

**Despite U.S. Pressures and Bullies, Russia and Iran Will Continue Working Toward Building Relations Based on Mutual Benefit And Respect, Kremlin Spokesman Dmitry Peskov Said**

# IRAN NEWS

**Judiciary Says Three Men Who Had Been Convicted of Launching A Terrorist Attack That Killed Three Security Forces in Isfahan During Foreign-Backed Riots Last Year Were Executed in Iran**

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## Indonesia to Sign Trade Agreement With Iran This Week

JAKARTA (Dispatches) - Jakarta and Tehran have concluded the final stage of negotiations on a bilateral trade agreement, the Indonesian Trade Ministry said.

The announcement came after the two sides finished a seventh round of talks, and the ministry said the governments could now proceed to sign the documents on the deal, which is called the Indonesia-Iran Preferential Trade Agreement (II-PTA).

The ministry said Indonesia and Iran would sign the trade agreement during a visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Jakarta between May 22 and 24.

"Iran is a nontraditional trade partner for Indonesia. With this PTA, we hope to widen our export opportunities and expand our market reach, especially in the Middle East and Persia," Johni Martha, the ministry's director of bilateral negotiations.

Indonesia has been looking to new markets to diversify its export options and thereby reduce its reliance on traditional trade partners, many of which have been affected by a weakened global economy and geopolitical risks.

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## Iran, Pakistan Open Border Marketplace, Power Transmission Line



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Pakistan jointly inaugurated a marketplace and a power transmission line along their shared border Thursday in a significant move aimed at boosting regional trade and energy cooperation.

Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif addressed a ceremony in a live broadcast from the Iranian side of the more than the 900-kilometer border between the two countries.

Raisi said the project had set the stage for Tehran and Islamabad to expand their economic and energy exchanges.

The transmission line would export 100 megawatts of Iranian electricity to Pakistan's border province of Baluchistan. The impoverished, natural resources-rich region already imports 100 megawatts of low-cost power from Iran.

"We are fully prepared to further deepen our relations with our neighboring country Pakistan in the energy sector," the Iranian president said.

The marketplace opened by the two countries Thursday links Iran's southeastern city of Pishin to Pakistan's southwestern city of Mand. It is one of the six border markets the two countries are jointly constructing.

Raisi said the facilities would help create jobs and boost bilateral "retail trade" to help thousands of households on both sides of the remote, poverty-stricken regions.

"The message of this project is one of security. ... Today, both countries see the border as an opportunity and not a threat," the Iranian leader stressed, speaking through an official interpreter.

Sharif said that he had held a formal meeting with Raisi on the sidelines of the inauguration and the two discussed ways to strengthen border security cooperation.

"We have exchanged proposals to make our joint border security mechanism more coherent and robust," the Pakistani prime minister said.

"I will convene an urgent meeting as soon as I return to Pakistan and we will take appropriate, effective steps in the light of your proposals," Sharif told Raisi without elaborating.

Iran and Pakistan signed an agreement in 1990 to construct a nearly 2,700-kilometer gas pipeline to export Iranian gas to the energy-deficient South Asian neighboring country. But U.S. sanctions on Tehran blocked any progress of the project.

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## 2 Iranian Banks Plan to Set Up Offices in Russia

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Two Iranian banks are planning to launch offices and branches in Russia, according to a Central Bank of Iran (CBI) official and amid growing trade and business ties between the two countries.

"Fortunately some good developments are taking place. We hope to announce news of the inauguration of the representative office and branch in Russia for at least two Iranian commercial banks in future," said Mohsen Karimi, who serves as CBI's deputy governor for international affairs, on Thursday.

The announcement came a day after Russia's second-largest bank VTB opened a representative office in Iran.

Iranian officials said the VTB is the first Russian bank to be directly represented in Iran as they expressed hope that the bank's office in Tehran would help boost transparency in Iran's international banking relations while improving trade and transaction capabilities for Iranian and Russian businesses.

Karimi said VTB's decision to set up an office in Tehran is in line with its policy to identify opportunities for investment and commercial activities in Iran.

He said Iran's CBI has been pushing Iranian banks in recent months to do the same and try to seize economic opportunities existing in the Russian market. Iran and Russia have expanded their trade and energy ties since February 2022 when Russia came under Western sanctions because of the war in Ukraine.

## Iran Deplores Baseless, Delusional Accusation By G7 Ministers

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has strongly condemned an accusation leveled by financial leaders of the Group of Seven advanced economies, urging them to end their complicity in illegal US sanctions instead of making "baseless" charges against the Islamic Republic.

The G7 finance ministers and central bank governors claimed in a statement on May 13 that they were concerned about "illicit financing risk emanating from Iran."

"We strongly condemn that part of the G7 finance ministers' statement that makes a completely baseless and delusional accusation against the Islamic Republic of Iran," Kanaani said.

He urged the small group of countries "that are trying to impose their wishes" on others to "stop their deplorable practice of accompanying and appeasing the illegal US sanctions which violate the fundamental principles of international law and human rights against the great Iranian nation."

Kanaani added that the G7 members should be held accountable for their gross violations of international regulations instead of approving and being complicit in "unilateral and unfair positions" on the Iranian nation.

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## Pakistan Risks \$18b Fine For Failing To Complete Iran Gas Project

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan is facing penalties of as much as \$18 billion if it fails to complete a gas pipeline project it is carrying out with Iran, local media have reported.

The project, which should supply some 750 million cubic feet of natural gas to Pakistan daily, has been fraught with difficulties, the chief among them being Pakistan's failure to build its section of the infrastructure.

Iran has already built its own portion of the pipeline but Pakistan has to finish the one passing through its territory by 2024. If it fails to do that, Iran has threatened a lawsuit and compensation of \$18 billion.

The pipeline should have been completed by 2019 but the two countries revised their original agreement to give Pakistan more time to build its portion of the pipeline.

The Pakistani foreign ministry said it was going to discuss the problems with "relevant parties", including Iran and the United States, which prompted a heated reaction from the head of the Public Accounts Committee—a transparency watchdog for all ministries and public agencies.

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## Afghanistan Urged to Allow Iranian Experts To Visit Dam Built on Hirmand River

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran once again calls on Afghanistan's Taliban government to allow expert visits to a dam built on the border river of Hirmand, also known as Helmand, instead of issuing political statements.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks during a visit to Sistan and Baluchestan Province on Thursday after the Taliban government claimed the Hirmand River does not have enough water to be shared with Iran.

Amirabdollahian said despite frequent calls from Iran, the Taliban government has not yet allowed Iranian experts to visit the dam.

The Helmand River, the longest watercourse in Afghanistan, rises in the Hindu Kush Mountains west of Kabul and flows in an arc southwest until it empties out into the Hamoun wetlands, located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan Province.

The Iranian foreign minister said that the main criterion for confirming the lack of enough water behind the dam is technical and objective inspections by experts not issuing political statements.

He said that "a technical delegation from Iran's Ministry of Energy and from the Afghan side should jointly visit the Kajaki Dam and measure the water situation, release the water and see whether or not this water enters the Sistan region."

Amirabdollahian added that "under the treaty, this is the natural right of Sistan and we are seriously pursuing this issue."

The Taliban government also described frequent demands for the country's water share by Iranian officials as harmful. Earlier on Thursday, Iran's president issued a stern warning to the Afghan government, asking Kabul to give the people of Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province their rights.

Speaking on the sidelines of the inauguration ceremony of a number of water and electricity projects in the southeastern province of Sistan and Baluchestan, President Ebrahim Raisi warned that Tehran will in no way tolerate a rights violation of the province's people.

He said the right of the people of Sistan and Baluchestan to Hirmand water has been enshrined in previous treaties, and the issue is not related to a specific period.

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## Qatar Signs \$10b Contract to Develop Gas Field Shared With Iran

DOHA (Dispatches) - A \$10 billion project has been agreed to develop a vast natural gas field shared between Qatar and Iran.

The deal was signed by QatarEnergy with French-owned Technip Energies for the scheme in the world's largest natural gas field.

The Iranian part, known as South Pars, supplies 70% of Iran's gas.

In a statement, QatarEnergy stated that the project will include two giant liquefied natural gas (LNG) production lines, with an annual capacity of 16 million tons.

The company said the extra LNG capacity would increase the country's total production by 60 percent reaching 126 million tons by 2027.

The Russian war on Ukraine and sanctions imposed by Europe and the US on Moscow have increased global demand for Qatar's gas.

The rapid development of the Qatari part comes as the completion of the remaining phases of the Iranian part has been delayed for years.

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## Qatar Pleased of Being Invited to Tehran Book Fair

TEHRAN (IBNA) - Qatar's Acting Minister of Culture who represents Doha at the 34th Tehran International Book Fair (TIBF) said his country is pleased that Iran has invited them to this event underway in the Iranian capital.

Ahmad Al-Mohammed Emadi said: "We are happy of attending this edition of TIBF which is one of the largest international fairs in the field of culture and books. The exhibition is greatly welcomed by

visitors, and the attendance is increasing day by day."

"In this edition of the fair, we are representing the publishing section of the Qatar's Ministry of Culture, which includes various titles. Among them are books on poetry, fiction, translated books, children's books, social issues, religious subjects, and books that introduce the relations and Eids (religious celebrations) such as Ramadan in Qatar."

## UN Chief Lauds Restoration of Iran-Saudi Ties

TEHRAN (PressTV) - United Nations Secretary-General António Guterres has praised the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia on restoration of diplomatic ties after seven years of estrangement, terming it as "a turning point" that marks the beginning of a new era of constructive interactions in the Middle East.

Guterres made the remarks in a telephone conversation with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian on Thursday evening.

After several days of intensive negotiations hosted by Beijing, Tehran and Riyadh clinched a deal on March 10 to restore diplomatic relations and reopen embassies.

The meeting between Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian and his Saudi counterpart

Elsewhere in the conversation, Guterres went on to point to a United Nations-organized conference on Afghanistan in the Qatari capital of Doha in early May, stating that all participants in the two-day meeting reached a consensus on the need to form an inclusive government with the participation of all ethnic groups in Afghanistan, fight against terrorism, support and empower of Afghanistan's economy, fight against drug production and trafficking, as well as securing the right to education for girls and women in the country.

The UN chief once again praised Iran's hosting a remarkable population of



Afghan refugees, underscoring the need for international assistance to the country in this regard.

He also expressed hope that the Ukraine war would come to an end as soon as possible, referring to a peace initiative developed by a group of African heads of state that could contribute to a solution to the Russia-Ukraine conflict, and the meeting of senior officials in Istanbul to extend a deal allowing the safe Black Sea export of Ukraine grain and agricultural fertilizers.

The secretary-general of the United Nations also stressed the need for a sustainable ceasefire in Yemen, and praised Iran's important and constructive role in the region.

For his part, Amirabdollahian described as positive the closed-door summit on Afghanistan in Qatar, stating that Iran has been hosting millions of Afghan refugees and assisting them with various services for decades.

Management of such a high number of refugees requires international attention and support, the Iranian foreign minister pointed out.

The top Iranian diplomat also expressed hope that the war and siege in Yemen would come to a close as soon as possible.

Amirabdollahian continued to underline Iran's vehement opposition to Ukraine war, expressing hope that the involved parties would return to the path of dialogue, end the war and establish peace.

The Iranian foreign minister and the UN chief also discussed the course of talks on the revival of the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), and the removal of sanctions, besides Tehran's cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency to resolve remaining misunderstandings.

## Importance of Scientists' Decisions For Iran's Advancement Remarkable

TEHRAN (IP) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi says the country's scientists and elites should recognize that they are considered among those making decisions for the country's advancements.

Delivering a speech in the opening ceremony of ICT projects, Raisi said that the Iranian scholars have reached the point where they feel they are of decision-maker body of the country and at the same time competing with each other on the quality of their work.

Raisi said that good work is being done but there is yet to reach the desired point, adding that one of the manifestations of a people-oriented government is the participation of the people in different sectors, including the knowledge-based projects, with the administration that is just supporting and supervising the process.

"Until yesterday, we were the consumers of the technological products, but now thanks to our scientists, we have managed to produce software and brainware along with hardware," he recalled.

President Raisi pointed to the surrounding countries in Asia and their advancement in terms of technology, saying as much as Iran earns money out of oil selling, the Asian countries (including Iran) do so out of technology such as in the digital economy.

He referred to the national information network as the country's infrastructure for progress and said until the former administration the project advanced up to 30 percent and in the current administration it reached 60 percent, the pace of which must be increased.

Iran's president reiterated that work that is offered in the Ministry of Information and Communications Technology today must be of high quality and done at a higher pace.

## DM Stresses Constant Progress in Iran's Missile Technology

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Describing the missile industry as a key component of Iran's defense power, Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani called for efforts to update those capabilities steadily to deal with threats.

In a meeting with the Defense Ministry's Aerospace Industries Organization staffers on Thursday, General Ashtiani said diverse types of missile defense systems are considered a top priority in Iran's defense doctrine, considering a whole host of threats to the Islamic Republic.

The minister also emphasized the need to update the missile technologies and provide expert training and support for the military forces.

Lauding the Defense Ministry's success in countering the emerging threats, he said such a model of management can be employed to address other problems in the country.

General Ashtiani also emphasized the necessity for the development of various homegrown satellites for application in telecommunication, precision farming, meeting water challenges, and preparation for natural disasters.

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. In February 2018, Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities, hitting back at the enemies for disputing the country's missile program.

## Iran Ready to Carry Out Iraq Gas Projects

TEHRAN (Shana) - Deputy Oil Minister Majid Chegeni announced Iran's readiness to carry out and complete Iraq's gas projects.

He made the remark in a meeting with visiting Iraqi Deputy Oil Minister Laith al-Shaher on the second day of the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, also known as Iran Oil Show 2023.

"We held very good talks about extending Iran's gas export agreement with Iraq during the recent trip to this country with Iran Oil Minister Javad Owji."

Iran exports 35 million cubic meters of gas to Iraq per day, he said, continuing, "Iran has very good technical and engineering capacities and many project equipment are made locally."

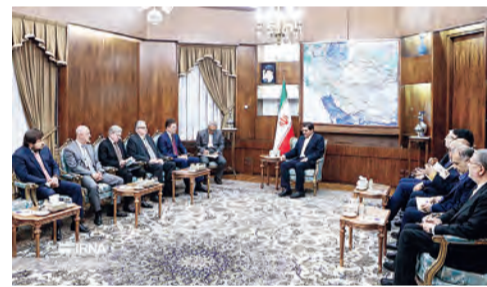
Shaher, for his turn, appreciated Iran's Ministry of Petroleum for holding the event and inviting Iraq.

## INSTC to Benefit All Regional Countries

TEHRAN (IRNA) - First Vice-president Mohammad Mokhber has hailed an agreement between Iran and Russia that will help speed up cargo transit through the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), saying that the transit route will definitely benefit all regional countries.

Mokhber made the comment on Wednesday afternoon as he hosted Deputy Russian Prime Minister Alexander Novak, hours after Iran's Road Minister and Russia's transport minister signed the agreement to build the Rasht-Astara railway. That's a project in northern Iran, which is key to the transit of cargo via INSTC.

Iran's first vice-president called the \$1.6-billion deal an important step in ties between the Islamic Republic and Russia, saying that the two sides should now seriously work to implement the agreement.



The Russian official on his part said that the North-South Transport Corridor will create a strategic route for Iran, Russia and all regional countries.

During their talks in Tehran, Mokhber and Novak discussed Iran-Russia economic cooperation in other fields as well, including oil, gas, industry and agriculture, among other things.

The Iranian official said that the two countries should accelerate ditching the dollar in their trade transactions in a bid to further boost their economic cooperation.

On the sidelines of the meeting, the Russian deputy prime minister and Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji signed a joint statement on cooperation between the two countries. Novak and Owji are the chairmen of Iran-Russia Joint Economic and Trade Cooperation Commission.

## Tehran Dismisses Washington Concern Over Expansion of Cooperation With Neighbors

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry has rejected as "unjustified and invalid" concerns voiced by the Joe Biden administration over Tehran's expansion of trade cooperation with other states, saying the latest agreements with Russia and Pakistan are in line with Iran's emphasis on the policy of good neighborliness.

Nasser Kanaani wrote in a post published on his Twitter page on Thursday that the signing of an

agreement on the completion of the Rasht-Astara railroad, with Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin attending the ceremony via videoconference, as well as the inauguration of joint border projects in the presence of Raisi and Prime Minister of Pakistan Shehbaz Sharif are all part of Iran's "neighbor-oriented" policy.

He highlighted that such a strategy is based upon "cooperation for common security, development and welfare."

Kanaani's remarks came after the US State Department's principal deputy spokesperson voiced concern over the recent agreement between Iran and Russia on the construction of the Rasht-Astara railroad - a vital section of the North-South Corridor that connects South Asia to North Europe.

"Any steps or any project being undertaken to go around sanctions is something that we of course would find deeply concerning," Vedant Patel said at a press briefing on May 17.

## Amnesty Granted by Supreme Leader Covered 88k Inmates

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Judiciary chief has announced that a total of 88,000 inmates, including people arrested during last year's riots in the country, have been pardoned under an amnesty granted by Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei earlier this year.

Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei said that the Iranian judiciary had separated the cases of "repentant individuals" from those of the rioters, and granted amnesty to them as per the Supreme Leader's order.

The unrest of the past year was to a large extent instigated by foreign elements, but some individuals also took to the streets without being affiliated with foreign agents, Ejei pointed out.

In addition to these cases, some people have received other forms of "legal

pardons," including with respect to their pecuniary punishment, the judiciary chief said, adding that a total of 88,000 people have been granted amnesty.

The unrest that took place last fall was triggered by the death of a young Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, who died in hospital on September 16, days after she collapsed in a police station in Tehran.

Iran's Legal Medicine Organization concluded in a report back then that Amini's death was caused by prior illness rather than blows to the head, as some had alleged without any evidence.

The protests were peaceful at first, but soon turned violent in several Iranian cities, with some rioters fatally attacking security forces and engaging in acts of vandalism against public property.

## Russia Opposes Extra-Regional Meddling in Countries' Affairs

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Chairman of Russia's State Duma Vyacheslav Volodin has said that his country, like Iran, is opposed to attempts by extra-regional powers to interfere in the internal affairs of regional nations.

The Russian official made the comment in a meeting with Iran's Supreme Court Chief Ahmad Mortazavi Moqaddam in Moscow.

Volodin hailed the high-level relations between Iran and Russia in all fields, which he said are indicative of the political determination of both sides to further promote their mutual cooperation.

He also said that the interaction between parliamentary and judicial bodies of Iran and Russia help the two countries deepen cooperation in fighting corruption, terrorism and extremism.

The Iranian official on his part hailed the growing cooperation between Tehran and Moscow as well.

He also referred to the judicial and parliamentary bonds between the two sides, saying that enhancing those bonds can pave the way for the public support to the strategic ties between the two nations at the time when certain countries target the

sovereignty of independent states through their illegal unilateral measures.

The two sides stressed the need for keeping up negotiations aimed at using all capacities to develop judicial and parliamentary ties between Iran and Russia.

Iran's Supreme Court chief arrived in Russia on Monday night at the official invitation of his Russian counterpart. Mortazavi Moqaddam has met other Russian officials, including Prosecutor General Igor Victorovich Krasno, and wrapped up his visit on Friday.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:26
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:14
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:55

32. And in no wise covet those things in which Allah Hath bestowed His gifts More freely on some of you than on others: To men is allotted what they earn, and to women what they earn: But ask Allah of His bounty. For Allah hath full knowledge of all things.

33. To (benefit) every one, We have appointed shares and heirs to property left by parents and relatives. To those, also, to whom your right hand was pledged, give their due portion. For truly Allah is witness to all things.

Surah 4. Women (32 - 33)

## ICCIMA Soon to Open Its Office in Russia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (ICCIMA) says the ICCIMA is soon to open its trade office in Russia.**

Gholam-Hossein Shafei who was leading a trade delegation to Republic of Tatarstan in Russia in meeting with the Head of Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Republic of Tatarstan announced readiness of opening its trade office in Russia.

In the meeting, Shafei pointed to the sincere relation of the private sectors of Iran and Russia and said that the priority of the ICCIMA is to launch its trade office in Russia and expressed hope the office would be launched by the yearend due to considerable demands.

Shafei was leading a trade delegation to attend the Kazan Forum 2023 and on the sidelines of the event met with the economic activists of Republic of Tatarstan and during the meeting highlighted the policies of the ICCIMA and the government in trade with neighboring states and said that boosting economic relation will lead to strong bonds between the nations.

He then pointed to the capacities of Tatarstan and capabilities of Iran for cooperation and said that the number of fields for bilateral cooperation is huge and in the current condition, it can create deep changes in direction of broadening economic ties in the shortest time.

He added that economic activists of both parties have never had such an opportunity, reiterating that this opportunity will not last long and both sides should take advantage of the existing capacities for strengthening bilateral trade.

He then pointed to the interests of economic activists of both countries for cooperation and this is because of political relation and will of Iran and Russia for broadening interactions and both sides should resolve infrastructural problems.



Shafei further said that signing of agreement for the North-South Corridor is an opening for broadening economic ties and it can resolve some part of problems of the private sectors for trade.

He reiterated that infrastructural problems are very serious and businessmen are very concerned about them and it may slow down the pace of bilateral trade.

Shafei noted that custom, port and transportation are three major problems for bilateral trade and they should be resolved for fast for broadening economic relations between Iran and Russia.

He then pointed to the recent talks of the Head of Chamber of Commerce of Russia who was present in the meeting and said that ICCIMA has approved the launch of 5 trade offices in some certain countries for boosting trade and the priority is to launch the office in Russia first.

President of the Russian Chamber of Commerce and Industry said that Russia plans to open a representative office of the Iranian Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture.

"We are actively working on opening a representative office of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry in Russia," Sergey Katyrin said.

He also welcomed the proposals of Mr. Shafei and said that recent exchange of delegations between Iran and Russia shows that there has been good cooperation between Iran and Russia for trade and both countries are doing some works which have been unprecedented. He also welcomed all Iranian businessmen who are trying to work with Russia and Russia will provide good facilities for them.

## Active Presence of PGSOC At Iran Oil Show 2023



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – Persian Gulf Star Oil Company (PGSOC) with displaying required technology book in line with identifying domestic suppliers and producers has participated in the 27th international exhibition on oil, gas, refining and petrochemical "Iran Oil Show 2023".**

According to the public relations of PGSOC, the company has taken part in the 27th Iran Oil Show for preserving and improving producing capacity of products with displaying the required technology book.

In this book, needs of Persian Gulf Star Oil Company has separately been presented in the fields of technical and engineering services, exploitation operation, maintenance, electricity, precision tools. Control system, IT and technology, data, safety, health, environment, research and development and the book facilitates the way for the domestic knowledge-based companies for cooperation with the biggest condensate refinery of the world, Persian Gulf Star Refinery.

The company beside displaying its achievements has put on this play this book which will be useful for the knowledge-based companies for cooperation.

The show will be open to the public by today and enthusiasts can visit the pavilion of the company at Hall 36 and announce readiness for cooperation.

## Tehran, Moscow Pledge to Expand Ties



**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran and Russia have signed scores of economic and energy deals as the two countries seek to replicate their successful security and military cooperation in efforts that could offset the impacts of Western sanctions on their economies.**

Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak led a high-ranking delegation to major events and ceremonies in Tehran on Wednesday where Iranian and Russian ministers and senior officials signed contracts and memoranda of understanding (MoUs) worth billions of dollars.

The most notable of the deals was a \$1.6 billion contract to finance and build the 162-kilometer Rasht-Astara railway, a key transport link in northern Iran which connects Russia and Northern Europe to Persian Gulf and Indian Ocean via railways.

Russia's First Deputy Energy Minister Pavel Sorokin and Iran's Deputy Oil Minister Ahmad Assadzadeh signed two contracts and eight MoUs to boost scientific and technological cooperation in the oil and gas sector, according to media reports published on Wednesday.

An agreement was also signed between customs chiefs of Iran and Russia for mutual recognition of institutions of authorized economic operator, said the reports.

Novak, a former Russian energy minister, also attended Iran Oil Show, a prestigious annual event where Iranian and foreign companies show off their technological and logistical capabilities.

He said afterwards that Russia and Iran have major oil and gas projects in the works which cover cooperation on six oil and two gas fields. He said Russia's state energy company Gazprom is particularly interested in joint development projects for Kish and North Pars gas fields in the Persian Gulf.

Iran and Russia have expanded their energy and economic cooperation since February 2022 when Russia's energy sector came under Western sanctions because of the war in Ukraine.

Iran has been facing similar sanctions since 2018 when a former US government pulled out of a landmark international deal on Iran's nuclear program.

## Iran Launches Over \$110m Worth of Telecom Projects

**TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran launched more than \$110 million worth of telecom projects as the country moves ahead with plans to boost its communication infrastructure.**

President Ebrahim Raisi inaugurated six major projects that were key to Iran's telecoms infrastructure in a ceremony that marked the World Telecommunication and Information Society Day.

The projects included providing FTTx services, which offer broadband via optic fiber, to three million households and businesses in Iran.

The project is part of a larger drive to make FTTx available to 20 million customers in Iran by 2025 when Raisi's current term in office expires.

Other projects included providing optic fiber access from Iran's mainland to three remote islands of Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Abu Musa in the Persian Gulf, as well as launching fiber connection between islands of Kish and Hendurabi in the same region.

Iran's telecoms minister Issa Zarepour said in the inauguration ceremony that some 4,000 new villages across Iran had been connected to the country's National Information Network, a platform that offers high-speed internet and intranet services.

He said the government had spent some 42 trillion rials (\$84 million) on the project over the past 20 months.

## NIOC, Gazprom Discuss Investment in Oil, Gas Development Projects

**TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Oil Company head and Russian state company Gazprom deputy chairman held talks on investment patterns for development of oil and gas fields.**

NIOC CEO Mohsen Khojastehmehr and Gazprom's Vitaly Markelov also discussed their cooperation in line with the \$40 billion memorandum of understanding (MoU) the two sides signed last year.

Tehran and Moscow discussed their cooperation in the energy sector in the presence of Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji and Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak on Tuesday.

The two countries' delegations exchanged views on bilateral cooperation in the oil, gas, petrochemical, electricity, and nuclear energy fields.

Their discussions also revolved around following up previous memorandums of understanding and overcoming obstacles in the path of implementing the MoUs.



The first business-to-business (B2B) meeting on cooperation in oil and gas sectors was also held between Iranian and Russian companies at the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) in Tehran.

Talking during the meeting, Iran's Deputy Oil Minister for International Affairs and Trade Ahmad Asadzadeh called for boosting cooperation

between Iranian and Russian small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

Iran and Russia signed 10 documents, comprising six MoUs, two contracts, one agreement and a roadmap, on cooperation in oil industry.

Twenty-eight Russian companies have taken part in the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, also known as Iran Oil Show 2023, and will hold talks with Iranian exporters and economic experts on the development of trade and industrial ties.

## Int'l Isar Festival to Host Artworks From 30 Countries

**TEHRAN (MNA) – Some 30 countries are to take part at the First International Isar (film and screenplay) which is slated to kick off in Iran on May 19.**

As many as 1,270 works of art have been submitted to the secretariat of the festival, the head of the Martyrs Foundation in Khorasan Razavi said.

Mehdi Hassanzadeh also said that some 219 artworks are screenplays while the remaining figure is short films, video clips, animations, dramas and documentaries.

Films from Lebanon, the US, Yemen, Pakistan, India, Iraq, Algeria, France, Afghanistan, Republic of Azerbaijan, Uzbekistan, Italy, Syria, Malaysia, Spain and Iran are to be screened during the festival.

Mashhad City in the northeastern province of Iran is slated to host the festival on May 19-24.

## Nordwind Airlines To Fly to Tehran



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN - Nordwind Airlines will operate a flight from Kazan International Airport named after Gabdulla Tukay to one of the largest cities in Asia, Tehran. Thus, it will be the first domestic airline connecting the Republic of Tatarstan directly with the Islamic Republic of Iran.**

As stated in the airport's announcement, the Kazan-Tehran-Kazan route will be the 18th route opened by Nordwind Airlines at Kazan Airport.

The press service reminds that Russian citizens need to obtain a visa to travel to Iran. However, for residents of Kazan, this process is simple and convenient, as the General Consulate of the Islamic Republic of Iran operates in the capital of Tatarstan.

## Iran, Russia Ink Custom Agreement To Facilitate Trade

**TEHRAN (IRNA) - Head of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) and Head of the Russian Federal Customs Service (FCS) have signed a new agreement to facilitate trade and transit between the two countries.**

The agreement was signed between Mohammad Rezvani Far, on the Iranian side, and Ruslan Davydov, from the Russian side in a meeting in Tehran.

Rezvani Far said after signing the contract that it could lead to an increase in the volume of trade between Iran and Russia.

Davydov, for his part, stressed the need to facilitate and speed up customs affairs and to help businesses of the two countries in their exchanges.

## DeSantis to Enter Presidential Race Next Week

WASHINGTON (dispatches) - Florida Republican Governor Ron DeSantis will officially enter the 2024 U.S. presidential race next week, according to two sources familiar with the decision, immediately becoming Donald Trump's biggest rival for the Republican nomination and shaking up a contest that largely has been one-sided.

DeSantis will likely file paperwork declaring his candidacy on May 25 to coincide with a donor meeting in Miami, with a more formal launch the week of May 29, according to a source. The invitation for the May 25 event stated that donors would be put to "work," an apparent allusion to raising money for DeSantis, according to a source familiar with the event.



## Devastating Italian Floods Kill at Least 13

CASTEL BOLOGNESE (Dispatches) - Floods that killed at least 13 people in Italy's northern Emilia-Romagna region caused billions of euros' worth of damage and hit agriculture particularly hard, the regional governor said.

Torrential rains this week devastated the eastern side of the region, known as Romagna, with up to 300 landslides, 23 overflowing rivers, some 400 roads damaged or destroyed, and 42 flooded municipalities.

"We are facing a new earthquake," Emilia-Romagna President Stefano Bonaccini told reporters, recalling the seismic events that struck the region in 2012, destroying thousands of homes.



## Ukraine Claims Shot Down 29 Out of 30 Fired Russian Missiles



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia fired 30 cruise missiles against different parts of Ukraine early Thursday in the latest nighttime test of Ukrainian air defenses, which shot down 29 of them, officials said.

One person was killed and two were wounded by a Russian missile that got through and struck an industrial building in the southern region of Odesa, according to Serhiy Bratchuk, a spokesperson for the region's military administration. Amid the recently intensified Russian air assaults, China said its special envoy met with Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy during talks in Kyiv earlier this week with Ukraine's chief diplomat.

Beijing's peace proposal has so far yielded no apparent breakthrough in the war. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Thursday that the warring parties needed to "accumulate mutual trust" for progress to be made.

Ukrainian officials sought during the talks to recruit China's support for Kyiv's own peace plan, according to Ukraine's presidential office. Zelenskyy's proposal includes the restoration of his country's territorial integrity, the withdrawal of Russian forces and holding Russian President Vladimir Putin legally accountable for the invasion in February 2022.

Leaders of the Group of Seven leading industrialized nations gathering in Japan on Thursday were expected to denounce Russia's war and vow to keep helping Ukraine fight Moscow. They were to hold "discussions about the battlefield" in Ukraine, according to Jake Sullivan, the White House national security adviser.

A Western official said Russia had built "potentially formidable" defensive lines on Ukrainian territory, including extensive minefields, and had more than 200,000 troops along the 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line, though it is unlikely to possess credible reserves.

As Ukraine receives sophisticated weapons systems from its Western allies, the Kremlin has started losing warplanes in areas previously deemed as safe, the official said, while Kyiv has proven able to shoot down Russia's hypersonic ballistic missiles — the most advanced weapons in Moscow's arsenal.

The official spoke on condition of anonymity to discuss military intelligence. Meanwhile, Kremlin-installed authorities in occupied Crimea reported the derailment of eight train cars Thursday because of an explosion, prompting renewed suspicions about possible Ukrainian saboteur activity behind Russian lines. Russian state media reported that the train was carrying grain.

The state news agency RIA Novosti, quoting a source within the emergency services, said the incident occurred not far from the city of Simferopol. The Crimean Railway company said the derailment was caused by "the interference of unauthorized persons" and that there were no casualties.

Ukraine officials refuse to comment on possible acts of sabotage. Ukraine's military intelligence spokesperson, Andriy Yusov, noted on Ukrainian television that Russian train lines "are also used to transport weapons, ammunition, armored vehicles."

Overnight, loud explosions were heard in Kyiv as the Kremlin's forces targeted the capital for the ninth time this month. It was a clear escalation after weeks of lull and before a much-anticipated Ukrainian counteroffensive using newly supplied advanced Western weapons.

## Central Asia Forges Ties With China

XIAN (Dispatches) - Central Asian heads of state converged in China's historic city of Xian for one-on-ones with Chinese leader Xi Jinping to seal pledges of "enduring" friendship, paving the way for a summit expected to result in a regional pact with Beijing.

The bilaterals set the stage for a group huddle on Friday, the first in-person gathering of the six leaders, where Xi will deliver an "important" speech, according to China's foreign ministry. An "important" political document will also be signed.

Across the city of Xian, from where the ancient Silk Road linked imperial China with civilisations to its west over a millennium ago, banners, billboards and even taxi signs were set up to promote the summit.

China is intensifying its economic and political engagement with the former Soviet states as Russia channels what remaining resources it has into the war in Ukraine. Some Central Asian states are increasingly stand up to Moscow, with Kazakhstan not recognising Russian-controlled regions in eastern Ukraine to Tajikistan demanding more "respect" from the Kremlin.

The first head of state to arrive in Xian was President Kassym-Jomart Tokayev of Kazakhstan - China's largest trading partner in Central Asia. When Tokayev met Xi on Wednesday, the Chinese leader greeted him warmly and wished him a happy 70th birthday.

"We have a common goal - to intensify bilateral relations," Tokayev told Xi. "We are also united by the desire to strengthen regional and international security and cooperation."

After their meeting, Xi and Tokayev jointly declared that the two countries shall build an "enduring friendship" and share "weal and woe".

They also agreed to ensure the safe and stable operation of the Kazakh section of the China-Central Asia natural gas pipeline, and also deepen oil and uranium cooperation.

On the summit's sidelines, state-owned Chinese energy giant Sinopec and Kazakhstan's KaymunayGaz agreed key terms for a potential investment in a polyethylene project in Western Kazakhstan's Atyrau region.

Russian President Vladimir Putin called the Kazakh president on Wednesday and affirmed the ties of their countries, according to Tass news agency.

China has said that scientific research is a normal activity in areas under Chinese jurisdiction.

China claims almost the entire South China Sea as its territory, based on what it says are old maps, including waters that lie within the EEZ of Vietnam and four other Southeast Asian countries.

The Philippines was also rebuked for placing navigational buoys in five areas of its EEZ to assert sovereignty over the hotly disputed Spratly islands, to parts of which Vietnam also lays claim.

Asked about the Philippines' move, Hang said: "Vietnam strongly opposes all acts violating Vietnam's sovereign rights."

Philippine Foreign Ministry spokesperson Teresita Daza said Manila's coast guard's installation of buoys was consistent with the country's rights as a coastal state under the U.N. Convention on the Law of the Sea. "They are meant to improve safety of navigation in our waters and should be of no cause for concern," Daza told Reuters in a phone message.

### Vietnam Rebukes China, Philippines Over South China Sea Conduct

HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam criticized recent conduct by a Chinese research ship and the Philippine coast guard in the South China Sea, accusing its neighbors of separate actions that were violating its sovereign rights.

Tensions are high in contested parts of the South China Sea, one of the world's most important trade routes and a conduit for more than \$3 trillion of annual ship-borne commerce.

Chinese and Vietnamese vessels confronted each other in recent days on multiple occasions as a Chinese research ship moved within Hanoi's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ), which experts said was likely a survey. Such a survey would usually be considered hostile if conducted without notification.

Asked for comment, Vietnamese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Pham Thu Hang told a press conference those vessels were "violating the sovereign rights and jurisdictions of Vietnam", which was taking "appropriate measures" to defend its rights.

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## Ecuador's President Dismisses Legislature

QUITO (Dispatches) - The president of Ecuador dismissed the legislature in a move that promised more turmoil around a conservative leader who has been unable to enact a business-friendly agenda as the South American country experiences an alarming rise in crime.

In disbanding the National Assembly, Guillermo Lasso made first use of the Ecuador presidency's nuclear option under the constitution in conflicts with the legislative branch. His first move was to push a package of tax cuts, but criticism was swift and an appeal to stop him was filed hours after he announced his decision in a televised message in which he accused lawmakers of focusing "on destabilizing the government."

"This is the best possible decision," he said after describing his move as a way to give Ecuadorians "the power to decide their future in the next elections."

Armed soldiers then surrounded the National Assembly in the capital. Lasso had been locked in a showdown with legislators who wanted to impeach him for not stopping a deal between the state-owned oil transport company and a private tanker company, accusations he denies.

Hours later, the president of the National Electoral Council, Diana Atamaint, said that its office will set the date for the next elections in no more than seven days. She anticipated that Ecuadorians would go to the polls to elect a new president and a new Assembly in no more than 90 days.

Lasso's Wednesday decision prompted Ecuador's top military leader to warn that the armed forces would crack down on any violence.

The president appeared to have the support of the armed forces but faced opposition from Indigenous Ecuadorians. Protests by the powerful Confederation of Indigenous Nationalities have nearly paralyzed the country in recent years, and the group's leader appeared outraged.

Lasso "launched a cowardly self-coup with the help of the police and the armed forces, without citizen support," Leonidas Iza Salazar said.

Lasso can now govern for up to six months by decree under the oversight of Ecuador's Constitutional Court.

Lawmakers had accused Lasso of not having intervened to end a contract between the state-owned oil transport company and a private tanker company. They argued Lasso knew the contract was full of irregularities and would cost the state millions in losses.

During a legislative session Tuesday, Lasso noted that the contract predated his administration. He also said that the state-owned company experienced losses of \$6 million a year before he took office, and that it has seen \$180 million in profits under his watch, something he has rejected as untrue.



## Imran Khan Not to Join Pakistan Corruption Probe

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's former Prime Minister Imran Khan, who is facing corruption charges, said he would not join an investigation by the powerful anti-graft agency while he was out on bail.

The National Accountability Bureau (NAB), which has in the past investigated, put on trial and jailed all those who have served as prime minister since 2008, had earlier summoned Khan for investigation into the graft charges, a spokesman said.

Khan was arrested on the charges, which he denies, on May 9 and later set free on court-ordered bail that was extended to May 31.

In a statement addressed to the NAB's deputy director, and shown to Reuters by one of Khan's lawyers, the former prime minister called the allegations against him "absolutely false, frivolous and concocted".

He said he was in the process of applying for, and obtaining, bail in a number of other legal cases and would not be available before his protective bail expired on May 22.

Khan's arrest triggered a wave of violence that deepened political instability in the South Asian nation of 220 million. Pakistan has also been facing its worst ever economic crisis, with critical IMF funding needed to avert a balance of payment crisis delayed for months.

His wife Bushra Khan, commonly known as Bushra Bibi, is also on bail until May 23.

On Wednesday, Khan said that police had surrounded his house in Lahore, in Punjab province, and that he expected to be re-arrested soon, after the government warned him to hand over supporters who it blamed for attacks on the army.

Punjab's information minister Amir Mir said the government did not have any plans to arrest Khan as he had been given bail by court. "All we want him to hand over the terrorists hiding at his home," he said.

Khan has said authorities could search his home but only with legal warrants from a court, and has denied sheltering anyone involved in the violence.

On Thursday, Khan's aide Ifikhr Durrani allowed journalists into some areas of Khan's Lahore home to "look for terrorists".

## Next Five Years Set To Be Hottest Ever



LONDON (Dispatches) - It is near-certain that 2023-2027 will be the warmest five-year period ever recorded, the United Nations warned as greenhouse gases and El Nino combine to send temperatures soaring.

Global temperatures are soon set to exceed the more ambitious target set out in the Paris climate accords, with a two-thirds chance that one of the next five years will do so, the UN's World Meteorological Organization said.

The hottest eight years ever recorded were all between 2015 and 2022 -- but temperatures are forecast to increase further as climate change accelerates.

"There is a 98-percent likelihood that at least one of the next five years, and the five-year period as a whole, will be the warmest on record," the WMO said.

The 2015 Paris Agreement saw countries agree to cap global warming at "well below" two degrees Celsius above average levels measured between 1850 and 1900 -- and 1.5C if possible.

The global mean temperature in 2022 was 1.15C above the 1850-1900 average.

The WMO said there was a 66 percent chance that annual global surface temperatures will exceed 1.5C above pre-industrial levels for at least one of the years 2023-2027, with a range of 1.1C to 1.8C forecasted for each of those five years.

While this does not mean that the world will permanently exceed the Paris benchmark, "WMO is sounding the alarm that we will breach the 1.5C level on a temporary basis with increasing frequency", said the agency's chief Petteri Taalas.

"A warming El Nino is expected to develop in the coming months and this will combine with human-induced climate change to push global temperatures into uncharted territory.

"This will have far-reaching repercussions for health, food security, water management and the environment. We need to be prepared."

El Nino is the large-scale warming of surface temperatures in the central and eastern equatorial Pacific Ocean. The weather phenomenon normally occurs every two to seven years.

Conditions oscillate between El Nino and its opposite La Nina, with neutral conditions in between.

The WMO said earlier this month that the chances of El Nino developing were 60 percent by the end of July and 80 percent by the end of September.

Typically, El Nino increases global temperatures in the year after it develops—which in this cycle would be 2024. Despite the cooling influence of La Nina conditions over much of the past three years, the warmest eight years on record have all been from 2015 onwards, with 2016 the hottest.

Heat gets trapped in the atmosphere by so-called greenhouse gases, which are at a record high. The three major greenhouses gases are carbon dioxide, methane and nitrous oxide.

Global land and sea mean near-surface temperatures have increased since the 1960s.

The chances of temperatures temporarily exceeding 1.5C above the 1850-1990 average have risen steadily since 2015, a year when they were considered close to zero.

Britain's Met Office national weather service is the WMO's lead centre on yearly to 10-yearly climate predictions. While there is a 66 percent chance that one year between 2023 and 2027 will exceed the 1.5C threshold, there is now a 32 percent chance that the entire five-year mean will do so, the Met Office said.

"Global mean temperatures are predicted to continue increasing, moving us away further and further away from the climate we are used to," said Met Office expert scientist Leon Hermanson.

Temperatures in 2023 are likely to be higher than the 1991-2020 average in almost all regions except for Alaska, South Africa, South Asia and parts of Australia, the WMO said.

Parts of the South Pacific Ocean are likely to be cooler than average.

## Coming Years Critical to Slash Plastic Pollution



PARIS (Dispatches) - The world must halve single-use plastics and slash throwaway consumption to stem the tide of environmental pollution, according to a UN report that warns the next few years are critical.

Concern is growing about the impacts of microplastics -- produced when plastic products break down in the environment -- which have been found from the deepest oceans trenches to top of Mount Everest.

In humans, they have been detected in blood, breast milk and placentas.

The report by the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) comes two weeks before negotiators from nearly 200 countries meet in Paris for a new round of negotiations aimed at reaching a legal agreement next year to end plastic pollution.

It lays out a three-pronged plan based on reuse, recycling and diversifying the materials used -- to help slash plastic pollution 80 percent by 2040 overall and cut single-use plastic production by half.

The report cited research estimating plastic could emit 19 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions by 2040.

That would essentially prevent the world from meeting its Paris Agreement commitment to limit the rise in the planet's average temperature to 1.5 degrees Celsius above the pre-industrial level.

"The way we produce, use and dispose of plastics is polluting ecosystems, creating risks for human health and destabilising the climate," said Inger Andersen, UNEP executive director.

She said the roadmap laid out in the report "dramatically reduces these risks, through adopting a circular approach that keeps plastics out of ecosystems, out of our bodies and in the economy".

In 2020, approximately 238 million metric tonnes (mmt) of waste from short-lived plastics -- like packaging that ends up in municipal waste -- was generated worldwide.

Roughly half of that was mismanaged -- for example dumped in the environment or burned.

Without significant changes, UNEP expects annual plastic waste to reach 408 mmt by 2040, including 380 mmt of new fossil-fuel-based plastics. That would mean some 227 mmt of plastics would end up in the environment.

The report estimates that with a range of "systems change" solutions, that pollution figure could be reduced to 41 mmt.

But the report says there is no time to waste.

"The next three to five years present a critical window for action to set the world on the path towards implementing the systems change scenario by 2040," it warned.

Reuse in particular was identified as the most effective measure -- cutting plastic pollution up to 30 percent by 2040 -- with the introduction of things like refillable water bottles, packaging take-back schemes and "reverse vending machines".

While governments have to incentivize the shift, consumers will have to "forego convenience of disposable and get used to products looking less shiny".

Better recycling could cut pollution by a fifth, the report found, while replacing plastics with alternatives, like paper or other compostable materials, could help cut waste another 17 percent.

## Tesla Not Immune to Tough Economy That He Foresees

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Tesla Inc CEO Elon Musk warned that the electric-vehicle maker was not immune to the global economy, which he said will be difficult for the next 12 months.

At the company's annual shareholder meeting in Austin, Texas, Musk played down market rumors that he may step down as CEO of Tesla, touched upon two new mass-market models it is developing, and reaffirmed that deliveries of its long-delayed Cybertruck pickup would start this year.

In a sign of tough times even for Tesla, the market leader in electric cars, Musk said the company would try to advertise its vehicles, something it has not done before. "We'll try out a little advertising and see how it goes," said Musk, who is also CEO of Twitter.

"Tesla is not immune to the global economic environment. I expect things to be, just at a macro economic level, difficult for at least the next 12 months," said the billionaire, dressed casually in a black T-shirt and trousers.

Tesla missed its margin target in the first quarter after it aggressively cut vehicle prices in the face of a slowing economy and rising competition.

At the meeting, shareholders voted to appoint the company's co-founder and former chief technology officer, JB Straubel, to the board. Proxy advisory firm Glass Lewis had urged investors to vote against Straubel's appointment, citing worries about his independence.

Straubel, who is CEO of battery recycling and materials company Redwood Materials, is considered a potential successor to Musk, according to Gene Munster, managing partner at Deepwater Asset Management.

Investors expressed frustration that the board failed to make sure



that Musk is focused on Tesla after he bought social media platform Twitter for \$44 billion in October.

"There was a short-term distraction because I had to do major open-heart surgery on Twitter to ensure the company's survival," Musk said on Tuesday. Last week he announced that NBCUniversal's former advertising head, Linda Yaccarino, will succeed him as Twitter CEO and that he will focus on products and technology at the company.

He said Twitter is now in a "stable place" and "the amount of time that Twitter will take going forward is relatively small compared to the last six months."

One shareholder asked about rumors that he would step down as Tesla CEO, adding "Say it ain't so." Musk replied: "It ain't so."

In November, Tesla director James Murdoch testified in court that

Musk had identified someone as a potential successor.

Investors voted against publishing a report on "Key-Person Risk." The proposal sought to identify key persons and establish succession plans.

Musk said at the meeting that Tesla would like to produce a quarter-million Cybertrucks a year, depending on demand. He said the EV maker hopes to start production of its long-delayed next-generation Roadster electric sports car next year.

He also briefly mentioned two new mass-market models under development, saying he hopes to make more than 5 million of those vehicles, but did not elaborate.

Musk also said he would conduct a third-party audit to ensure there is no child labor in cobalt mines that supply the ingredient used in making batteries.

"In fact, we will put a webcam on the mine and if anybody sees any children, please let us know," he said, adding that most of Tesla's battery packs were iron-based and that Tesla used cobalt only a "tiny amount" as a binder.

Tesla shareholders swiftly voted with the board's recommendations on nearly all proposals.

Shareholders also voted to re-elect Musk and Chair Robyn Denholm as board members.

Proxy advisory firm ISS had recommended a vote against Denholm, citing concerns about a lack of scrutiny over the use of Tesla shares as collateral for loans by Musk and his brother, Kimbal.

Tesla shares closed flat at \$166.52 on Tuesday and rose 0.6% in after-hours trading. The stock has dropped about 60% from its record high in November 2021.

## Asia Heatwaves Made 30 Times More Likely by Climate Change

PARIS (AFP) - Climate change made record-breaking deadly heatwaves in Bangladesh, India, Laos and Thailand last month at least 30 times more likely, according to a study published.

Parts of India saw temperatures above 44 degrees Celsius (111 Fahrenheit) in mid-April, with at least 11 deaths near Mumbai attributed to heat stroke on a single day. In Bangladesh, Dhaka suffered its hottest day in almost 60 years.

The city of Tak in Thailand saw its highest-ever temperature of 45.4 Celsius, while Sainyabuli province in Laos hit 42.9 Celsius, an all-time

national temperature record, the study by the World Weather Attribution group said.

Two deaths were reported in Thailand, but the real toll was likely higher as the extreme heat caused widespread hospitalisations, with the poor and vulnerable the worst affected.

The new study by international climate scientists looked at the average maximum temperature and the maximum heat index, which includes humidity.

"In both regions, the researchers found that climate change made the humid heatwave at least 30 times more likely, with temperatures at least 2

degrees Celsius hotter than they would have been without climate change," WWA said in a statement.

"Until overall greenhouse gas emissions are halted, global temperatures will continue to increase and events like this will become more frequent and severe," it added.

The analysis also found that such events in India and Bangladesh, previously once-a-century, can now be expected around once every five years because of human-caused climate change.

For Laos and Thailand, if global temperatures rise by two degrees Celsius -- as will happen within

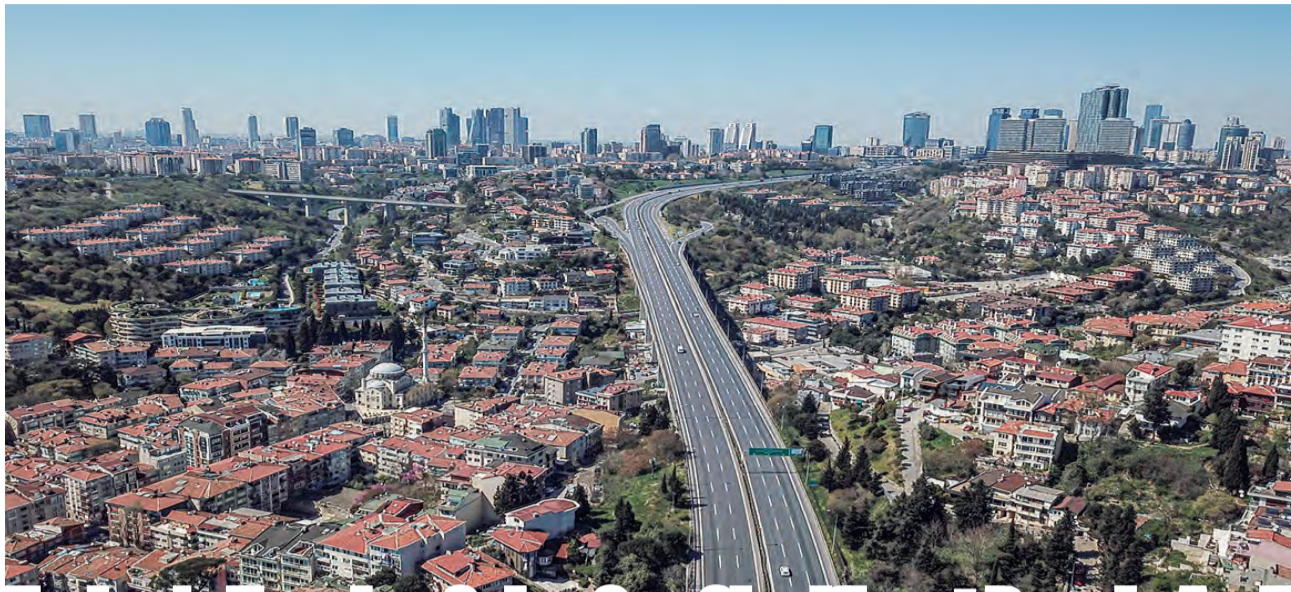


around 30 years if emissions are not cut rapidly -- such extreme events could happen every 20 years, compared to every two centuries now, the study said.

## India Considers Testing Cough Syrups Before Export

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's drug regulator has proposed testing cough syrups in government laboratories before they are exported, media outlet News18.com reported, after Indian-made syrups were linked to dozens of deaths in Gambia and Uzbekistan last year.

India's health ministry received the proposal from the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO) this month and is considering it, the news website quoted an unidentified ministry official as saying.



## Turkey's Housing Sales See Significant Drop in April

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Housing sales in Turkey witnessed a significant decline in April, experiencing a 35.6% drop compared to the same month the previous year, according to the official data.

The total number of housing sales for April stood at 85,652, the data from the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) showed.

The statistics reveal that the downward trend persisted in the January-April period as well, with housing sales decreasing by 18.6% when compared to the corresponding period of the previous year.

The cumulative figure for housing sales in January through April amounted to 368,867.

In April, Istanbul emerged as the leader in house sales, accounting for the highest share with 13,944 houses sold, representing 16.3% of the total.

Following Istanbul, Ankara recorded 10,000 house sales, making up 11.7% of the overall market share. Western Izmir secured the third position with 4,960 house sales, capturing a 5.8% share.

Conversely, the provinces with the lowest number of house sales were eastern Ardahan and Hakkari, each with 22 houses sold, while Bayburt recorded 53 houses sold.

In April, a total of 2,557 houses out of 85,652 sold in Turkey were purchased by foreigners.

However, housing sales to foreigners experienced a significant decline of 60.3% compared to the previous year. Foreigners accounted for 3% of the total house sales in April.

Among the provinces, the Mediterranean province of Antalya ranked first in housing sales to foreigners, with 1,024 houses sold in April. Istanbul secured the second position with 792 sales, followed by southern Mersin province with 186 sales.

Throughout the January-April period, housing sales to foreigners decreased by 35.1%, totaling 13,483 houses, compared to the same period in the previous year.

In April, Russian citizens accounted for the highest number of purchases with 817 houses bought from Turkey. They were followed by citizens from Iran with 377 houses, Ukraine with 136 houses and Iraq with 124 houses.

In terms of mortgaged house sales, Turkey experienced a notable decline of 32% in April compared to the same month in the previous year, resulting in a total of 21,769 houses sold through mortgage transactions. Mortgage sales accounted for 25.4% of the overall housing market.

For the January-April period, mortgage sales also saw a decrease of 19.7%, totaling 80,591 houses sold compared to the same period in the previous year.

Out of the mortgaged sales in April, 7,388 were firsthand sales, while for the January-April period, 25,552 were firsthand sales.

The number of non-mortgaged house sales in April also saw a decline of 36.8% compared to the previous year, with a total of 63,883. Non-mortgaged sales represented 74.6% of the total house sales.

Similarly, non-mortgaged sales during the January-April period decreased by 18.3% compared to the previous year, amounting to 288,276.

In April, the number of houses sold for the first time in Turkey decreased by 26% compared to the previous year, totaling 26,952. First-time sales accounted for 31.5% of the total house sales. For the January-April period, firsthand house sales were recorded as 110,859, reflecting a decrease of 15.3% compared to the previous year.

Secondhand house sales in Turkey also experienced a decline of 39.3% in April compared to the previous year, with a total of 58,700.

## Oil Price Downturn Ignores Looming Supply Crunch

LONDON (Dispatches) - Weeks of declining oil prices due to concerns over a possible recession clash with the outlook for scarce supply and robust demand later in the year, the International Energy Agency said.

"Prices were pressured lower by muted industrial activity and higher interest rates, which, combined have led to recessionary scenarios gaining traction," the Paris-based agency said in its monthly oil report.

"The current market pessimism, however, stands in stark contrast to the tighter market balances we anticipate in the second half of the year, when demand is expected to eclipse supply by almost 2 million barrels per day (bpd)."

The IEA raised its forecast for global oil demand by 200,000 bpd to 102 million bpd, noting that China's recovery after the lifting of COVID-19 curbs had surpassed expectations with demand reaching a record 16 million bpd in March.

The world's top oil importer is set to account for nearly 60% of global demand growth in 2023, offsetting, along with India and the Middle East, sluggish demand in developed countries.



## Lebanon's Tanking Economy Increasingly Cash-Based

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - The World Bank has warned that nearly half of crisis-hit Lebanon's economy is now cash-based as trust in banks has plummeted, heightening money laundering risks and slashing hopes for recovery.

Lebanon has been mired since 2019 in an economic crisis that the World Bank has dubbed one of the worst in modern history, as the currency's market value has fallen by at least 98 per cent against the dollar.

As a result, the cash economy has nearly doubled in size from 26.2 per cent of gross domestic product in 2021 to nearly half of GDP last year, the Washington-based body said in a report.

"A pervasive and growing dollarized cash economy is a major impediment to Lebanon's economic recovery," the report warned.

The trend has adverse implications on "fiscal and monetary policy, significantly heightens the risks of money laundering, increases informality and facilitates tax evasion", it added.

The World Bank estimated Lebanon's cash economy to be at around \$9.9 billion, or 45.7 percent of GDP in 2022.

"Cash economies make it easier to conceal the source of funds for illicit and illegal activities," it added.

Lebanon's currency plunge has driven price hikes including on fuel, food and other basic goods, with supermarkets pricing items in dollars and many private employers paying salaries in cash.

Banks have imposed draconian withdrawal restrictions, essentially locking depositors out of their life savings and prompting them to back away from a collapsing banking sector.

## Gopinath Sees Sizeable Upside Inflation Risks

WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The International Monetary Fund's no. 2 official said she sees sizeable risks that inflation will remain high or accelerate in many emerging markets and urged central banks to keep monetary policies tight.

IMF First Deputy Managing Director Gita Gopinath told a conference hosted by the Central Bank of Brazil that markets were probably "too optimistic" about what it would take to bring down inflation in emerging markets.

"Despite encouraging signs, I am worried that price pressures seem entrenched in many economies and that upside inflation risks are sizeable," she said in remarks prepared for the event.

"Central banks must remain resolute in keeping policies tight and recognize that insufficient monetary tightening now may

necessitate even more painful actions down the road," she said. That was a lesson learned from the high inflation period of the 1970s and it "very much applies today," Gopinath said.

She said fiscal restraint could support the fight against inflation by central banks and financial tools could improve tradeoffs in the event of pronounced financial stress, if judiciously used.

Gopinath said emerging market economies have maintained growth in recent years, helped by strong monetary policy frameworks and reforms that had lowered credit and currency risks.

But these countries still faced "considerable downside risks" from monetary policy tightening in advanced economies, and conditions may get "significantly worse," she said. Rate hikes in the United States, for instance, had come with still-benign conditions, but that could change in the period ahead, she said.

Gopinath said she was less optimistic than markets about lowering inflation in emerging markets, given that it had been unexpectedly high and persistent, and often rose faster than expected, she said.

Inflation in services had been strong and policy tightening had not cooled labor markets significantly, with wage growth still robust in many emerging market economies.

She said several factors could be contributing to the stickiness of inflation, including pent-up demand from the pandemic, rotation of demand from goods to services, and a decrease in potential output and employment.

Given few historical precedents for inflation coming down from very high levels without a significant economic slowdown, Gopinath said "quite strong" labor markets and activity pointed to "considerable upward pressure on inflation."

She said companies might pass on higher costs instead of absorbing them into their profit margins, and that workers could demand payback for real wage losses. That meant the longer inflation stayed high, the harder it could be to bring it down, and the larger the contraction of output that would be required.

## Global Debt on the Rise, EM Crosses \$100 Trillion Mark

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - A measure of debt across the globe rose in the first quarter to almost \$305 trillion, and the rising cost to service that debt is triggering concern about the financial system's leverage, a widely tracked study showed.

The Institute of International Finance, a financial services trade group, said global debt rose by \$8.3 trillion in the first three months of this year compared to the end of 2022 to \$304.9 trillion, the highest since the first quarter of last year and second-highest quarterly reading ever.

"Global debt is now \$45 trillion higher than its pre-pandemic level and is expected to continue increasing rapidly," said the IIF in its quarterly Global Debt Monitor.

After peaking near 360% in 2021 the debt-to-output ratio has stabilized around 335%, above pre-pandemic levels.

Aging populations and rising healthcare costs continue to put spending pressure on governments, while "heightened geopolitical tensions are also expected to drive further increases in national defense spending over the medium term," wrote IIF researchers.

The report partly focused on the effects of last year's rapid rise in rates in some bank balance sheets.

"Although recent bank failures appear more idiosyncratic than systemic," the report said, "fear of contagion has prompted significant deposit withdrawals from U.S. regional banks."

The IIF voiced its concern that tighter lending practices among smaller banks would hurt some businesses and households harder.

"Given the central role of regional banks in credit intermediation in the U.S., worries about their liquidity positions could result in a sharp contraction in lending to some segments."

The IIF also noted the growth of shadow banking, or credit intermediation from non-bank financials.

"Shadow banks now account for more than 14% of financial markets, with the majority of growth stemming from a rapid expansion of U.S. investment funds and private debt markets."

Specifically, the report mentioned the "large portion" of corporate debt held by life insurance companies, "raising concerns over their increased exposure to less liquid assets."

The report showed 75% of the IIF's emerging market (EM) universe saw an increase in debt levels in dollar terms in the first quarter, with the overall figure crossing over \$100 trillion for the first time. China, Mexico, Brazil, India and Turkey posted the biggest increases, the data showed.

Some of the larger EMs have benefited from the relative weakness of the dollar, which has attracted investors to their local currency debt. But for others access to markets has been harder or non-existent on either tighter spreads as rates rose in developed markets or fast-rising borrowing costs.

## India's Russian Oil Buying Hits Record High



NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's oil imports from Russia rose to a fresh record high in April, further reducing the share of Middle Eastern and African grades to their lowest level in at least 22 years, data obtained from trade sources showed.

Refiners in India, the world's third-biggest oil importer and consumer, are on a Russian oil-buying binge after some countries shunned purchases from Moscow over its invasion of Ukraine in February last year.

Asia's third-largest economy imported about 1.9 million barrels per day (bpd) of Russian oil in April, about 4.4% higher than the previous month, the data showed. That accounts for about two-fifths of the nation's overall purchases.

Higher imports from Russia raised the share of oil from the C.I.S. countries - Azerbaijan, Kazakhstan and Russia - to 43.6% of an overall 4.81 million bpd imported by India last month.

That narrowed the share of the Middle Eastern grades, which traditionally have accounted for the bulk of total oil imports, to about 44% and African oil to 3.4% last month, the data showed.

Russia remained the top oil supplier to India for the sixth-straight month in April, followed by Iraq and Saudi Arabia.

"Indian refiners have cut their spot purchases of Middle Eastern and West African grades as we are getting supply of Russian oil at lower prices," said an Indian refining official at an Indian refinery.

Oil imports from Russia also rose as Indian Oil Corp, the country's top refiner, raised the size of its annual import deal with Rosneft.

India's oil imports from Iraq in April declined by 3.1% from the previous month to a 4-month low of 928,400 bpd, while imports from Saudi Arabia fell by 11% to 723,800 bpd, the least in five months, the data showed.

## Persepolis Claim Title of Iranian Football Pro-League

TEHRAN (MNA) – Tehran giants Persepolis won the title of the Iranian Professional League (IPL) for the eight times on Thursday. The Tehran-based team defeated Nassaji Mazandaran 4-0 on Thursday night, the final matchday of the league, to win the trophy with 66 points. Sepahan finished runner-up with 63 points after defeating fifteenth-place team Mes Kerman on Thursday. Mes Kerman and Naft Masjed Soleyman were relegated from the IPL. It is the eight titles of Persepolis in 22 editions of Iran Pro-League.



## Europe, G7 Sign War Register for Ukraine

LONDON (Dispatches) - Europe and the United States hailed a newly created "register of damage" for Ukraine as a first step to making Russia pay for its war.

The instrument, created by the 46-nation Council of Europe, records claims of damage or loss, paving the way to a future mechanism to compensate victims of the conflict.

The register is a "first, necessary, urgent step" ensuring "justice that is centred on the victims" of the war, said council head Marija Pejcinovic Buric on the second day of the summit in Iceland.

She said that, by early Wednesday, 40 countries had signed onto the register, including the United States, Japan and all other G7 nations.

Another three countries were finalising internal procedures to do so.

She and other leaders emphasised that countries outside the Council of Europe -- a pan-continental rights body separate from the European Union but incorporating all 27 EU member states -- could back the initiative.

The register, established initially for three years, will be lodged in The Hague with a satellite office in Ukraine.

Ukrainian Prime Minister Denys Shmyhal, at the summit, hailed the register as "an important milestone on the road to justice and reparations for Ukraine and the Ukrainians who have suffered so much from this war."

"The hard work begins now -- we need to ensure that the register becomes operational soon, so that victims of Russian aggression could submit their claims."

US ambassador to the UN Linda Thomas-Greenfield, at the summit in an observer capacity, told Icelandic media that America was "proud" to join it and was working to drum up funds to contribute to it.

Russia was kicked out of the council last year after invading Ukraine.

Several EU countries back Ukraine's call for a special court to be set up to try Russia's leadership for war crimes.

The Hague-based International Criminal Court (ICC) in March issued an arrest warrant for Putin, accusing him of unlawfully deporting Ukrainian children.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz voiced support for the register, which he signed on to, but pointed out that "it doesn't settle the issue of payment for the damages" to Ukraine.

He said Europe could use money raised from frozen Russian funds to help pay for Ukraine's postwar reconstruction.

The move by the wider European community highlighted Russia's isolation on the continent.

The summit "shows clearly that (Russian President Vladimir) Putin has failed," Scholz said.



"This meeting and this declaration is important to show the strength of our unity, the strength of our commitment" to Ukraine, the head of the EU's European Council, Charles Michel, said.

The summit was held just after Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky wrapped up a whirlwind tour of major European capitals that saw Germany, France and Britain all vow to step up arms deliveries to Ukraine.

Ukraine is believed to be preparing an offensive on Russian positions in the east of its territory to be launched within weeks.

Zelensky is intent on boosting air defences as Russia deploys missiles and drones to inflict long-range damage.

He is pressing Western allies to provide advanced fighter jets but they are wary, fearing it could escalate the war.

British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak and Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte agreed on the first day of the summit that they would build an "international coalition to provide Ukraine with combat air capabilities, supporting with everything from training to procuring F-16 jets".

## NIOC, Gazprom Discuss Investment In Oil, Gas Development Projects

TEHRAN (Shana) - The National Iranian Oil Company head and Russian state company Gazprom deputy chairman held talks on investment patterns for development of oil and gas fields.

NIOC CEO Mohsen Khojastehmehr and Gazprom's Vitaly Markelov also discussed their cooperation in line with the \$40 billion memorandum of understanding (MoU) the two sides signed last year.

Tehran and Moscow discussed their cooperation in the energy sector in the presence of Iran's Oil Minister Javad Owji and Russia's Deputy Prime Minister Alexander Novak.

The two countries' delegations exchanged views on bilateral cooperation in the oil, gas, petrochemical, electricity, and nuclear energy fields.

Their discussions also revolved around following up previous memorandums of understanding and overcoming obstacles in the path of implementing the MoUs.

The first business-to-business (B2B) meeting on cooperation in oil and gas sectors was also held between Iranian and Russian companies at the Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) in Tehran on Tuesday.

## Boeing Launches Data Tool To Chart Path to Net-Zero Emissions Target

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Boeing Co said it is rolling out a data modeling tool aimed at helping airlines and policymakers determine the quickest, most efficient path to reducing aviation emissions to zero by 2050.

The tool, known as Cascade, allows users to adjust different variables -- such as the use of sustainable fuels or electric propulsion, the replacement of older-model aircraft, operational improvements and other advanced technologies -- to better understand how those factors could result in decreases to carbon emissions over time.

Boeing unveiled a beta version of Cascade in July 2022 but it was not publicly available. Over the past year, the model has been improved so that users can project data out to 2050 instead of visualizing only a single point in time, the company said.

Boeing officials believe it will take a "collection" of technology or process changes to move the needle on emissions, Boeing Chief Sustainability Officer Chris Raymond said on Wednesday during an event hosted by the U.S. planemaker and attended by airline and government officials.

But Raymond added that sustainable aviation fuel provides the most immediate pathway for the aviation sector to cut its carbon footprint, as it can immediately be used by airlines while advances in electric or hydrogen-powered aircraft may not be mature enough to meaningfully reduce emissions ahead of 2050.

The public launch of Cascade comes just days after U.S. Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg met with counterparts from Canada, the United Kingdom and Singapore at the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum to discuss investments in sustainable aviation fuel.

## Iran Rejects Any Link with People Arrested in Azerbaijan

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry roundly dismissed any connection between Iran and the Azeri nationals recently arrested on a charge of links with Iranian organizations.

"Sadly, the government of the Republic of Azerbaijan has been arresting and keeping its citizens in custody for some time on a charge and bogus allegation of links with Iranian institutions," Nasser Kanaani said on Thursday, refuting the "chain accusations" that the Azerbaijan Republic has leveled against Iran recently.

The spokesperson dismissed any official or unofficial connection between the arrestees and the Islamic Republic of Iran, stressing, "The popular relationships between the citizens of the two countries are heartfelt, emotional, historical, religious and even family-based. The government of the Republic of Azerbaijan should not attribute such deep-rooted and historical bonds of its nationals to security issues or associate them with neighbors."

Kanaani noted that every government has the inherent right to take action against the law-breaking citizens, but made it clear that Baku's move to arrest and imprison many citizens by making the allegation of connection with Iran is inadmissible and unacceptable.

The Azerbaijan Republic's interior ministry, security service and the office of prosecutor general said in a joint statement on Tuesday that at least nine Azeri nationals have been arrested, suspected of being "linked to Iranian secret services and of plotting a coup and assassinations".

The statement gave nine names and said several other people had been arrested.

### Iran, Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

Iranian officials maintain they have finished construction of the pipeline on their side of the border and are waiting for Pakistan to complete its part, saying a lack of progress by next year would entitle Tehran to demand financial penalties.

Pakistani Foreign Ministry spokeswoman Mumtaz Zahra Baloch reiterated Thursday her country remains committed to the pipeline project.

"Pakistan considers the Iran-Pakistan pipeline as an important project that symbolizes the friendship between Pakistan and our neighbor, Iran," Baloch told a news conference in Islamabad when asked to comment on the reported multibillion-dollar penalty facing her country.

She said talks with Iranian officials on "some issues" about the pipeline's completion continued, adding that "it is premature for me to comment on anything that could happen several months from now."

Meanwhile Pakistan and Iran agreed to accelerate work on Free Trade Agreement (FTA) between the two countries and finalize it at the earliest.

This was stated by Shehbaz Sharif while speaking to the tribal elders and notables of the city in Gwadar.

The Prime Minister said he held a very constructive, positive and fruitful meeting with Iranian President Raisi, covering all issues of bilateral interests including trade and economy.

He said both sides agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in trade, investment, Information Technology, Agriculture, power, energy and other sectors.

Pakistan was Iran's fifth largest export market in the previous calendar year, importing non-oil products worth \$1.488 billion from Iran, Rouhollah Latifi said in early May.

He also said that Iran imported non-oil goods worth \$842 million from Pakistan last year, up 170 percent from the previous year.

### Afghanistan Urged to...

FROM PAGE 1

Afghanistan has blamed climatic factors for reduced river volumes.

Raisi said that "if our experts confirm the lack of water, we have nothing else to say, otherwise we will not allow the rights of our people to be violated."

The Iranian president cautioned that Afghan authorities should take his words "seriously and not complain later." Iran and Afghanistan have been locked in a protracted water dispute, which has prevented them from realizing the vast potential of bilateral trade ties.

At the heart of the dispute is the Hilmand River, which originates in the Hindu Kush Mountains near Kabul and flows 700 miles (1,126 kilometers) south before flowing into Hamoun wetlands, located in Iran's Sistan and Baluchestan province.

The two countries signed a water-sharing accord on the Hilmand River in 1973, under which Afghanistan pledged to deliver an average of 820 million cubic meters of water per annum to Iran.

Iran has repeatedly criticized Afghanistan for failing to honor the agreement in letter and spirit.

### Indonesia to Sign Trade...

FROM PAGE 1

The government aims to speed up the country's economic recovery from the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing its exports.

Countries of the Middle East are among those considered alternative trade partners for the government, along with countries in Africa, South Asia, South America and Eastern Europe.

In July last year, Indonesia inked a comprehensive economic partnership agreement (CEPA) with the United Arab Emirates. The government has been pursuing similar cooperation with other Persian Gulf states, including a CEPA with Saudi Arabia since 2018.

The negotiations between Indonesia and Iran come at a time of heightened geopolitical tensions in many parts of the world.

The Trade Ministry noted that trade between Indonesia and Iran amounted to US\$54.1 million during the first three months of this year.

Last year, the bilateral trade value increased by more than 23 percent to \$257.2 million.

Motorcycles, vehicle parts, fatty acid industrial monocarboxylates and wood fiber are among the main goods shipped from Indonesia to Iran.

Meanwhile, major Iranian shipments to Indonesia include dates and grapes, carbonates and vegetable alkaloids, among many other products.

The ministry said Indonesia and Iran had also concluded negotiations on an article related to countertrade, which allows the two countries to pay for goods and services from the other side in kind rather than settling transactions with money.

This would allow trade between the two to continue despite possible difficulties in securing currency commonly used in international trade, such as US dollars.

"We have communicated intensively. Several postponed issues have been concluded. Both parties have been showing flexibility and commitment to quickly wrap up these negotiations," Johni.

### Iran Deplores Baseless...

FROM PAGE 1

The G7 is an intergovernmental political forum consisting of Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom and the United States. The European Union (EU) is a "non-enumerated member."

The US, under former president Donald Trump, reinstated crippling sanctions on Iran after unilaterally walking away from the 2015 nuclear deal in May 2018, despite Iran's full compliance with the terms of the agreement.

Although Trump failed to achieve his professed goals with the so-called "maximum pressure" campaign, the waves of sanctions have taken a heavy toll on ordinary Iranians.

The sanctions, maintained by Trump's successor Joe Biden, have restricted the financial channels necessary for Iran to pay for imports of basic goods and medicine.

### Pakistan Risks...

FROM PAGE 1

"The US should pay the penalty if it does not approve of Pakistan and Iran going ahead with the gas pipeline project. The USA will have to do away with double standards -- being lenient with India in meeting its energy needs while punishing Pakistan for the same," Noor Alam Khan said, as quoted by Dawn.

U.S. sanctions on Iran and pressure from Washington on Islamabad have been named among the reasons for the pipeline completion delays. The gas that it would receive from Iran via the new pipeline is essential for Pakistan's energy security, which should have provided enough motivation to complete the project but, it seems, it has not.

Last year, Pakistan suffered major blackouts amid the surge in international LNG prices as European buyers who could afford the higher prices took all available LNG in, leaving poorer countries such as Pakistan out in the cold and dark.

### Qatar Signs \$10b Contract to...

FROM PAGE 1

Just to maintain current production, Iran needs to invest up to \$50 billion in its gas fields, especially in the Persian Gulf offshore South Pars reserves shared with Qatar.

In Iran's gas fields, as any other in the world, underground pressure that pushes the gas out declines over time, so necessitating modern technology to maintain production level. However, such equipment is only provided by a handful of Western energy giants and the sanctions against Iran are a barrier for them to invest.

Although Iran has the second-largest natural gas reserves in the world, holding more than 17 percent of global fields, the government has issued warnings of power cuts in winter, as power plants that lacked sufficient gas supplies were forced to switch to less efficient liquid fuels.

## Brentford's Toney Banned For Eight Months

LONDON (Dispatches) - Brentford striker Ivan Toney has been banned from all football-related activity for eight months over breaches of betting rules.

Toney, who was charged by the Football Association in November with 262 alleged breaches over a four-year period, has been suspended with "immediate effect".

The 27-year-old England international is banned until mid-January and has been fined £50,000 (\$62,000) after he admitted to 232 of the breaches.

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## Kyrgios Forced to Miss French Open

MELBOURNE (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios was forced to miss the French Open due to a foot injury sustained during the theft of his car and not because of a knee problem, his agent said.

The Wimbledon finalist's mother was held up at gunpoint by a Canberra suspect near his house and his Tesla stolen earlier this month, police allege.

Kyrgios's agent, Daniel Horsfall, said the player had injured himself during the "high-adrenaline rush of everything" that had happened during the robbery.

# Man City Outclass Real Madrid to Reach Champions League Final

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - This time Manchester City left nothing to chance as they demolished Real Madrid 4-0 to march into the Champions League final for the second time in three seasons with a 5-1 aggregate victory at a raucous Etihad Stadium today.

A semi-final delicately poised after an electrifying 1-1 draw in the Bernabeu turned into a rout as Pep Guardiola's City slickers dispatched the Spanish giants with consummate ease.

Bernardo Silva's first-half double gave City control and the hosts took gleeful revenge for last season's heartbreaking semi-final loss to the 14-time champions with Manuel Akanji credited with City's third and Julian Alvarez adding a fourth.

With Inter Milan in the final, City will be favourites to deliver the trophy Abu Dhabi's Sheikh Mansour has craved since buying the club in 2008, having lost to Chelsea in the final two years ago.

City are unbeaten in 26 home Champions League games and that run was never in danger once Portuguese midfielder Silva whipped a shot past Thibaut Courtois in the 23rd minute and then headed his side's second in the 37th.

The second half became a formality as holders Real, bidding to win the trophy for a sixth time in 10 seasons, were powerless to stop a relentless City side closing in on a treble.

Carlo Ancelotti's record 191st game in charge of a Champions League team became a night to forget for the wily Italian who, for once in his illustrious career, had nothing up his sleeve.

"It's a beautiful night for us. We knew it was going to be tough," Silva told BT Sports. "But to beat this Madrid team 4-0 at home, it was a wonderful. A wonderful feeling to be in the final again, and hopefully this time we can win it."

City launched 69 attacks, according to Uefa data, and but for some incredible saves by Real keeper Thibaut Courtois, they would have run up a much bigger score.

"The opponent was better than us by a large margin," Dani Carvajal, one of four Real starters with five Champions League titles for the club, said. "They were a superior opponent."

Expectancy and tension hung heavy in the air before kickoff inside City's fortress, even more so as the clash was billed as a de-facto final with Inter, in their first final for 13 years despite a mediocre Serie A season, awaiting the winners.

There was also the pain of last season when City led 5-3 on aggregate in the 89th minute of the second leg of the semi-final in the Bernabeu, only to lose 6-5 on aggregate.

"We had one year of pain in our stomach," Guardiola, twice a Champions League winner as Barcelona manager, said.



Just as in the Spanish capital last week, City took an early stranglehold and Courtois rescued his side twice in the opening 20 minutes with saves from Erling Haaland headers, the first a little lucky, the second miraculous.

City's breakthrough was not long coming though as Silva whipped a left-footed shot past Courtois — City's eighth goal attempt in the opening 23 minutes.

It took Real half an hour to mount an attack and even then, City's Kyle Walker won a sprint race with Vinicius Jr to snuff out the danger. Toni Kroos then unleashed a dipping right-foot shot against the crossbar with Ederson getting a touch.

But Silva made sure City reached halftime with one foot in the final, reacting quickest to loop a header into the net after Ilkay Gundogan's shot was saved.

Real needed some magic to give themselves any hope and it almost arrived six minutes after halftime when David Alaba's dipping free kick was acrobatically saved by Ederson.

Courtois did his best to keep Ancelotti's side in the tie with yet another save from Haaland as the Norwegian was left waiting for his 53rd goal of an incredible season.

But any thoughts of a repeat of last year's comeback were banished when Kevin De Bruyne's whipped free kick glanced off Akanji and Eder Militao and into the net.

Alvarez, on for Haaland, put the icing on the cake on a memorable night for City when he stroked a first-time shot into the bottom corner in stoppage time.

With their place in the Istanbul showpiece secured, City can win their fifth Premier League title in six seasons this weekend and they also have an FA Cup final to look forward to.

## Milner To Leave Liverpool at Season's End

LONDON (Dispatches) - James Milner will leave Liverpool when his contract expires at the end of the season, the Premier League giants announced as they confirmed several departures from Anfield.

Milner will bow out alongside Roberto Firmino, whose exit has long been forecast, as well as Naby Keita and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.

All the quartet will be out of contract after the end of the current campaign.

"We can confirm Roberto Firmino, Naby Keita, James Milner and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain will leave the club upon the expiry of their contracts this summer," said a Liverpool statement.

"Special acknowledgements will be paid to the quartet at Anfield, with further tributes to follow at the end of the season."

Veteran former England midfielder Milner, 37, has been linked with a move to either high-flyers Brighton or hometown club Leeds following an eight-year stint at Anfield.

He made his Premier League debut for Leeds aged 16 in 2002 and had spells at Newcastle, Aston Villa and Manchester City before joining Liverpool in 2015.

His total of 617 appearances leaves Milner behind only Gareth Barry (652) and Ryan Giggs (632) in the Premier League list, although the trio are still shy of England goalkeeping great Peter Shilton's tally of 848 games, a record set in the old First Division.

## Riner Won World Title Due to Refereeing Oversight

PARIS (Dispatches) - French judo legend Teddy Riner, fresh from being crowned world champion, can breathe a sigh of relief after The International Judo Federation (IJF) admitted it should have been his opponent Inal Tasoev who took gold.

The IJF said in a statement Russian judoka Tasoev -- competing as a neutral athlete due to Russia's invasion of Ukraine -- should have been awarded a point during the extra time golden score period.

Under IJF rules the first judoka to win a point in this spell which comes after the four minutes of normal combat is declared the winner.

"In the final contest of the +100kg category of the 2023 World Judo Championships, between the athletes Teddy Riner (FRA) and Inal Tasoev (AIN), there was one situation where neither the referee on the mat nor the IJF Refereeing Commission gave any score," read the IJF statement.

"The attack of Teddy Riner in white judogi was blocked and countered by Inal Tasoev in blue judogi. The decision was to continue the contest, without awarding a score for the counterattack.

"After the competition, taking into consideration the current refereeing rules and the opinion of judo experts, we find that a score for Tasoev's counterattack could be awarded.

"Herewith the IJF Refereeing Commission apologises deeply for its decision and informs that this kind of action shall be scored in the future, following the current judo rules."

Despite the official's error Riner retains his record-extending 11th world title and at 34 the milestone of being the oldest ever world champion.

The man from Guadeloupe, who became the youngest ever men's world champion in 2007, will bid for a third individual Olympic gold medal on home soil next year, after having to settle for bronze in Tokyo.

Riner last appeared in the world championships in 2017 and missed out last year due to an ankle injury.

# World Cup 2026 Teams to Be Based in Clusters



LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - Teams at the expanded 2026 World Cup in the United States, Canada and Mexico will be based in regional clusters during the early rounds to ease travel, FIFA president Gianni Infantino said.

Speaking in Los Angeles to unveil the official logo and branding for the tournament, Infantino said the move was prompted by the scale of the 2026 finals.

For the first time the next World Cup will include 48 teams -- up from 32 -- and will be co-hosted by three countries, another first.

"The challenges will be the whole logistics around it," Infantino said. "It's a continent -- three countries and not three small countries either -- three big countries."

"The distances, the time zones, the climatic differences too -- altitude in Mexico, sea level in other parts.

"So for us it's important to create the right environment for the teams and the fans to be put in the best possible conditions.

"Meaning not having to travel too much, especially at the beginning. So we will create some clusters where teams will be based depending on the draw and then they will play their games in that particular cluster."

Infantino said travel, and the move towards basing teams in regions, had been discussed at a meeting in Doha last week of the 32 coaches involved in last year's World Cup.

"This was one of the advantages of the World Cup in Qatar, where a player, one hour after the game, was in his bed," he said.

"(In 2026) there will be some travel involved but we will coordinate that and make sure that it will be the best possible conditions for the teams."

Infantino meanwhile hopes the tournament can build on the success of the 1994 finals in the United States, which helped establish Major League Soccer in North America.

## Spurs Poised for Wembanyama Pick

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The San Antonio Spurs were awarded the top pick in next month's NBA draft, leaving them in pole position to land French prodigy Victor Wembanyama.

San Antonio, who finished the regular season bottom of the Western Conference with a 22-60 record, were drawn first in the NBA's lottery to determine who gets the coveted top pick in New York on June 22.

Barring a monumental surprise, the 19-year-old Wembanyama will be the No.1 selection in the draft, which sees the cream of basketball's rookie talent up for grabs.

The 7ft 2in (2.21m) Metropolitan 92 player is seen by many as a transformational talent, a once-in-a-generation player regarded as the most sought-after No.1 draft pick since LeBron James entered the league in 2003.

Wembanyama is now set to follow in the footsteps of French basketball legend Tony Parker, who won four NBA championships with San Antonio between 2003 and 2014.



## Djokovic Knocked Out of Italian Open By 20-Year-Old Rune

ROME (Dispatches) - World number seven Holger Rune beat a frustrated Novak Djokovic 6-2, 4-6, 6-2, sending the top seed spinning out in a dramatic rain-interrupted quarter-final at the Italian Open.

The Serb, who will drop to second on Monday in the rankings behind Carlos Alcaraz, admitted that he was outplayed in heavy, wet conditions after a week of rain in normally sunny Rome.

"This is probably the coldest, wettest tournament I've ever played here in Rome," the 22-time Grand Slam winner said.

"I don't recall so many days in a row (of) raining. In these conditions, it's very difficult to get the ball past him. He's a very talented, dynamic player - he was too good for me for most of the match," he said of Rune.

Six-time champion Djokovic was carrying an unspecified injury into the match as he lost for a second time to the rising 20-year-old Dane, who bested him to win the Masters 1000 at Paris Bercy last November.

The latest contest between the pair was marred by spats with the chair umpire by both players -- Djokovic on a time warning and Rune over a second-set line call.

