate Deflation to Test Policy

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's consumer prices rose at the slowest pace in more than two years in April, while factory gate deflation deepened, data showed, suggesting more stimulus may be needed to boost a patchy post-COVID economic recovery.

The weak consumer price rise reinforces the signals from this week's trade data suggesting domestic demand remains lackluster, while the deflationary impulse in producer prices underlines the strains on factories - a double-whammy for the world's second-biggest economy as it tries to shake off the COVID-induced damage.

The consumer price index (CPI) in April rose 0.1% year-on-year, the lowest rate since February 2021, and cooling from the 0.7% annual gain seen in March, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said. The result missed the median estimate of a 0.4% rise in a Reuters poll.

Producer deflation also deepened last month, which taken together with the CPI data, highlights the broader economy's struggles to rev-up after the lifting of COVID curbs in December.

The producer price index (PPI) fell at the fastest clip since May 2020 and was down for a seventh consecutive month, declining 3.6% year-on-year after a 2.5% drop the previous month. That compared with a forecast for a 3.2% fall.

China's economy grew faster than expected in the first quarter thanks to the lifting of COVID curbs but the recovery has been uneven. Recent data showed factory activity contracted, while persistent weakness in the property market remains a concern.

The reopening probably put some upward momentum on services inflation, but it was in large part offset by slowing growth in food and energy prices, analysts say.

The latest data could raise pressure on the People's Bank of China (PBOC) to cut rates or release more liquidity into the financial system. It cut lenders' reserve requirements ratio (RRR) for the first time this year in March.

China has already told its banks to reduce the ceiling on interest rates they pay on certain types of deposits.

"Amid a weakening post-Covid recovery, the PBOC's guidance to cut deposit rates, ongoing disinflation, falling market rates and the Fed signalling a potential pause, we continue to believe a PBOC policy lending rate cut is becoming more likely," Ting Lu, chief China economist at Nomura, said in a research note. Overall inflationary pressures remain low with the core consumer inflation, which excludes volatile food and energy prices, up 0.7%, unchanged from the previous month.

The statistics bureau attributed the weaker consumer inflation to the base effect. Vegetable prices extended their decline to 13.5% and pork, a major driver of CPI, slowed its price growth to 4.0% from 9.6% in March.

Overall, analysts are split on whether the central bank will continue to ease policy as record credit growth is likely to limit the extent of any monetary support it's able to provide.

"China is still in the stage of disinflation, not deflation. The post-reopening recovery boosted by the Labour Day holidays could further spur CPI numbers in May, meaning there is less urgency for large-scale monetary easing in the near term," said Bruce Pang, chief economist at Jones Lang Lasalle.

## Inflation Gives Eastern European Currencies Wings

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Czech currency, the koruna, hit a 14-year high and the Hungarian forint a 10-month record earlier this year, boosted by high interest rates, falling energy prices and a strong euro. The two currencies — later joined by the Polish zloty and Romanian leu — have gained despite economic activity contracting.

Observers are asking how this happened and how long it is likely to last.

The currencies in Central and Eastern Europe (CEE) — all outside the euro area except Slovakia — have benefited above all from a high interest rate differential, known as the real interest rate, which is calculated by subtracting the rate of inflation from the nominal interest rate. The CEE currencies now look attractive in comparison with ECB and US Fed rates.

After inflation surged to double-digit rates across CEE countries last year, it now seems to have peaked. But interest rates remain high and central banks are not in a hurry to ease policy until price growth is reined in.

Hence the widening gap between inflation and interest rates, which makes the region attractive to capital looking for a high-yielding home. This is also despite further interest rate increases in the US and the eurozone.

Piotr Arak, director of the Polish Economic Institute (PIE), explains that as a rule of thumb growing exports, cheaper energy, inflows of capital due to higher interest rates "result in stable currencies."

"During recent quarters, there has been a noticeable improvement in current account balances and exports as the countries in the region continue to grow, while the decrease in commodity prices has led to lower import burdens," Arak told DW.

In Poland, the central bank on May 10 held its main interest rate at 6.75%, its level since last September, while inflation fell to 14.7% in April from 16.1% in March. In an interview with the weekly Gazeta Polska, the governor of the National Bank of Poland, Adam Glapinski, said he expected inflation to fall to single digits at the beginning of September. This would make an interest rate cut possible at the end of the year provided inflation eases further.

ING bank's monetary policy expert Rafal Benecki, however, finds the March data from the Polish economy wasn't "a pretty picture" in this respect, indicating the current high interest rates are taking some heat out of the economy.

Core inflation remained broadly unchanged, which suggests enterprises are passing on higher costs onto prices and that disinflation is mainly due to the easing energy shock and lower food price pressure.

ING expects the central bank to keep policy rates unchanged by the end of this year and cuts may start in 2024 at the earliest, meaning short-term scope for further zloty gains may have been "largely exhausted," as Benecki said in a note to clients.



## Middle East Gas Producers Set to Spend \$120b to Boost Output by 2030

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Middle East is set to spend up to \$120 billion to boost natural gas production by more than 19% by 2030, according to energy consultancy Wood Mackenzie.

Natural gas output from the region will rise to 86 billion standard cubic feet (bcfd) a day by the end of the decade, from 72 bcfd currently, it said in a report last week.

The expected increase in production is equivalent to the gas consumption of the entire European power sector and could help energy companies solve the energy trilemma of sustainability, security and affordability, the report said.

"The Middle East can be part of the solution for the global gas markets as the region continues to ramp up production from its gigantic gas reserves," said Alexandre Araman, principal analyst for Middle East Upstream at Wood Mackenzie.

Around half of the 14 bcfd increase will be made available for export, which could have a game-changing effect on the global gas markets, especially as the LNG liquefaction capacity in the Middle East keeps growing. The other half will be absorbed by domestic demand growth.

"To fulfil the level of production growth that we have predicted, investments in non-associated gas projects are set to reach a record \$25 billion this year and a cumulative total of \$120 billion by the end of the decade."

Qatar LNG exports should reach 126 million tonnes per annum (mtpa) by 2030, while Abu Dhabi should be able to export 15.4 mtpa after its new LNG facility comes onstream in 2028.

## All OECD Countries Need to Step Up Efforts to Boost Gender Equality

PARIS (Dispatches) - Despite progress in recent years, more work needs to be done, across all OECD countries, to secure gender equality, with women and girls still facing inappropriate disadvantages and barriers in most spheres of social and economic life, according to a new OECD report.

The report Joining Forces for Gender Equality: What is Holding Us Back? shows progress in some policy areas, such as paternity leave, pay transparency, flexible work opportunities and

higher representation of women in leadership roles. However, major challenges remain, including the need to boost girls' participation in educational fields promising better job opportunities, lower wages for women than men, barriers to entrepreneurship and self-employment for women, gender gaps in lifetime earnings and pension income, women's disproportionate share of unpaid care and housework and women's underrepresentation in politics and government leadership positions.

Even in those countries that have been at the forefront of gender equality policy, women and girls continue to face barriers and disadvantages at home, in the labour market and in public life, says the report. Girls are now, on average, better educated than boys, but still under-represented in educational fields that promise better job opportunities, such as science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM). On average across the OECD, only one in five new university students in ICT studies was a woman (based on 2020 data).

Lower employment rates, fewer working hours per week, substantial labour market segregation, and persistent glass ceilings mean that women get paid lower wages than men. Almost 60% of public employees are women but they make up less than 40% of managers in public employment. Women also face barriers to entrepreneurship and self-employment. Closing gaps in labour force participation and working hours has the potential to drive an average 9.2% boost to GDP across OECD countries by 2060, adding about 0.23% to average annual growth. On average across the OECD, women also spend twice as much time on unpaid care and housework than men.

Recent crises including the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's war of aggression against Ukraine present new gender equality challenges that countries must tackle through innovative policy making, with women more likely to suffer heavier economic and financial consequences, such as energy poverty, due to gender gaps in savings and income.

## U.S. Debt Brinkmanship Risks Serious Costs

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Political brinkmanship over raising the U.S. debt ceiling risks "serious economic costs" even without the "catastrophe" of a default, Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen warned at G7 finance talks in Japan.

Hours earlier, former president Donald Trump urged Republican legislators to trigger the first-ever US debt default by refusing to lift the limit if Democrats do not agree to spending cuts.

President Joe Biden has also threatened to call off his trip to Asia, including in-person attendance at next weekend's Group of Seven summit, if the deepening standoff is not resolved soon.

"In my assessment -- and that of economists across the board -- a default on US obligations would produce an economic and financial catastrophe," Yellen said in a speech.

"Short of a default, brinkmanship over the debt limit can also impose serious economic costs," she added as a three-day meeting of finance ministers and central bank chiefs began in the city of Niigata.

The lifting of the so-called debt ceiling -- a limit on government borrowing to pay for bills already incurred -- is often routine.

But budget-minded Republicans, who won control of the House of Representatives in 2022, have vowed to only raise the limit from its current \$31.4 trillion maximum if spending curbs are enacted.

Last week, Yellen warned that the United States could run out of money to meet its financial obligations as early as June 1.

On Thursday, she recalled a similar impasse in 2011, which resulted in the United States losing its coveted AAA debt rating.

A high-stakes meeting between Biden and key lawmakers from both parties on Tuesday yielded no breakthrough, but the group agreed to keep trying to avert a default.

But on Wednesday, Trump -- a frontrunner for the 2024 Republican presidential nomination -- urged otherwise during a live broadcast on CNN.

"Republicans out there, congressmen, senators, if you don't give you massive cuts, you're gonna have to do a default," he said. When asked about Trump's comments, Yellen said "America should never default" because "it would be tremendously economically and financially damaging".

"The notion of defaulting on our debt is something that would so badly undermine the US and global economy that I think it should be regarded by everyone as unthinkable," she said.

"I'm very hopeful that the differences can be bridged and the debt ceiling will be raised."

## India Extends \$1b Credit Line For Sri Lanka by a Year



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India has extended a \$1bn credit line for Sri Lanka by one year, a Sri Lankan official says, giving the crisis-hit island nation a backup infusion of dollars for essential imports.

The credit line, part of about \$4bn in emergency assistance extended by India during the peak of Sri Lanka's financial crisis early last year, was scheduled to end in March.

After the negotiations, the credit line was extended until March 2024, Sri Lanka's Deputy Treasury Secretary Priyantha Rathnayake told the Reuters news agency on Tuesday.

"There is about \$350m left of the credit line that can be utilised as needed," he told Reuters.

"However, given the increase of foreign exchange availability in the market, the need is not as keen as it was last year."

The announcement came as Sri Lanka's creditor nations are preparing for their first meeting later on Tuesday to coordinate the restructuring of the nation's debt. The focus is turning to whether China will attend.

The online meeting will be held within a new framework launched in Washington, DC in April that creditors hope will serve as a model to resolve the debt difficulties of middle-income economies.

Japan, which initiated the launch together with India and France, has invited all bilateral creditors, including the largest, China, though Japanese officials said it was uncertain whether it would join the talks.

The reason was not immediately clear, although one of the officials felt Beijing could be weighing the merit of participation.

Last month, France, India and Japan unveiled a common platform for talks among bilateral creditors to coordinate the restructuring of Sri Lanka's debt.

Sri Lanka owes \$7.1bn to bilateral creditors, government data show, with \$3bn owed to China, followed by \$2.4bn to the Paris Club and \$1.6bn to India.



## “Count to 10” Nominated For 2 Int’l Awards

TEHRAN (MNA) - Directed by Iranian filmmaker Farid Valizadeh, “Count to 10” was nominated for the best director award at the Playback International Film Festival and the Benelux International Film Festival. “Count to 10” narrates the story of a couple who starts walking as much as they could until one of them passes out. And whoever passes out first has to follow the winner’s decision whatever it might be.

Manoucher Zende Del, Qazaal Nazar, Elnaz Batani, Mania Babaei, Amir Nazar and Bahram Hosseini are the cast of the film. Playback International Film Festival’s goal is to promote films from around the world and bring creators together. Its mission is to find, cultivate and celebrate the very best in international and homegrown talent across all departments of independent filmmakers.



## More Than 71m People Internally Displaced Worldwide in 2022

LONDON (Dispatches) - A “perfect storm” of overlapping crises forced tens of millions to flee within their own country last year, sending the number of internally displaced people to a record high, monitors said.

An unprecedented 71.1 million internally displaced people (IDPs) were registered in 2022 -- up 20 percent from a year earlier -- amid mass displacement for Russia’s war in Ukraine, as well as by the monsoon floods that drenched Pakistan.

A full 60.9 million new internal displacements were meanwhile reported in 2022, with some people forced to flee multiple times during the year, according to a joint report by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC) and the Norwegian Refugee Council (NRC).

That marks an all-time high for new internal displacements, and an increase of 60 percent compared to the some 38 million fresh displacements seen in 2021.

That number is “extremely high”, IDMC chief Alexandra Bilak told AFP. “Much of the increase is caused, of course, by the war in Ukraine, but also by floods in Pakistan, by new and ongoing conflicts across the world, and by a number of sudden and slow onset disasters that we’ve seen from the Americas all the way to the Pacific.”

Last year, new internal displacements from conflict surged to 28.3 million -- nearly doubling from a year earlier and three times higher than the annual average over the past decade.

Beyond the 17 million displacements inside Ukraine last year, eight million were forced from their homes by Pakistan’s monster floods.

Sub-Saharan Africa saw around 16.5 million displacements -- more than half of them due to conflict, especially in the Democratic Republic of Congo and in Ethiopia.

The global internal displacement figures are only expected to grow this year, driven in part by fresh conflicts like the violence ravaging Sudan forcing hundreds of thousands to flee.

More than 700,000 people have already become internally displaced by the fighting that erupted on April 15, while another 150,000 people have fled the country, according to UN numbers.

“Since the start of the... most recent conflict in April, we’ve already recorded the same number of displacements as we did for the whole year in 2022,” Bilak said.

“Clearly, it’s a very volatile situation on the ground,” she said, pointing out that those being newly displaced by the fighting were joining the ranks of more than three million people already displaced across Sudan.

While internal displacement is a global phenomenon, nearly three quarters of the world’s IDPs live in just 10 countries: Syria, Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic



of Congo, Ukraine, Colombia, Ethiopia, Yemen, Nigeria, Somalia and Sudan. Many of them remain displaced due to unresolved conflicts that have dragged on for years and continued to force people to flee their homes last year.

And even as conflict-related displacement surged, natural disasters continued to account for most new internal displacement, spurring 32.6 million such movements in 2022 -- up 40 percent from a year earlier.

NRC chief Jan Egeland described the overlapping crises spurring ever more displacement around the world as a “perfect storm”.

“Conflict and disasters combined last year to aggravate people’s pre-existing vulnerabilities and inequalities, triggering displacement on a scale never seen before,” he said in a statement.

“The war in Ukraine also fuelled a global food security crisis that hit the internally displaced hardest,” he said.

“This perfect storm has undermined years of progress made in reducing global hunger and malnutrition.”

## U.S. Wants Death...

FROM PAGE 1

According to a new report by Foreign Policy Magazine published on Thursday, American weapons sales to NATO states nearly doubled in number and value in 2022.

With the conflict in Ukraine draining European military stockpiles, the top US arms merchants have all seen their share prices skyrocket.

The US government approved 14 major arms sales to NATO members in 2021, totaling around \$15.5 billion, the magazine stated, citing an analysis of Pentagon figures. By the end of 2022, it had approved 24 sales worth roughly \$28 billion, RT reported.

While some of these deals were negotiated years beforehand, the Russia-Ukraine war sent NATO’s European members scrambling to bump up their military spending, and to replenish vehicles, weapons, and ammunition donated to the Ukrainian military.

Latvia, Lithuania, and Estonia have all ordered HIMARS Multiple-Launch Rocket Systems (MLRS), the same systems the US has given dozens of to Ukraine. Earlier this month, the US State Department authorized the sale of 116 M1A1 Abrams tanks to Poland, after Warsaw sent its Soviet-era T-72 and domestically-made PT-91 tanks to Kiev’s forces.

Amid the rush to arm Ukraine, European and American arms stockpiles are running low, according to media reports and admissions by top officials. In addition to the arms sold to its allies, the US has also allocated more than \$110 billion in military and economic aid to Kiev since February, with approximately \$21 billion worth of weapons transported to Ukraine as of December 21.

The unprecedented strain on US stockpiles -- Washington had given Kiev a decade’s worth of Javelin missiles by September, for example -- has resulted in record profits for the arms industry.

So one can see that Washington prefers war in the world and its claim of mediation or peace-brokering is baseless and this country makes most of wars in the world because it sells weapons and make money.

According to the Independent, in Biden’s first full fiscal year as president, weapons sales from the United States to other countries reached \$206 billion, according to the State Department’s annual tally, which uses an opaque but seemingly broader accounting of yearly FMS and DCS figures; Biden’s first-year total surpasses the Trump-era high of \$192 billion. The multibillion-dollar effort to train and equip Ukraine doesn’t fully explain the dramatic rise in total arms sales last year, let alone to autocracies. Russia’s invasion of Ukraine didn’t occur until five months into fiscal year 2022, and much of the assistance from the United States to Ukraine took the form of grants (not sales) and the transfer of materiel from Pentagon stockpiles through the presidential drawdown authority.

So one should not believe what the U.S. says about peace and mediating for peace because peace makes no money for the Western states and especially for the U.S. and they can make most of any war in any part of the world and we can see it apparently in war in Ukraine as Washington continues fanning the flame of war and even accuse other states of helping Russia in this war.

Therefore, as far as these arms manufacturers are in the U.S. and support the administrations, one should expect at any moment any war in any part of the world as we in our Iranian proverb says death is good for the neighbor and the U.S. does not like other countries to sell weapons because they want to have their own monopoly in this field.



## A Skin Patch to Treat Peanut Allergies? Study in Toddlers Shows Promise

WASHINGTON

(Dispatches) - An experimental skin patch is showing promise to treat toddlers who are highly allergic to peanuts



— training their bodies to handle an accidental bite. Peanut allergy is one of the most common and dangerous food allergies. Parents of allergic tots are constantly on guard against exposures that can turn birthday parties and play dates into emergency room visits.

There is no cure. The only treatment is for children 4 and older who can consume a special peanut powder to protect against a severe reaction.

The patch, named Viaskin, aims to deliver that kind of treatment through the skin instead. In a major test with youngsters ages 1 to 3, it helped those who couldn’t tolerate even a small fraction of a peanut to eventually safely eat a few, researchers reported Wednesday.

If additional testing pans out, “this would fill a huge unmet need,” said Dr. Matthew Greenhawt, an allergist at Children’s Hospital Colorado who helped lead the study.

About 2% of U.S. children are allergic to peanuts, some so severely that even a tiny amount can cause a life-threatening reaction. Their immune system overreacts to peanut-containing foods, triggering an inflammatory cascade that causes hives, wheezing or worse. Some youngsters outgrow the allergy but most must avoid peanuts for life and carry rescue medicine to stave off a severe reaction if they accidentally ingest some.

In 2020, the Food and Drug Administration approved the first treatment to induce tolerance to peanuts -- an “oral immunotherapy” named Palforzia that children ages 4 to 17 consume daily to keep up the protection. Aimmune Therapeutics’ Palforzia also is being tested in toddlers.

Immunotherapy is an alternative way to desensitize the body to allergens.

The Viaskin patch is coated with a small amount of peanut protein that is absorbed into the skin. A daily patch is worn between the shoulder blades, where toddlers can’t pull it off.

In the new study, 362 toddlers with peanut allergy first were tested to see how high a dose of peanut protein they could tolerate. Then they were randomly assigned to use the Viaskin patch or a lookalike dummy patch every day.

After a year of treatment, they were tested again and about two-thirds of the toddlers who used the real patch could safely ingest more peanuts, the equivalent of three to four, researchers concluded.

That compares to about a third of youngsters given the dummy patches. Greenhawt said they likely include children who are outgrowing the allergy.

As for safety, four Viaskin recipients experienced an allergic reaction called anaphylaxis that was deemed related to the patch. Three were treated with epinephrine to calm the reaction, and one dropped out of the study.

## U.S. Inflation Eases Slightly But Price Pressure Remains High

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. consumer prices rose again in April, and measures of underlying inflation stayed high, a sign that further declines in inflation are likely to be slow and bumpy.

Prices increased 0.4% from March to April, the government said Wednesday, up from a 0.1% rise from February to March. Compared with a year earlier, prices climbed 4.9%, down slightly from March’s 5% year-over-year increase.

The nation’s inflation rate has steadily cooled since peaking at 9.1% last June but remains far above the Federal Reserve’s (Fed) 2% target rate.

For everyday consumer items, Wednesday’s inflation report was mixed. Gasoline prices jumped 3% just in April. By contrast, grocery prices dropped for a second straight month. Used car prices surged 4.4% after nine months of declines. Rental costs rose but at a slower pace.

Still, the data offered some signs that inflation is continuing to cool. Airline fares dropped 2.6% in April, and hotel prices plunged 3% after four straight monthly increases.

Excluding volatile energy and food costs, core prices rose 0.4% from March to April, the same as from February to March. It was the fifth straight month that core prices have risen at least 0.4%. Core prices are regarded as a better gauge of longer-term inflation trends, and monthly increases at that pace are far above the Fed’s 2% annual target.

Compared with a year ago, core inflation rose 5.5%, just below a year-over-year increase of 5.6% in March.

The Fed is paying particular attention to a measure of services inflation that covers such items as dining out, hotel stays and entertainment and has remained chronically high for much of the past year. This measure, which excludes energy services and housing, rose just 0.1% from March to April and 5.2% compared with a year ago. It had exceeded 6% a month ago.

Last week, the Fed signaled it might pause its rate increases, after imposing 10 straight hikes, so that it could take time to assess how higher borrowing costs have affected the economy. The full economic impact of the hikes, though, might not become evident for months.

For over two years, high inflation has been a significant burden for America’s consumers, a threat to the economy and a frustrating challenge for the Fed. The central bank has raised its key interest rate by a substantial 5 percentage points since March 2022 to drive inflation back down to its 2% target.

Besides making borrowing far more expensive for consumers and businesses, those higher rates have contributed to the collapse of three large banks in the past two months and to a likely pullback in bank lending. The result could be a further weakening of the economy.

## Iran to Stand With...

FROM PAGE 1

He said the resistance front has grown into an extensive axis, which has connected different sources and points of resistance in the world together.

“This front has drawn together altruist, educated and erudite people who share many points in common,” he said. “The main commonality among them is their longing to defend Islam, the honor of Muslims. They defend themselves and others collectively.”

Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf has lauded the epic turnout of Iranian people in international Quds Day rallies, saying Iran is the greatest and most steadfast supporter of the resistance in the world.

Brigadier General Qa’ani described the mass mobilization of Muslim resistance fighters as an ideal commanded by the late founder of the Islamic Republic, Imam Khomeini, and achieved by Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

The chief commander of the IRGC Quds Force also stressed that it does not now last long for resistance fighters in Lebanon, Yemen or anywhere else across the globe to voice solidarity with Palestinians anytime the Zionist regime commits a crime in the occupied territories.

Over the years, Iran has spared no efforts to support resistance movements and repeatedly called resistance the sole way to free Palestine from Israel’s decades-long occupation.

For their part, regional resistance forces have lauded Iran for its unwavering support for them.

Last month, a senior official of Lebanon’s Hezbollah resistance movement said Tehran has always been at the forefront in this regard despite paying the price for its stance.

## GC Approves...

FROM PAGE 1

He stated: “One of the additional amendment bills is the protocol for the extension of the temporary agreement on the establishment of an Iran-EAEU mutual trades and also free trades with EAEU member states free trade which was examined in the meeting of the Guardian Council and was not found to be against the Islamic Law and the Constitution.”

“Amendment protocol of the agreement between Iran and Iraq in order to avoid double taxation and exchange information on income and capital taxes had examined in the previous stage and resulted in a minor flaw, which was not found to be against Islamic Law and the Constitution after the amendment of the parliament.”

## Iranian Oil Tanker...

FROM PAGE 1

“The seized 10,000-ton oil tanker Purity had been illegally leased to a foreigner by falsifying documents since 2018 and its Iranian owners were deprived of the benefits of the oil tanker,” Qahremani said.

The head of the Justice Department of Hormozgan Province added that it was discovered after investigations by security organizations that the foreign company used the vessel for fuel trafficking.

Stressing that the prosecutor of the provincial capital Bandar Abbas ordered the seizure of the oil vessel last February, Qahremani said, “Following a judicial order and close cooperation between the IRGC Navy and Intelligence Ministry, the oil tanker was finally identified and confiscated in the Persian Gulf waters earlier this month.”

The vessel was reported to be at Iran’s Assaluyeh Port on the westernmost coast of the Persian Gulf in order for its fuel consignments to be unloaded.

Forces from the first naval zone of the IRGC late in October seized a foreign tanker ship carrying 11 million liters of smuggled fuel in the Persian Gulf.

The Islamic Republic has vowed that the Persian Gulf would never be a safe place for smugglers. The IRGC’s Navy has also foiled several attacks on Iranian and foreign tankers alike.



## Injury Forces Fraser-Pryce Out of Kenya Athletics Meet

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Injury has forced Jamaican sprint star Shelly-Ann Fraser-Pryce to withdraw from a weekend athletics meet in Kenya that would have signalled the start of her international season.

"I am deeply disappointed to share that I will not be competing at the Kip Keino Classic," Fraser-Pryce said in a statement on Friday, the eve of the event in Nairobi.

"I was truly looking forward to kick off my season at one (of) the greatest athletic events in East Africa," she added.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

### Switchboard:

(+98) (21) 44253448

### Public Relations Tel:

(+98)(21) 44253450

Editorial Board: 44253449

### Public Relations Fax:

(+98)(21) 44253395

### Advertising Department:

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

### Website:

http://www.irannewsdaily.com

### E-Mail Address:

info@irannewsdaily.com

### ISSN 1024-6053

P.O. Box: 15875-8551

Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St., Golestan II St, Golestan St.Marzdaran Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran

Printed by: Entekhab-e Rasaneh

### Distributed by:

Cities of Iran Cultural and Artistic Institute

Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

## Stenson Resigns From European Tour After Sanctions

LONDON (Dispatches) - Axed Ryder Cup captain Henrik Stenson has resigned his European Tour membership after golf chiefs imposed further sanctions on players who competed in LIV Golf and Asian Tour events without permission.

The European Tour, known as the DP World Tour, confirmed the sanctions on Thursday, saying 26 players had been punished on a "case-by-case" basis. Fines range from £12,500 (\$15,600) to £100,000 for each breach of regulations. Suspensions of up to eight tournaments were also handed out.

# Jokić, Nuggets Roll Over Suns to Reach Western Conference Finals

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Nikola Jokić and the Nuggets absolutely dominated the shorthanded Phoenix Suns to officially secure their spot in the Western Conference finals. The Nuggets flew to an easy 125-100 blowout win over the Suns at the Footprint Center in Phoenix, which closed out their Western Conference semifinals series 4-2. It was the largest margin of victory by any road team so far this postseason.

The Nuggets flew ahead at the end of the first quarter and never looked back. They closed the period on a 17-0 run in the final three minutes, which gave them an 18-point lead. They quickly pushed that to 30 by halftime, thanks to a second 17-4 run late in the second quarter. The Suns were getting blown out by 11 on the boards, and Denver almost shut Kevin Durant down completely. Durant was held to just 8 points in the first half after shooting just 2-of-11 from the field.

The Suns narrowed the gap briefly in the second half, but it was far too late to make any meaningful push. The Nuggets cruised to the 25-point win with ease, and will now advance to the Western Conference finals for the first time since 2020 — when they lost to the Los Angeles Lakers in the Walt Disney World bubble because of the COVID-19 pandemic. The Nuggets have never reached the NBA Finals. They lost in the ABA Finals once before the merger.

Jokić — who had his 10th career playoff triple-double in their Game 5 win, which set an NBA record for a center — led the Nuggets with 32 points, 12 assists and 10 rebounds on Thursday. He's the first player to have three triple-doubles in the same playoff series since Russell Westbrook did in 2017. Jamal Murray added 26 points, and Kentavious Caldwell-Pope finished with 21 points. They shot almost 54% from the field as a team, too.

Durant finished with 23 points, and ended up shooting 8-of-19 from the field. Cameron Payne dropped 31 points after shooting 7-of-9 from behind the arc. Devin Booker



finished with 12 points and 8 assists, and shot just 4-of-13 from the field.

The Suns were missing both Chris Paul and Deandre Ayton. Paul missed most of the series with a groin injury. Ayton was ruled out on Thursday afternoon with a rib contusion, something he sustained in Game 5 on Tuesday night after colliding with Bruce Brown. But, perhaps more disappointing for Suns fans, Phoenix has now been on the wrong end of a blowout with a spot in the conference finals on the line in back-to-back seasons. The Dallas Mavericks beat the Suns by 33 points in Game 7 of their Western Conference semifinals series last season.

The Nuggets will now await the winner of the "California State Championship" series in the conference finals. The Lakers hold a 3-2 series lead over the Golden State Warriors headed into Game 6 of their series.

## Haaland, Kerr Win FWA's Player of the Year Awards



LONDON (Dispatches) Manchester City's Erling Haaland has been named the Football Writers' Association's men's player of the year, while Chelsea's Sam Kerr won the women's award, it was announced.

Norway international Haaland, who has scored a record 51 goals in all competitions for City this campaign, triumphed with 72% of the votes -- the biggest margin since the Premier League began.

Arsenal's Bukayo Saka came second among the votes followed by his team mate Martin Odegaard.

In the women's game, Australia international Kerr became the first player to win consecutive awards after she bagged twice as many votes as Aston Villa's Rachel Daly. Chelsea's Lauren James came third.

Haaland and Kerr will receive their awards at a ceremony on May 25.

Haaland's City are top of the Premier League table by one point with four games remaining, while Kerr's Chelsea are second in the Women's Super League standings.

## French Open

### Announces Prize

### Money Increase for 2023

PARIS (Dispatches) - The prize money for this year's French Open will total 49.6 million euros (\$54.6 million), up 12.3% on 2022, organisers of the claycourt Grand Slam announced.

The amount offered for the Roland Garros singles draws will be raised by 9.1% on 2022, with organizers saying in a statement they had "significantly increased" the prize pot to ensure a more even distribution between players.

Losing players in the opening three rounds of the singles draw stand to receive between 11% and 13% more this year, with organizers also increasing prize money for the three rounds of the qualifying competition by an average of 11.8%.

The men's and women's champions will receive 2.3 million euros each.

The prize money for the men's and women's doubles events have also gone up by 4%, organisers added.

The allocation for the wheelchair and quad competition is 810,000 euros, equating to a 40% increase on 2022.

The French Open takes place from May 28-June 11.

## Something Special About

### Nadal and Roland Garros

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Coco Gauff had doubts about an ailing Rafa Nadal's chances at last year's French Open, only to see him romp to a 14th title at the Paris Grand Slam, and the women's world number five said she will never underestimate him again at Roland Garros.

Nadal, 36, has not played since suffering a hip injury at the Australian Open in January and there are doubts about the Spaniard's participation in Paris after the 22-time major champion pulled out of the Italian Open.

Gauff said Nadal would be her first pick to win in Paris if he is fit enough to play, despite his lack of time on court. "I don't think he needs match experience," the 19-year-old told reporters in Rome. "I'm sure he probably would have preferred to play some matches before. Him and Roland Garros is something special."



# Mueller Remains Key Team Member

The 33-year-old, who is a rare one-club player after having come through the Bayern youth system, has been left on the bench in recent weeks under Tuchel and has played only minor substitute roles.

He did not start either of their two matches against Manchester City as they were knocked out of the Champions League in the last eight and his lack of game-time has fanned speculation he could be looking for a move away from Munich at the end of the season.

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich stalwart Thomas Müller remains a key player for the team even in his current substitute role, coach Thomas Tuchel said, refusing to be drawn into speculating about the midfielder's future.

"Thomas is the one who will mainly decide that because Thomas is Bayern Munich and Bayern Munich is Thomas," Tuchel told a press conference.

"He is playing for his 12th German title. That is what we are all focused on. I consider everything else an exaggeration and missing the target."

"He remains a key part even if he came from the bench a few times recently. From that to go and talk about a career end is widely off the mark."

Tuchel said the 2014 World Cup winner has had a reduced programme in recent days. "He has some knocks at the end of the season which is normal," Tuchel said.

Mueller is a crowd favorite in Munich and the last Bayern regular to have transitioned successfully from their youth system.

Bayern, who are in top spot in the Bundesliga, a point ahead of Borussia Dortmund with three games remaining, hosted struggling Schalke 04.

## Djokovic Feels Good After Injury



ROME (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic said that Carlos Alcaraz is the man to beat at the Italian Open, but reassured fans that he "feels good" after his recent elbow injury.

Top seed Djokovic comes into the clay-court tournament, where he has been champion six times, braced to lose top spot in the world rankings to Alcaraz.

The flamboyant Spaniard, fresh from back-to-back clay titles in Barcelona and Madrid, just needs to play a match in the Italian capital to return to the summit ahead of the French Open which starts later this month.

"He's going to be number one after this tournament and if it happens it will be deservedly so. He plays very impressive tennis, a great level. He's the player to beat on this surface no doubt," said Djokovic, who starts his title defence against Argentina's Tomas Etcheverry on Friday.

Djokovic won a record-equalling 22nd Grand Slam at the Australian Open in January but missed the American hard-court swing in March due to his refusal to be vaccinated against Covid.

The 35-year-old has endured a tough start to the European clay-court season, being eliminated in the last 16 at the Monte Carlo Masters, in the quarter-finals at Banja Luka and then pulling out of Madrid with his elbow problem.

However Djokovic said that he had overcome the physical problems which have blighted this part of his season.

"It's all good. There are always some things here and there that bother you at this level," he added.

"It's normal. When you're not 20-25 anymore you experience that a bit more than what used to be the case."

"I feel good... Historically throughout my career Rome has been a very nice tournament for me, I had success in it many times, got to finals."

"It's my most successful clay court event. Coming into the French Open it can be a great springboard for what's coming up in Paris where I want to be at my best."

## Liverpool Can Attract Players Even Without Champions League



LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool are an attractive prospect for players in the transfer market even if they are not assured of a place in the Champions League next season, manager Jurgen Klopp said.

Fifth-placed Liverpool are making a late charge for the top-four in the Premier League and a berth in Europe's lucrative competition, with Klopp's team only a point behind Manchester United having played a game more.

"If I'm allowed to talk to a player, we cannot say in the moment if we have Champions League football. So, if we're already talking, then it is already clear that he already knows about that situation," Klopp told reporters.

"It's obvious we have to be part of the Champions League, fight for trophies... If you want to be part of that, you're more than welcome. We cannot guarantee Champions League football. "But all the rest is the same as before: a fantastic club with a really good football team - and a better one hopefully next year. It's really that simple. Still Liverpool. We're really attractive to a lot of players."

Liverpool have three league games left this season, starting with Monday's trip to Leicester City. Leicester produced one of the greatest sporting achievements when they won the league in 2015-16 after starting the campaign as 5,000-1 outsiders, but they are fighting for survival this season, sitting two points adrift of the safety zone.

Klopp expects Monday's game to be a testing encounter for Liverpool.

"I've told the boys already, this is now the real fight. A home game for Leicester, they need all the points they can get. It will be a super difficult and super intense game," Klopp said, adding that Roberto Firmino and Naby Keita are still absent through injury.

Having won their last six league games to jump three spots to fifth, Klopp said his team are moving in the right direction.

"This period is super important because it gives us all a massive hint on how it (the future) could look," Klopp said.