

Shahrouz Sokhanvari, Under the Nickname Alex, Who Was the Ringleader of a Network for Trafficking Iranian Women and Girls and Transferring Them to Some Countries Was Executed on Saturday

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Special Envoy to Afghanistan Hassan Kazemi Qomi Has Reiterated That the Taliban Must Be Held Accountable for Its Refusal to Deliver Iran's Water Rights If It Is Proven There Is Enough Water in Helmand River

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Tehran to Keep Contacts With Paris to Resolve Misunderstanding

TEHRAN (MNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian said in an interview with a French magazine that Iran and France were continuing their contacts after the release of two French nationals held in Iran.

A week after the release and return to France of two French nationals imprisoned in Iran after being convicted of different charges in Iran, the head of Iranian diplomacy foreign minister Hossein Amirabdollahian assured in an interview with Le Figaro on Thursday May 18 that the Islamic Republic would "make efforts" to keep contacts with the French government to secure release of four other French imprisoned in Iran after being convicted over committing crimes.

"We agree with (Catherine) Colonna to make efforts to secure the release of French nationals who are already convicted and imprisoned in Iran, but the continuation of this case rests with the judiciary of our country," said Iran's foreign minister, according to Le Figaro. **See Page 7**

Dignity in Foreign Policy Means Denial of Submissive Diplomacy



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN – Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyed Ali Khamenei has warned of the enemies' efforts to stoke tensions between Iran and its neighbors.

Ayatollah Khamenei touched on Iran's long borders with many and sometimes important and influential countries, saying the policy of the government to communicate with its neighbors is very important and right.

"Foreign hands are at work to create problems between Iran and its neighbors. You should not allow this policy to be realized," the Leader told a group of Iranian Foreign Ministry officials and ambassadors to other countries in Tehran.

"The policy of communication with Islamic countries, even those far away, as well as with like-minded and supporting countries is important," Ayatollah Khamenei added.

The Leader touched on the ongoing transformation in the world order and its frequent use in the diplomatic literature.

"The transformation in the world order is a long-term process full of uncertainties tied to possible unforeseen events, and different countries have different and conflicting opinions and approaches toward it."

Ayatollah Khamenei said a proper placement of Iran in the new order by monitoring and evaluating global developments and knowing the exact direction of events is important.

"Based on this observation and evaluation, practical suggestions should be drawn out," the Leader said, adding Iran's ambassadors and representatives should play an important role in this regard, especially in the countries which have a say in international issues.

Ayatollah Khamenei stressed the need for Iranian officials to pursue negotiations with international sides from a position of dignity, noting that leniency in foreign policy does not conflict with fundamentals and principles.

"Dignity in foreign policy means negation of the diplomacy of imploring," the Leader said.

The Leader underlined that Iranian diplomats and envoys should never pin their hopes on a specific political figure, and get carried away by others' comments and actions.

"Dignity means we should not put absolute trust in others, but rather rely on our own principles," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

The Leader said wisdom means taking landmark decisions within the course of international interactions.

"Wisdom means acting prudently, sensibly and considerately in all bilateral and multilateral interactions, and steering clear of derogatory, scathing and disparaging comments. Wisdom means every move is anchored in reasonableness, and carefully thought out and calculated," the Leader of the Islamic Revolution highlighted.

Ayatollah Khamenei said expediency in foreign policy means knowing how to stay flexible, as flexibility does not conflict with fundamentals and principles.

He also called on Iranian ambassadors to employ "good, timely and well thought out" personal initiatives during interactions with foreign authorities.

The Leader described the Iranian envoys as representatives of the nation's identity and character, saying, "Iranian diplomats should be a symbol of faith, love for dear Iran, zeal and determination. They should be dynamic and vigorous, and their remarks and actions should garner respect for Iranian people."

Iran-Russia \$40b Target Trade Within Reach

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) said that Iran and Russia have targeted an annual trade of \$40 billion which he believed is achievable considering the potentials of both countries.

Gholam Hossein Shafei, who was in Kazan to attend a Russia-Islamic World Forum, made the remarks in a press conference held on the sidelines of the event.

Noting that Iran and Russia have valuable experiences in different fields, he underlined the need for joint investments in oil and gas and auto industries.

Shafei said that Iran and Russia have made great achievements in the auto industry compared to other regional countries and can cooperate with each other in this field.

He also said that agricultural equipment is another field for cooperation between Tehran and Moscow.

"Iran and Russia are two oil and gas rich countries but in the case of renewable energies, both countries have good capacities that should be paid attention to," the Iran Chamber of Commerce president said. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

9/11 a License to Kill

When on September 1, 2001, the U.S. was targeted by a terrorist attack, many people cast doubt on the attack and claimed it was dubious because such an attack was impossible especially in the middle of New York unless the terrorists had received a green light and now coming reports claim that the attack was an excuse and a license for the deaths of over 4.5m people.

A new report on Friday revealed that the wars initiated by the United States in the Middle East and North Africa following the September 11 attacks have directly or indirectly killed at least 4.5 million people and displaced millions of others.

According to the research report from the Costs of War project at Brown University Watson Institute, nearly one million people were directly killed as a result of conflicts in Afghanistan, Iraq, Pakistan, Syria, Yemen, Libya and Somalia.

The report, released on May 15, also estimated that at least 3.6 to 3.7 million of the casualties were "indirect" deaths caused by a variety of factors, including failed economies, extreme poverty, malnutrition, disease, destroyed health infrastructure, environmental contamination and reverberating trauma and violence.

The numbers of direct and indirect war casualties are still continuing to grow from ongoing global conflicts after more than two decades, the report added.

"These wars are ongoing for millions around the world who are living with and dying from their effects," it said, emphasizing that women and children "suffer the brunt of the impact."

"Indirect deaths are devastating, not least because so many of them could be prevented, were it not for war," the report said, adding that it is difficult to estimate indirect deaths, as they do not occur immediately after the battles.

"A death from hunger mostly occurs at some distance from this attention to spectacle and it may happen months or years after war disrupts access to food. Often, people affected by war are displaced and transient, making them hard to track."

The report also acknowledged that it is difficult to disentangle indirect war death factors from the ones that might have occurred in places where people are already suffering from high rates of poverty, disease, and malnutrition.

It singled out the U.S. for its role in many post-9/11 wars, particularly the casualties over the past 20-plus years in Afghanistan. **See Page 7**

U.S. Has Yet to Receive Final Blow

TEHRAN (MNA) – Major General Hossein Salami said that Washington has yet to receive 'final blow' from Iran after repeated failures in the West Asia region.

The commander-in-chief of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks at a ceremony in memory of IRGC 'martyrs' in the city of Golpayegan, in Isfahan Province on Friday.

The IRGC chief said that the enemies led by the United States sought to cripple Iran with the sanctions but failed due to great resistance on the part of the Iranian nation.

He noted that the enemies sought to disappoint people with Islamic Republic in the last autumn riots, but the Iranian nation disappointed them and their ill-wishing dream backfired on them.

He stated that "what the enemies had planned for us has now happened for them. For example, today the Zionist regime is grappling with many problems and setbacks."

"These days, barrage of fire (missiles) is raining down on the heads of the Israelis from Gaza. But the Zionists are unable to do anything and they have become helpless and America has also left the region." **See Page 7**

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Washington Issues New Sanctions, Targeting Iranians, Russians

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. State Department added two Iranian shipping companies, a port operator and a marine service provider to its new sanctions list, continuing its unjust campaign against the Iranian nation.

The department said they were part of the "logistics network" between Moscow and Tehran. The targets included Khazar Sea Shipping Line, and Nasim Bahr Kish, two Iranian shipping companies, and Grand Sea LLC, a maritime service provider in Makhachkala, Russia.

The sanctions also include the entities related to the recent agreement between Iran and Russia to build a railway section of the North-South Corridor.

The Iran-Russia relations have angered the US. That includes a recent agreement between Iran and Russia on the construction of a railroad section that connects southern Asia to northern Europe.

The U.S. said it's deeply concerned by any move to go around sanctions. Tehran has slammed Washington's sanctions, saying that the Rasht-Astara railway project is part of its neighbor-oriented strategy, which is based on cooperation for security, development, and common prosperity.

Iran and Russia this week signed an agreement on the construction of the Rasht-Astara railway, a strategic transport corridor that connects the existing railways of the two countries and Azerbaijan. **See Page 7**

Raisi to head for Indonesia on Monday

TEHRAN (IP) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi will visit Indonesia's capital Jakarta on a three-day trip on Monday, at the official invitation of the President of Indonesia, in a bid to deepen and expand economic, political and cultural relations.

The official welcome, a bilateral meeting with Indonesian President Joko Widodo, as well as the signing of cooperation documents in various sectors are on the agenda during Raisi's state visit to Indonesia.

Besides meeting with the President of Indonesia, Raisi will also meet and discuss with the Speakers of the House of Representatives and the Consultative Assembly of Indonesia.

A meeting with businessmen and economic activists of the two countries, a conversation with Indonesian scholars and intellectuals, and a meeting with Iranians living in Indonesia will be among the other plans of the president's two-day stay in Jakarta.

Tehran, Caracas Can Overcome World Media Power

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Minister of Culture of Venezuela stressed that media power of the world has become a device that causes anger and hatred in the international arena, and of course, spreads the Islamophobia, but Iran and Venezuela can overcome them through cultural activities.

The unveiling ceremony of "April, Inside the Coup", a book written by Venezuela's Minister of Culture, Ernesto Villegas Poljak was held in Tehran on Friday.

In the ceremony, Poljak noted: "Coups continue in various forms, supported by imperialism, so we must overcome them taking advantage of cultural measures."

He said: "In cultural fields, we had plans to communicate with all the nations of the world, of course, people who have an identity and want to communicate within the framework of their own identity."

Poljak added that Iranians, like Venezuelans, fought to preserve their independence, and stability, so they stand all together and unite.

Meanwhile Iranian Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance Mohammad Esmaili stressed that Iran and Venezuela have a lot in common.

Esmaili said: "We have stood together to establish freedom and independence, and



we will stay together to implement justice in the international arenas."

Attending the event, Ismaili emphasized: "Venezuelans resisted the U.S. and imperialism and achieved stability, and now they are developing economically, politically, and culturally."

He stated: "There are many commonalities between the two nations of Iran and Venezuela which are both specific in terms of economy and politics, and in the field of culture."

Ismaili added: "We witnessed the national unity among Venezuelans during our trip to the country, and despite all the problems that imperialism imposed against them, they have resisted against the oppression, and have been expanding their culture."

He expressed hope that the expansion of cultural interactions between the two countries will continue, and a cultural and artistic agreement will be signed, and cultural weeks will be held in the two countries soon.

He went on to conclude that the two countries intend to develop their relations in film, music, and theater fields.

Domestic Manufacturers Outnumber Suppliers for First Time

TEHRAN (Shana) - Iran's oil minister on Saturday announced that manufacturers on the Approved Vendor List (AVL) have for the first time in the country's oil industry outnumbered suppliers.

Javad Owji, who made the remarks in his talks with SHANA during a visit to the newsroom at the venue of Iran Oil Show 2023, called it a "promising development".

At present, more than 80 percent of oil parts and equipment are supplied by Iranian manufacturers, said the minister, adding Iranian companies will gradually find their way to international markets.

Pointing to Iranian manufacturers' strong presence in the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, he recalled that a considerable number of Iranian companies attending the expo 15 years ago were suppliers and brokers, continuing, "But today, most of these companies are manufacturers."

The four-day Iran Oil Show 2023 kicked off at Tehran International Permanent Fairground Wednesday and ends on Saturday.

Some 200 foreign companies from 13 countries have participated in the exhibition.

Iran Warns Iraq Over Terrorist Attacks

TEHRAN (IFP) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Forces says Iran will continue to hit the positions of anti-Iran terrorists in Iraq if Baghdad doesn't adhere to a commitment to expel them from Iraqi territory.

Mohammad Pakpour said Iran and Iraq have reached an agreement under which Baghdad has undertaken to expel terrorist groups from the border areas with Iran.

"We are waiting for the Iraqi government to carry out its commitments, and we have given them some time; if that doesn't happen, IRGC attacks will continue," Pakpour said.

He declined to specify when the deadline had been set for the Iraqi government.

IRGC targeted the positions of various anti-Iran separatist groups in northern Iraq with precision missiles last year.

Pakpour said the security level in Iran, especially in border areas, was desirable and sustainable.

Nouri's Solitary Confinement World Record

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Lawyers of Iranian national Hamid Nouri, who has been illegally detained in Sweden for more than three years, have criticized his trial process and the way he is being treated in jail, saying the 62-year-old's solitary confinement is too long and regarded as a "world record."

Mizan news agency, affiliated with the Iranian Judiciary, cited Nouri's lawyer Hanna Larsson as saying at the tenth session of an appeals court hearing that her client has now spent 3.5 years in solitary confinement in Swedish detention centers, describing the long period as a "record" in the world and the way he is treated by jailers as "very heinous."

Larsson said Nouri's family members have been prevented from visiting him, blaming the Swedish prison authorities for refusing to arrange meetings despite having "enough time to do so."

"He is entitled to have in-person and virtual meetings, but no meeting is held," she said, adding that the prison authorities have also deprived Nouri of having access to his laptop and iPad over the past weeks.

Larsson also rebuked the Swedish authorities for preventing Nouri's access to crucial documents required for defending him at the court, dismissing as "not true" the prosecutor's claim that the documents had been handed over to her client.

"These documents were of great value to our client and now we cannot defend him as we should and be ready for defense," Nouri's lawyer underlined.

Larsson also brought up the issue of Nouri's failing eyesight, saying her client had for several times called for arranging an appointment with an ophthalmologist but the prison authorities turned down the plea.

Gov't Unveils 7th Five-Year Development Plan

TEHRAN (IP) - The document of the 7th five-year Development Plan of Iran was unveiled in the presence of the country's first vice president and elites on Saturday.

The conference for introducing Iran's 7th five-year Development Plan document started with the speech of First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber.

This conference, which is held in the presence of more than five hundred elites, professors, State managers and private sector activists, examines the 20 axes of the 7th Development Plan with an explanatory approach.

In this brainstorming session, the deputies and heads of Iran's Planning and Budget Organization, cabinet members, parliamentarians and experts of the executive bodies will examine and explain the special features and innovations of this program within 16 specialized round tables format.

The seven headings of the general policies come in 26 clauses and include "economic", "infrastructural", "cultural and social", "scientific, technological and educational," "political and foreign policy", "defensive and security", and "administrative, legal and judicial".

Pakistani Delegation Headed By FM Zardari to Visit Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Pakistan cabinet announced that a delegation headed by the foreign minister of the country will visit Iran to follow up on the implementation of bilateral agreements.

Pakistan cabinet held a meeting chaired by Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif on Friday a day after Iran's president and Pakistani premier met at the shared border to inaugurate border markets and an electricity transmission project.

Pakistan's Prime Minister's Office issued a statement on the cabinet meeting earlier today and announced that Shehbaz Sharif informed the members of the cabinet about his meeting and important talks with Seyed Ebrahim Raisi, the President of the Republic of Iran at the shared border on Thursday.

The Pakistani prime minister further said that through the follow-ups and resolve of the two countries' officials, the Polan-Gebed electricity transmission project was completed and put into operation in the shortest possible time.

The statement added Shehbaz Sharif announced in today's meeting that a high-ranking delegation from Pakistan headed by Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari will travel to Iran to follow up on the agreement between the two sides and accelerate its implementation.

He stated that Iran and Pakistan emphasized joint efforts to maintain stable security on the shared borders of the two countries and to fight terrorism and announced their readiness to strengthen the security mechanism on the shared borders.

Navy to Deploy for First Time 86th Flotilla to Antarctic Soon

TEHRAN - The Iranian Navy has announced plans to deploy one of its flotilla of warships to the Antarctic for the first time ever "in the near future."

The deployment of Iranian warships to the Antarctic was apparently one of the main goals of a recent mission by the 86th flotilla, which returned to the country a few days ago after a round-the-world voyage, Iran's Tasnim news agency said.

The naval fleet, comprised of domestically-manufactured Dena destroyer and Makran forward base ship, entered the territorial waters of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Wednesday, after sailing 63,000 kilometers of sea routes over eight months and a circumnavigation of the globe in 360 degrees.

The 86th flotilla broke the record for the distance an Iranian flotilla has ever sailed in international waters and crossed the Strait of Magellan — the nearest region to the South Pole — during its mission, a main purpose of which was to test the strength of the steel hull of the Dena destroyer in cold waters.

Antarctica is one of the most important strategic regions in the world, with 30 countries having 70 active research centers there.

"Presence in Antarctica is important from various scientific,

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



legal and political, geostrategic, economic aspects, and this region in the future will be a major issue on the international arena," Tasnim quoted Abolfazl Saleh, head of the Marine Science Research Institute of Iran's National Institute for Oceanography, as saying.

The news agency added that the establishment of a permanent base by the Islamic Republic of Iran in the South Pole in order to increase the strategic depth of the country has received a lot of attention over the past years.

The 86th naval fleet set sail on a mission around the world from Iran's southern port city of Bandar Abbas on September 20, 2022.

At one point, the naval fleet passed the coasts of Chile, Argentina, Uruguay and Brazil, finally anchoring in the port of Rio de Janeiro in Brazil, which coincided with the 120th anniversary of the establishment of relations between Iran and Brazil.

Dena is a Mowj-class destroyer that joined the Iranian Navy in June 2021. The military vessel is equipped with anti-ship cruise missiles, torpedoes and naval cannons.

Makran is a forward base ship weighing 121,000 tons. The warship can carry five helicopters and is employed for providing logistical support for the combat warships.

Top Iran Official Warns Taliban Not to Misunderstand Tehran's Good-Neighborliness Policy

TEHRAN (IMF) - An Iranian vice president says Tehran will pursue its rights from the Helmand River under a "special" agenda in the wake of President Ebrahim Raisi's warning to the interim Taliban rulers in Afghanistan. In a tweet, Mohsen Mansouri, vice-president and head of the administrative affairs at the president's office, cautioned the caretaker government in Kabul not to "misunderstand" the Iranian policy of good neighborliness.

"The follow-up on the Helmand water rights will go on until results are achieved," he said.

During a visit to Sistan and Baluchestan Province, President Raisi sternly warned the Taliban that they will have to accept the repercussions of refusing to allow Iran access to its share of water from the Helmand River.

Tensions have been escalating between Iran and Afghanistan over the Taliban's violations of the 1973 treaty on shared water resources.

As per the provisions of the treaty, Afghanistan is bound to release 820 million cubic meters of water from the river, but Iranian authorities have repeatedly said that Kabul has been withholding its share.

In a statement on Friday, Iranian Foreign Ministry warned that Tehran will not hesitate to use pressure to make the Taliban respect the water rights of Iran.

Iran Condemns Latest Desecration of al-Aqsa Mosque Compound

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran strongly has condemned Israeli settlers' latest violation of the sanctity of the al-Aqsa Mosque's compound in the occupied city of al-Quds, calling it a reaction to the Israeli regime's recent defeat in the face of the Palestinian resistance in Gaza.

Tweeting on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani denounced "Zionists' repeated desecration of the al-Aqsa Mosque [s compound] and [their] shouting of racist slogans against Palestinians and Muslims."

The remarks came a day after hundreds of Israeli settlers stormed the compound -- which is Islam's third-holiest site -- in al-Quds' Old City amid heavy protection

provided for them by thousands of Israeli troops.

The violation took place ahead of the so-called "flag march" by Israelis, which marks the regime's 1967 occupation of the Palestinian territory of the West Bank, including East al-Quds -- which Palestinian want as the capital of their future state.

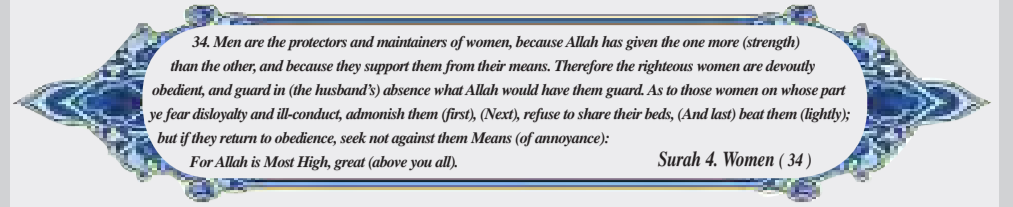
Kanaani called the settlers' infringement on the compound "a reaction to the [Israeli regime's] disastrous defeat in the face of Gaza's heroic resistance."

The Tel Aviv regime launched a campaign of deadly bombings against the Gaza Strip on May 9, prompting the Islamic Jihad, a resistance group based in the coastal sliver, to fire over 1,000 rockets toward the occupied territories.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:00
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:27
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:13
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:54



Tehran Talks With Ashgabat on Gas Imports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has negotiated with Turkmenistan to import gas from the neighboring country, the director of the integrated planning at the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC) said.

"Gas swap from Turkmenistan has doubled," Hossein-Ali Mohammad-Hosseini said at a panel on investment opportunities in NIGC, adding Iran is in talks with Turkmenistan to import gas.

Iran, Turkmenistan and Azerbaijan signed a gas swap deal for up to 2 billion cubic meters per year in 2021.

Iran was the third-largest gas producer in the world after the United States and Russia in last Iranian calendar year (ended March, 20, 2023), he stated, adding Iran produced 291 billion cubic meters of gas and injected 271 billion cubic meters of sweet gas to its national gas network.

The National Iranian Gas Company invested over 400,000 billion rials last Iranian calendar year, which will increase to 550,000 billion rials this year (to end March 19, 2023).

Iran's gas industry needs about 40 billion dollars in investment by the end of the Seventh Development Plan, he said, adding 20 billion dollars are expected to be invested by private sector.

Hosseini also said that natural gas transmission via Iran's national network is expected to reach 280 billion cubic meters in the current Iranian calendar year 1402 (began on March 21).

Speaking on the sidelines of the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition (Iran Oil Show 2023), Hosseini said the volume of gas transmitted through the country's network increased by 2.2 percent in the previous year.

As IRNA reported, the official said NIGTC delivers natural gas to 2,200 pressure



reduction stations, cities, and large industries such as petrochemicals and power plants. "Gas is also stored at Shourijeh and Sarajeh storage facilities and injected into oil wells at three points," he added.

Hosseini noted that NIGTC operates the National Iranian Gas Company (NIGC)'s physical asset which is the country's national gas network, saying: "In total, there are 39,000 kilometers of high-pressure gas transmission lines, 90 pressure reduction stations, 61 operating yards and 330 compressors operating under NIGTC across the country."

According to the official, the company also managed to complete 107 cases of major overhauls last year, and while conducting smart tracking on 3,000 kilometers of pipelines, 1100 cases of small repairs and 48,000 kilometers of leak detection were also carried out on the facilities and lines operated by the NIGTC.

Operating the largest natural gas network in West Asia, NIGC has been continuously expanding this network into the country's most remote areas so that currently over 98 percent of the urban population, as well as 90 percent of the country's rural population, have access to natural gas through this huge network.

IGTC, as the NIGC's subsidiary in charge of the management, maintenance, and operation of the country's national gas network, has been working around the clock to ensure a safe, secure, and sustained supply of natural gas throughout the country all year long, especially during the cold seasons.

Iran, Russia to Develop Fishery Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - In a meeting of the Joint Fisheries Committee of Iran and Russia, the two sides stressed the need for the expansion of cooperation for facilitating the export of fishery products to Russia through the development of transportation routes.

As IRIB reported, during the meeting, the fishery officials of the two countries discussed ways of cooperation in various areas including processing and trade of fishery products, scientific and research, restoration of reserves and aquaculture, as well as, the development of investment in Iran's fisheries industry.

Iran and Russia have been boosting their economic ties as the two sanctioned nations take new steps for expanding cooperation in the energy sector and increasing settlements in national currencies.

In early February, Russian Deputy Foreign Minister Andrey Rudenko told Interfax that the two countries are actively cooperating in banking and are planning to ramp up the share of national currencies in mutual settlements.

"We are continuing to work with Iran while promoting trade transactions in national currencies. The share of such settlements exceeded 60 percent in 2021. The positive trend continued last year," Rudenko said in an interview with Interfax.

NIOC Inks 170 Deals, MOUs During Iran Oil Show

TEHRAN (MNA) - Head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) has said the company signed 170 deals and memorandums of understanding (MOUs) with knowledge-based firms on the sidelines of the 27th International Oil, Gas, Refining, and Petrochemical Exhibition of Iran (Iran Oil Show 2023).

According to Mohsen Khojasteh-Mehr, the mentioned documents include 120 MOUs and 50 deals, Shana reported.

Referring to the slogan of this year's exhibition, which is "oil industry, knowledge-based production, and optimal consumption", the official added: "We have had good meetings with the Vice Presidency for Science, Technology and Knowledge-Based Economy in order to solve upstream issues and challenges related to oil and gas fields."

"I hope that at the end of this exhibition, we will witness the finalization of these contracts, and next year, we unveil the products of these [knowledge-based] companies at the exhibition, and this will be the most important achievement," he added.

Iran Oil Show 2023 kicked off in a ceremony in the Iranian capital Tehran on Wednesday. The exhibition was wrapped up on Saturday.

In addition to the Iranian firms, some 200 companies from 13 countries took part in this year's exhibition.

Iran Monthly Non-Oil Export To Iraq Up 43%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- The value of Iran's non-oil export to Iraq increased by 43 percent in the first month of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-April 20), as compared to the first month of the past year, the spokesman of Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade announced.

Ruhollah Latifi said that importing non-oil commodities worth \$6.9 billion, Iraq was Iran's first export destination in the said month.

The Arab country was Iran's sixth source of import in the first month, through exporting non-oil goods valued at \$7.1 million, with 30.5 percent drop year on year, he added.

As previously announced by an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the value of Iran's export to Iraq increased by 15 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Farzad Piltan, the director-general of TPO's Office of West Asian Countries, said that based on the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA), Iran exported commodities worth over \$10 billion to its neighbor in the previous year.

By stating that Iraq is one of the strategic partners of Iran in the field of foreign trade and especially exports, he put the value of Iran's import from Iraq at about \$200 million in the past year.

Considering Iran's vast export capacity and Iraq's large market for Iranian goods, both sides want to expand the volume of bilateral economic exchanges.

Iran and Iraq have set a target of \$20 billion in annual trade, and businessmen and authorities of both countries are determined to meet that target, Head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Ale-Es'haq has stated.

ICCIMA Calls for Forming Joint Islamic Market in 10 Years

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) urged the need for forming a joint Islamic market by the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC) member states within ten years.

Gholam Hossein Shafei, who was in Kazan to attend a Russia-Islamic World Forum, made the remarks addressing a meeting of the presidents of the chambers of commerce of OIC countries.

He said that the OIC is moving not only towards regional development, but also towards global development.

With members from four different continents, the move of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation is towards glory, Shafei said.



Expansion of cooperation among Islamic countries can play a key role in creating jobs and helping the industrial and agricultural development of these countries, he added.

Noting that the world is projected to be facing three different challenges for meeting energy, water and food needs in the future, the Iran Chamber of Commerce

president said that "fortunately, the energy reserves of the Islamic countries in Asia and Africa are so much that they can meet the needs of the member countries of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation for many years."

He also referred to fertile lands of Islamic countries which can help the world meet the increasing need for food.

UNESCO to Add 3 Iranian Documents to Its Memory of the World

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to UNESCO said they include the entire great works of famous Iranian poet Jalal ad-Din Mohammad Rumi, also known as Molavi, (including Masnavi, Divan-e Kabir, Majales Sabeh, Maktubat and Fihe-Ma-Fih - a collection of mystical sayings), documents on the history of Iran's foreign relations during the Qajar Era and documents related to Sheikh Safi Al-Din Ardabili tomb.

The Memory of the World Register lists documentary heritage that has been recommended by the International Advisory Committee, and endorsed by the Director-General of UNESCO, as corresponding to the selection criteria regarding world significance and outstanding universal value.

UNESCO has previously inscribed 10 Iranian works to the Memory of the World Register. A Collection of selected maps of Iran in the Qajar Era, Administrative Documents of Astan-e Quds Razavi in the Safavid Era, Al-Tafhim li Awa'il Sana'at al-Tanjim, Al-Masaalik Wa Al-Mamaalik and Bayasanghori Shahnameh are among them.



3.1m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade 3,168,012 tons of commodities and 500 vehicles with a total trading value of nearly \$791m, posting growths of 7% and 26% in volume and value of trades compared with the week before that.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,622,139 tons of commodities worth more than \$560m.



On this floor the IME sold 1,277,140 tons of cement, 658,173 tons of steel, 536,000 tons of iron ore, 184,000 tons of sponge iron, 7,695 tons of aluminum, 5,050 tons of copper, 1,710 tons of zinc, 200 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 500 vehicles.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 443,453 tons of commodities valued at more than \$205m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 118,437 tons of bitumen, 100,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 95,560 tons of polymeric products, 66,000 tons of lube cut, 42,418 tons of chemicals, 18,920 tons of sulfur, 3,057 tons of base oil, 120 tons of gas feedstocks and 100 tons of insulation.

The IME also traded within the same week 102,420 tons of commodities on its side market.

Iran Marks National Day Of Organ Donation

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The National Organ Donation Day was held in the capital of Iran on May 20, 2023, with the presence of experts and specialists.

Attending the event, Shahid Beheshti University's president emphasized that 70% of the families of the brain-dead deceased donate their loved one's organs.

Alireza Zali said: "Currently, ten percent of Iranians have received organ donation cards."

He said: "There have been 68 organ processing units in the country, and more than 150,000 phone calls are made for organ donation every year."

He added: "The heart, liver, and kidneys from the brain-dead person's organs will be able to be transplanted to save many lives, adding: Last year, 750 cases of brain death were reported, of which the Shahid Beheshti University's expert team confirmed about 350 cases."

He stated: "National Organ Donation Day has been named National Organ Donation Day in accordance with the historical fatwa of Imam Khomeini (RA) regarding organ donation, so organ donation is considered sacrificing."

Also during the ceremony, the Chairman of the Department of Urology and Kidney Transplantation, Nasser Simforoosh, said: "Turkey ranks first and Iran ranks second in the world in organ donation from living people."

He stressed: "The medical fee for transplantation is low and should be increased to attract more young specialists in the field."

Meanwhile in the event head of the management center for transplantation and special diseases at the Iranian Ministry of Health said that the best medical services are provided to the people who donate organs. Amir Hessem Alirezaei emphasized: "For the first time in Iran, we managed to perform an organ transplant on a pregnant woman, fortunately without any side effects."

He said: "Teamwork is very important in Iran, and Iranians are trying to do a great job by donating organs, and I request that if the family has a brain-dead person, they can save the lives of many people by donating their organs."

In addition, Mojtaba Mokhbar Dezfuli, the head of the Transplant Organs Provision Unit, as the other keynote speaker said: "There are no restrictions on organ donation and transplantation in Iran."

He said: "Since the formation of the Transplant Organs Provision Unit, we have had 2200 cases of brain death donation, and almost all over Iran we have had 6300 transplant organs out of these 2200 cases of brain death donation."

Italy Flood Death Toll Rises

ROME (Dispatches) - The toll from floods that have devastated the Emilia Romagna region in Italy rose to 14, amid calls for the government to revive an abandoned project to mitigate the impact of natural disasters.

Authorities in Ravenna ordered the immediate evacuation of two small towns and issued an "extremely urgent" call for residents to reduce their movements to a minimum in the region, which was still subject to a red weather alert.

"The death toll has risen to 14," a spokeswoman for the region told AFP.

The latest victim to be found was a man recovered from a flooded house in Faenza, a picturesque city usually surrounded by green pastures and vineyards, left largely underwater after the fierce downpour earlier this week.



Russian PM to Visit Beijing This Week

BEIJING (AP) — Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin will visit Beijing this week for talks, China's Foreign Ministry said Friday, marking the latest exchange in a relationship in which Russia is becoming increasingly reliant on China for economic and diplomatic support.

"During the visit, the two sides will have an in-depth exchange of views on practical cooperation in bilateral relations and issues of common concern," ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said at a daily briefing.

"We look forward to further strengthening cooperation between the two sides, deepening people-to-people and local exchanges (and) injecting strong momentum into the recovery of the world economy," Wang added.



G7 Steps Up Russia Sanctions, Seeks To Cut China Trade Dependency



HIROSHIMA (Dispatches) - Leaders of the world's richest democracies agreed to stiffen sanctions against Russia, while a draft communique to be issued after their talks in the Japanese city of Hiroshima stressed the need to reduce reliance on trade with China.

The Group of Seven (G7) leaders, who will be joined this weekend by Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy, pledged to restrict any exports to Russia that could help it in its 15-month-old invasion of Ukraine.

"This includes exports of industrial machinery, tools, and other technology that Russia uses to rebuild its war machine," they said in a joint statement released on Friday, adding they would pursue moves to limit Russian revenues from trade in metals and diamonds.

On China, which G7 powers increasingly see in terms of a threat to economic security, they were to agree its status as the world's second-largest economy meant it was necessary to foster cooperation, an early draft of the final communique seen by Reuters said.

"Our policy approaches are not designed to harm China, we do not seek to thwart China's economic progress and development," noted the draft, which is still subject to change, calling for "stable and constructive" ties with Beijing.

But the draft nonetheless urged measures to "reduce excessive dependencies" in critical supply chains and counter "malign practices" in technology transfer and data disclosure.

It reaffirmed the need for peace and stability in the Taiwan Strait and urged China to press Russia to end its aggression in Ukraine.

The G7 - the United States, Japan, Germany, Britain, France, Italy and Canada - will use the three-day meeting to debate strategy on a Ukraine conflict that shows no sign of easing.

The summit venue, Hiroshima, was destroyed by U.S. nuclear bombings 78 years ago that ended World War Two. Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida, who represents Hiroshima in Japan's lower house of parliament, said he chose it for the global gathering to focus attention on arms control.

Russia's threats of possible recourse to nuclear weapons, together with the nuclear programmes of North Korea and Iran, have all added to concerns about proliferation.

In the draft, G7 countries - among them nuclear-armed France, Britain and the United States - expressed their "commitment to achieving a world without nuclear weapons" through a "realistic, pragmatic, and responsible approach".

Having emerged as the world's wealthiest nations after World War Two, the G7 democracies have become increasingly challenged by an ascendant China and unpredictable Russia.

Amid evidence that existing Russian sanctions are being weakened by circumvention, they said the group was "engaging" with countries through which any restricted G7 goods, services or technology could transit through to Russia.

Zelenskiy Visits Saudi, Seeks Arab League Support For His People

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy attended a summit of the Arab League in Saudi Arabia to canvas support for his people, while Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman expressed his readiness to mediate in the war between Moscow and Kyiv.

Also at the Jeddah gathering, Arab leaders warmly welcomed back into their fold Syria's President Bashar al-Assad - who has received heavy support from Russia in his country's civil war - following a decade of isolation.

"We reaffirm the kingdom's readiness to continue mediating efforts between Russia and Ukraine, and to support all international efforts aimed at resolving the crisis politically in a way that contributes to achieving security," the Saudi Crown Prince said in his opening speech.

Prince Mohammed has mediated in the conflict before.

Zelenskiy, who was also due to attend a summit of the G7 leaders in the Japanese city of Hiroshima this weekend, thanked Saudi Arabia for its past help and said delegates would each receive the text of his 10-point peace plan.

Witnesses Recount Gunmen's Raid on Church in Khartoum

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Over four terrifying hours last weekend, masked gunmen affiliated to one of Sudan's warring factions raided one of Khartoum's oldest churches, opening fire at church officials as they searched for cash, gold and women, two witnesses said.

The raid was one of many targeting homes, factories, banks and places of worship that residents have often blamed on the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF), which have been battling the army across greater Khartoum over the past month.

RSF fighters have spread out through many residential areas as the army has targeted them with air strikes and heavy artillery. Police have disappeared from the streets, leaving locals at the mercy of armed fighters and gangs.

The RSF, which denied responsibility for the raid on the Mar Girgis (St. George) Coptic church, has said in statements its troops are working to protect civilians, and that those committing abuses are criminals who have stolen RSF uniforms.

The attack at the church in the Masalma neighbourhood of Omdurman, across the Nile from Khartoum, began shortly before midnight on May 13.

The witnesses described the attackers as in their late 20s, with at least one non-Arabic speaker. They wore scarves across their faces leaving only their eyes uncovered, and mismatched clothing including some items of RSF uniform, the witnesses told Reuters by phone.

The gunmen sprayed bullets at a priest, nuns, and sextons, wounding five of them, said the two witnesses, who asked not to be named for fear of reprisals. "They shouted, 'Where is the gold? Where is the money? Where are the dollars?'" one witness said. They also insulted the church leaders and workers saying, "You are Egyptians, sons of dogs", calling them infidels, and telling them to convert to Islam.

Just over 5% of Sudan's 46 million population is estimated to be Christian, split into 36 denominations, according to data from the Pew Research Centre and the Sudan Council of Churches.

Russian Forces Dig in at Ukrainian Nuclear Plant

LONDON (Dispatches) - Russian military forces have been enhancing defensive positions in and around the Zaporizhzhia nuclear power plant in southern Ukraine in recent weeks, four witnesses said, ahead of an expected counteroffensive in the region.

New trenches have been dug around the city and more mines have been laid. Surveillance cameras at the plant are pointing north across a wide reservoir towards Ukrainian-controlled territory.

The Russians have had firing positions set up atop some of the plant's buildings for several months. Nets have been erected in a possible deterrent to drones.

The measures described by two Ukrainians who work at the power plant and two other residents in the city of Enerhodar underline the risks the war poses to the security of the facility.

The sources spoke on condition of anonymity because of fears for their safety in a city under Russian occupation.

The Russian plant operator said any possible military action by Ukraine posed a threat to nuclear safety, and that the plant's equipment was being maintained properly. The Ukrainian military intelligence agency and the Russian defense ministry did not respond to requests for comment.

Some nuclear industry experts said they were alarmed and warned that any damage to the plant could have dire consequences for people, the surrounding area, the war and the global nuclear industry.

"Nuclear reactors were not designed for war zones and I do not believe they can be safe or secure in a war zone," said Nickolas Roth, director at think tank the Nuclear Threat Initiative.

Petro Kotin, chief of Ukraine's Energoatom nuclear agency, told Reuters he did not believe Ukrainian forces would stage an attack directly on the site and could instead try to force the Russians to retreat by cutting off supply lines.

But there is concern in the international community that the six-reactor nuclear plant, Europe's largest, could be caught up in fighting, particularly as military analysts expect Ukraine to try to push Russian forces back in the Zaporizhzhia region.

The U.N. nuclear watchdog says that the military presence and activity is growing in the region, underlining the need for urgent action. It has warned for months of the danger of a major accident at the plant.

The agency plans to present a deal between Russia and Ukraine to the U.N. Security Council later this month to protect the facility, four diplomats told Reuters.

In Japan, where just over a decade ago an earthquake and tsunami cut power supply to the Fukushima nuclear power plant causing reactors to melt down, the government said it was keeping close tabs on Zaporizhzhia.



Spanish Far Right Eyes Gains in Regional Polls



VALLADOLID (Dispatches) - Far-right party Vox has shaken up Castilla y Leon since it entered the government of the Spanish region last year, attacking unions and pushing polarizing positions on social issues.

It is now poised to spread its influence beyond the sparsely populated region near Madrid, with the party set to make gains in regional and local elections on May 28. Surveys suggest the main opposition conservative Popular Party (PP) could need the support of Vox to govern in half of the 12 regions casting ballots, just as it did in Castilla y Leon last year.

Polls also indicate the PP is on track to win a year-end general election but will need Vox to form a working majority and oust Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez's coalition government from office.

Vox leader Santiago Abascal has called the PP-VOX coalition government in office in Castilla y Leon since March 2022 a "showroom" and "an example of the alternative Spain needs".

It is Spain's first government to include a far-right party since the dictatorship of Francisco Franco.

In Castilla y Leon, Vox has slashed funding to unions, which the party has vowed to "put in their place" if it comes to power nationally.

Trade union UGT was forced to lay off 40 percent of its staff in Castilla y Leon last month and scale back programmes to promote workplace safety.

Spain's other main union, the CCOO, is preparing to follow suit. "We are submerged in a serious economic crisis," the secretary general of CCOO's branch in Castilla y Leon, Vicente Andres, told AFP at his office in Valladolid, the region's biggest city.

Vox has also angered LGBTQ groups by refusing to allow the regional parliament to be lit up in the colours of the rainbow, the symbol of the gay rights movement, for Pride festivities as in past years when the PP governed alone.

In addition, the regional vice-president, Vox's Juan Garcia-Gallardo, has railed against a law passed by Spain's leftist central government that extends transgender rights.

Egyptian Artisans Carve a Path To World Luxury Markets

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Egyptian luxury brands are harnessing traditional craftsmanship from jewellery design to carpet weaving to bring the country's ancient cultural riches to the world.

Experts in the sector say the global appeal of Arab and Islamic designs from other countries shows Egypt could do more to promote its rich, millennia-old artistic heritage.

One pioneer has been master jeweller Azza Fahmy, whose signature Islamic art-inspired pieces have graced the world's rich and famous including US pop star Rihanna and Jordan's Queen Rania.

Fahmy, who started off in an Old Cairo workshop about 50 years ago, said her focus has been designs that "resonate with Egyptian identity".

Artists and artisans in Egypt, the Arab world's most populous country, draw from a history that spans ancient Pharaonic times, the Mamluk, Ottoman and modern eras.

"We are lucky to be able to draw on 6,000 years of history," said textile designer Goya Gallagher, founder of Cairo-based Malaika Linens, which makes high-end household pieces.

"The main challenge is making sure our pieces are timeless, that they're very well made and always hand-made," she said at the company workshop on the western outskirts of Cairo.

But while Egypt boasts some business success stories, many more luxury goods makers say they labour against myriad odds to eke out a market both locally and internationally.

In the era of global mass production, Egypt's once expansive pool of skilled artisans has shrunk, with many young people turning their backs on family skills passed down through the ages.

As businesses struggle to fill the talent gap, they also face the headwinds of a painful economic crisis that has tanked the local currency and restricted raw material imports.

The state's efforts to support the handicrafts sector, meanwhile, have been "limited and sporadic", says the United Nations Industrial Development Organization.

Culture consultant Dina Hafez agreed that Egypt offers little in the way of formalised arts and crafts training.

"The training of artisans is still essentially based on informal education and networks of apprenticeship," said Hafez.

"The sector lacks any structure. We need a real ecosystem. But for the moment, it's all based on personal initiatives."



She said Egypt could learn from Turkey and Morocco, "where the opportunities and obstacles look a lot like Egypt", but which had managed to launch "their designs onto the international scene".

Still, change is afoot.

A collection of jewellery made at the Azza Fahmy workshop in the 6th of October industrial zone southwest of Egypt's capital

Fahmy, the jewellery designer, said there is always space in the market for works made by skilled artisans and "good designers with creative minds and quality education".

Many designers hope to benefit from government initiatives to draw in investment and tourism revenue from its ancient wonders.

At the Grand Egyptian Museum at the foot of the Giza pyramids, Egyptian luxury stores enjoy pride of place.

Although its official opening has been long delayed, the museum offers limited tours and events, and the shops already "showcase the best of Egyptian crafts", said the owner of one, Mohamed al-Kahhal.

In Cairo's historic centre, linen company Malaika trains women from marginalised backgrounds in embroidery and sells the wares to its customers and to other fashion and textile brands.

Carpet maker Hend al-Kahhal works in the same spirit, of bringing Egyptian identity to global frontiers.

Standing on the factory roof, where wool and silk creations hung out to dry, Kahhal said the family business works with designers "to give a contemporary touch to Pharaonic and Mamluk motifs".

The Egyptian Handicrafts Export Council, under the trade and industry ministry, has long been working to showcase such Egyptian creations internationally.

But Hafez, the culture consultant, said she hopes for more progress in future, as often "budget constraints, red tape and customs regulations don't exactly make things easier".

The question, she said, is whether Egyptian "authorities are really aware of the soft power these creators can have".

This AI-Powered Breathalyser Could Detect Covid-19 and Other Diseases

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Soon, you might only need to blow into a breathalyser to find out if you have Covid-19 or other, more serious diseases like cancer and diabetes. A team of US researchers has used artificial intelligence to develop a kind of breathalyser that can diagnose various diseases quickly and accurately.

Scientists from the University of Colorado, Boulder and the National Institute of Standards and Technology are working on a new kind of AI-powered breathalyser that could detect Covid-19 and other diseases such as cancer and diabetes in real time, just from a person's exhaled breath. The results of their research are published in the Journal of Breath Research.

"Our results demonstrate the promise of breath analysis as an alternative, rapid, non-invasive test for Covid-19 and highlight its remarkable potential for diagnosing diverse conditions and disease states," says study first author Qizhong Liang, in a news release.

This breathalyser works with "frequency comb spectroscopy," a technique that uses laser light to distinguish one molecule from another. It is able to identify biomarkers of disease in human breath. In order to ensure more accurate detection, the researchers integrated artificial intelligence. "Molecules increase or decrease in concentrations when associated with specific health conditions," explains Qizhong Liang. "Machine learning analyses this information, identifies patterns and develops criteria we can use to predict a diagnosis."

An initial trial was conducted between May 2021 and January 2022, collecting breath samples from 170 CU Boulder students who had undergone PCR testing in the previous 48 hours, either by submitting a saliva or nasal swab. Half had tested positive, half negative. When compared with the PCR tests performed, the results obtained with the breathalyser were found to be accurate, matching in 85 per cent of cases. However, the study, which is small in scale, requires more subjects to effectively confirm the effectiveness of the breathalyser.

And there is still much to be learned, says the senior author of the research, Jun Ye. "With one breath, we can collect so many data points from you, but then what? We only understand how a few molecules correlate with specific conditions."

The research team is currently working on miniaturising the breathalyser system to the size of a chip. This could boost the potential uses of this test, which could then be integrated into various devices, possibly even smartphones.

The test is also being improved in order to detect a maximum number of possible diseases. For example, the researchers are working with several paediatric and respiratory specialists to refine the functionalities of the breathalyser. Their objective is to "explore how the breathalyser can not only diagnose diseases but also enable scientists to better understand them, offering hints about immune responses, nutritional deficiencies and other factors that could contribute to or exacerbate illness," the news release explains.



Earth-Sized Alien Planet Gripped By Widespread Volcanism



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - An Earth-sized planet orbiting a dim star in our galactic neighborhood is offering some of the best evidence to date of volcanism beyond our solar system, with observations suggesting a rugged and rocky world tormented by constant eruptions.

Scientists said yesterday the planet, the third detected orbiting this particular star, is likely covered with volcanoes — similar to Jupiter's moon Io, the most volcanically active body in our solar system. In our solar system, Earth and Venus are volcanically active, as are some of Jupiter's moons.

The planet's volcanism was not directly observed but rather inferred due to its significant gravitational interaction with the larger of the two other planets orbiting the dim star. The gravitational tug from the larger planet may squeeze and flex the newly identified one, heating up its interior and causing surface volcanic activity, similar to Io, the researchers said.

Planets beyond our solar system are called exoplanets. "There is not yet any direct observational evidence of exoplanet volcanism, but this planet is a particularly likely candidate," said University of Kansas astronomy professor Ian Crossfield, one of the authors of the research published in the journal Nature.

It is a planet that does not rotate — with one side perpetually in daylight and the other in darkness.

"On the dayside, it is too hot for liquid water, so it is likely very dry and hot — likely a desert. On the night side, there is possibly a large icy glacier," said study co-author Björn Benneke, head of the astronomy group at the University of Montreal.

Arab Conflict Zones Missing out on Climate Funds

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Conflict-plagued countries in the Middle East are among the most vulnerable to climate change but are almost entirely excluded from meaningful financing to mitigate its effects, aid groups warned.

In a joint report focusing on Iraq, Syria and Yemen, the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and the Norwegian Red Cross demanded greater assistance, saying the combined effects of climate change and armed conflict create an alarming cocktail of humanitarian woes.

The Climate Funds Update database, which collates information from 27 UN, World Bank and other multilateral funds, listed only 19 single-country projects in Iraq, Syria and Yemen that have been approved for funding as of January 2022, the report said.

It noted the total amount disbursed to date is just \$20.6 million — less than 0.5 percent of the money spent on climate projects worldwide.

"Current climate finance distributions almost entirely exclude the most fragile and unstable places," said the 56-page report.

"It's clear from a humanitarian perspective that this must change," said Anne Bergh, secretary-general of the Norwegian Red Cross.

Grappling with an eight-year civil war, the University of Notre Dame's Global Adaptation Initiative ranks Yemen as one of the region's most climate-vulnerable countries, topped only by Sudan and Afghanistan.

"In Yemen, it is not uncommon for people to flee their homes seeking safety from conflict only to then be farmed that new location because the land cannot be farmed" due to drought and water scarcity, the ICRC said in a statement.

The United Nations lists Iraq, still recovering from decades of conflict, as one of the five countries most impacted by some effects of climate change including drought.

Syria is also at heightened risk following more than a decade of war that has battered the country's infrastructure.

"Death, injury and destruction are the devastating and well-known effects of armed conflict," ICRC regional director Fabrizio Carboni said in a statement.

"Less well-known are the challenges residents must endure and overcome because of this terrible combination of conflict, climate change and environmental degradation."

Climate finance is expected to be a key issue at upcoming UN climate talks, which will be held in the United Arab Emirates' business hub of Dubai in November and December.

Helena de Jong, a senior adviser with the UAE's COP28 team, said she was looking into ways to accelerate climate action and finance ahead of the event into regions affected by conflict.

COP28 offers an opportunity to talk to climate finance providers, including development banks such as the World Bank as well as humanitarian bodies, she said.

"We do want to see a big step forward at COP28," potentially in the "form of a global pact that all these actors would sign up to", de Jong said.

The proposed pact "would include at least a couple of solutions" such as streamlining applications and enabling more local projects rather than relying on government-driven schemes, she added.



Could Lab-Grown Caviar Be the Latest, More Ethically Acceptable Luxury Treat?



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Meat and fish alternatives aren't the only things being grown in labs, because scientists are also working on reproducing luxury foods such as caviar, in particular to address animal welfare issues.

From meat to salmon, tuna, oysters, and now caviar! A South Korean start-up recently announced that it has succeeded in producing sturgeon eggs in a lab. The firm doesn't go into detail about the process, other than that it is based on shrimp and seaweed, and that it is inspired by the Oscietra variety of caviar. This lab-made caviar is said to have a less intensely salty taste than that of Oscietra caviar, and a different texture to traditional sturgeon roe. Above all, CellMeat — the name of the company behind the research — boasts that it could offer the famous luxury dish without having to kill a single sturgeon.

This is a no-brainer for the start-up, which has previously developed its own culture medium for the development of edible cell tissues as an alternative to the controversial foetal bovine serum. To stimulate the production of a piece of meat from stem cells, it is necessary to add a kind of elixir rich in nutrients, growth factors and hormones, taken from a suckling cow sent to slaughter. In addition to its astronomical production cost, one of the major challenges for cell culture lies in the ability of laboratories to use a synthetic serum. The aim is to resolve the issue of animal welfare. Companies producing cultured meat cannot claim to be addressing this if they continue to use fetal bovine serum.

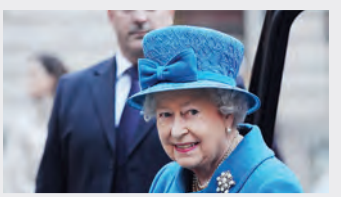
Globally, this South Korean product is not the first attempt at making alt caviar. In the United Kingdom, another firm claims to have developed the first caviar produced without animals.

\$200m Spent on Queen Elizabeth II's Funeral in UK

LONDON (Dispatches) - The treasury revealed Queen Elizabeth II's funeral and lying-in-state last year cost Britain's government about 162 million pounds (around \$200 million).

The state funeral for the late monarch, held on Sept. 19, was the first in the U.K. since that of former Prime Minister Winston Churchill in 1965.

The occasion, attended by world leaders and dignitaries, followed 10 days of national mourning after the queen died at age 96 on Sept. 8 after 70 years on the throne.



Turkey's Inflation to Fall Further in Absence of Major Lira Volatility

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's inflation is expected to fall further toward year-end without major volatility or a significant depreciation in the Turkish lira, according to a senior European development bank official.

Consumer price increases in Turkey have moderated over the last six months from a 24-year peak in October last year, a trend the government says is expected to continue.

The inflation eased to an annual 43.68% in April, almost halving from 85.51% in October. It fell in December and touched 50.51% by March, with a favorable base effect and a relatively stable lira.

"Provided that there is no major shock or excessive depreciation of the Turkish lira, I expect inflation in the country to fall slightly by the end of the year," Roger Kelly, a regional chief economist at the European Reconstruction and Development Bank (EBRD), told an interview with Anadolu Agency (AA).

Kelly noted that they do not officially make forecasts about the inflation rates of countries, yet suggested that they expect the annual consumer price index (CPI) in Turkey to be around 35% by the end of this year.

He said the upcoming trend would largely depend on the policies to be followed after the May 28 presidential runoff that will see President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan again face opposition rival Kemal Kılıçdaroğlu.

In last Sunday's presidential race, Erdoğan secured just under the 50% threshold needed to win outright and giving him the lead over Kılıçdaroğlu.

Erdoğan has repeatedly said his government would not reverse the course of its economic policies and would keep favoring lower interest rates if they win the election.

The government has favored lower borrowing costs as part of its economic program unveiled in 2021 to boost exports, production and investment and create new jobs. It eventually aims to lower inflation by flipping the country's chronic current account deficit to a surplus.

Erdoğan has insisted that high borrowing costs cause high inflation, rejecting economic thinking that suggests raising interest rates helps curb price increases. An easing trend last year saw the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) cut its key one-week repo rate by 500 basis points to counter an economic slowdown before it held it at 9% in December and January. It justified the cuts by saying financial conditions must remain supportive of maintaining the growth in industrial production.

The bank further cut the benchmark policy rate by 50 basis points to 8.5% after the catastrophic Feb. 6 earthquakes to support the recovery of the real sector. However, it said last month that the recovery in the devastated southeastern region has been stronger than expected. As a result, it left the key policy unchanged in March and April.

Kelly's cited EBRD's 0.5-percentage-point downgrade in its forecast for Turkey's economic growth this year, mainly due to the February earthquakes that ripped through the country's southeastern region.

Six Pacific Countries at High Risk of Debt Distress

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - Six Pacific countries are at a high risk of debt distress in part due to government spending to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the World Bank said in a report.

The report, titled Raising Pasifika, said fiscal consolidation was needed in Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu because these countries lack domestic debt markets and access to international capital markets.

Among other countries in the region, Vanuatu is rated at medium risk, while Palau and Nauru's debt is sustainable, the report noted.

"While public debt levels as a share of GDP remain modest across most of the region, the PIC9's economic geography and volatile revenue bases mean debt distress risks remain elevated," it said.

Debt has surged in the region since 2019 as the tourism-dependent economies were hit by COVID border closures, trade was hurt by logistical challenges and weather events caused damage. The World Bank last month said that Fiji must also take urgent action to reduce its debt burden.

Stephen Ndegwa, World Bank Country Director for Papua New Guinea & the Pacific Islands, said reducing debt, strengthening revenue and improving the quality of government spending are critical areas for Pacific countries to address.

The report said continued access to grants in line with pre-pandemic trends is also essential to find capital investment projects for sustainable development and climate resilience.

The World Bank report recommends that, together with more efficient spending, improvements to tax collection must be a priority for Pacific governments to ensure individuals and businesses are contributing their fair share to the region's economies.

It also said that Pacific countries should allocate more to social assistance and protection measures.

"These investments would help reduce poverty and inequality, while also supporting communities in tough times, including in the aftermath of climate-related disasters or major economic shocks, such as the region saw from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent natural disasters in Tonga and Vanuatu," it said.

ADB Warns China It Risks Wasting Money on State-Led Growth

BEIJING (dispatches) - China needs to level the playing field between private and state owned firms, the Asian Development Bank's chief economist said, adding that the world's second-largest economy risks "wasting a ton of money" with a state-led growth model.

"If you just try to use brute force, spend your investment in a few companies that are not really facing a lot of competitive pressure, those policies, usually they often don't yield much return for your money," Albert Park told Reuters in his first trip to Beijing since COVID restrictions were lifted.

The Manila-based lender "consistently" raises with China the importance of improving the business environment and the sustainability of the country's development, he said, while noting that a one percentage increase in growth in China can increase growth in developing Asia by 0.3%.

The comments come amid growing signs that China's post-COVID economic recovery is losing steam, intensifying pressure on policymakers to shore up wobbly growth.

April industrial output, retail sales, and property investment data this week disappointed investors. Private fixed-asset investment rose only 0.4% last month, in sharp contrast to the 9.4% jump in investment by state entities, indicating weak business confidence. "I feel China does need to move towards really creating a dynamic private sector with open market competition because that's how you generate innovation," Park said.

"If you look at the history of China's economic development, a lot of the gains in growth, productivity, and employment have come from the non-state sector," he added.

Six Pacific Countries at High Risk of Debt Distress

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - Six Pacific countries are at a high risk of debt distress in part due to government spending to respond to the COVID-19 crisis, the World Bank said in a report.

The report, titled Raising Pasifika, said fiscal consolidation was needed in Kiribati, Republic of the Marshall Islands, Federated States of Micronesia, Samoa, Tonga and Tuvalu because these countries lack domestic debt markets and access to international capital markets.

Among other countries in the region, Vanuatu is rated at medium risk, while Palau and Nauru's debt is sustainable, the report noted.

"While public debt levels as a share of GDP remain modest across most of the region, the PIC9's economic geography and volatile revenue bases mean debt distress risks remain elevated," it said.

Debt has surged in the region since 2019 as the tourism-dependent economies were hit by COVID border closures, trade was hurt by logistical challenges and weather events caused damage. The World Bank last month said that Fiji must also take urgent action to reduce its debt burden.

Stephen Ndegwa, World Bank Country Director for Papua New Guinea & the Pacific Islands, said reducing debt, strengthening revenue and improving the quality of government spending are critical areas for Pacific countries to address.

The report said continued access to grants in line with pre-pandemic trends is also essential to find capital investment projects for sustainable development and climate resilience.

The World Bank report recommends that, together with more efficient spending, improvements to tax collection must be a priority for Pacific governments to ensure individuals and businesses are contributing their fair share to the region's economies.

It also said that Pacific countries should allocate more to social assistance and protection measures.

"These investments would help reduce poverty and inequality, while also supporting communities in tough times, including in the aftermath of climate-related disasters or major economic shocks, such as the region saw from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recent natural disasters in Tonga and Vanuatu," it said.

India, UK Still Far Apart On Free Trade Deal

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India and Britain are struggling to make progress in free trade talks due to differences on some key tariff lines and investment protection rules, making a deal unlikely during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's second term ending next year, Indian sources said.

The two nations are unable to agree on concessions on duties levied by India on car and liquor imports, a government official with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Besides tariffs, Britain is also pushing India to agree on strong investment-protection provisions either as part of the deal or in a parallel investment treaty, according to a second government official.

"Britain has insisted on investor protection if it were to proceed with a final deal," said the person who has direct knowledge of the talks.

A deal between India and the United Kingdom is crucial for New Delhi, which hopes to become a bigger exporter, while the UK would get wider access for its whisky, premium cars and legal services.

Both countries are aiming to double bilateral trade by 2030 via such a deal. For India, a deal with the UK would be its first with a developed country after it signed an interim trade pact with Australia last year. It comes at a crucial time for Modi, who is looking to solidify India's business-friendly image in the run up to national elections next year.

Britain, on the other hand, has prioritised a deal with India as part of its Indo-Pacific foreign policy tilt aimed at enhancing ties with the region's fast-growing economies.

The main disagreement on the investment protection provisions is Britain's insistence that its companies be allowed to seek international arbitration should a dispute arise without going to Indian courts first, said the second government official who is directly involved.

This would be a marked departure from India's present provision that calls on companies to exhaust local remedies first, and is not agreeable to the Indian government, said a third senior government official.

"We had kept November as another soft deadline. But does not look like this is going to work out till at least next year. Maybe after the general elections in India," a fourth government official told Reuters.

Both nations are set to hold general elections next year where India's Modi will seek a rare third term while British Prime Minister Rishi Sunak faces a stiff test of electoral popularity after a choppy term for the Conservative Party.

As of the end of April the countries were unable to complete discussions on any more chapters than they had in December. They have agreed on terms of 13 out of 26 chapters that constitute the pact.

The two countries have also ruled out the possibility of an interim pact, two of the sources said.

EBRD Pledges More Support For Ukraine With Capital Boost



SAMARKAND (Dispatches) - At a meeting in Russia's former Central Asian backyard, the European Bank for Reconstruction and Development pledged further support for war-torn Ukraine with plans to increase its capital by 3 billion-5 billion euros.

The emerging markets lender has already earmarked 3 billion euros for Ukraine - which is fighting off a Russian invasion - to be invested in 2022-23, and EBRD President Odile Renaud-Basso told its annual meeting assistance would continue.

"Increasing paid-in capital will give us the means to sustain such level of investment and step up our investment (in Ukraine)," she told a briefing in the Uzbek city of Samarkand.

The bank's statement said a detailed proposal on a paid-in capital increase would be prepared by the end of this year. For every billion euros of additional capital, the bank can extend a few billion in fresh loans.

"As I said to the bank's governors this morning, Ukraine is the bank's top priority," Renaud-Basso said.

The multilateral development bank's support has so far focused on maintaining and repairing essential infrastructure, financing energy companies and supporting Ukraine's foreign trade, she said.

"(We are) supporting also the private sector, food industry, SMEs... that are absolutely fundamental to keep the economy going and keeping the jobs and providing those resources."

Renaud-Basso said EBRD shareholders had also approved plans to expand operations to sub-Saharan Africa and Iraq, where the bank plans to start lending in 2025.

The EBRD has halted its work in Russia but boosted its presence in the former Soviet region of Central Asia, where it is now promoting the development of transport corridors bypassing Russian territory.



Over 200 Agreements, MoUs Signed in Iran Oil Show 2023

TEHRAN (Shana) - More than 200 agreements and memorandums of understanding (MoUs) have been signed between Iranian and international companies during Iran Oil Show 2023, Iran's oil minister said. Javad Owji made the remark at the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition, also known as Iran Oil Show 2023, adding as planned, over 160 billion dollars are needed to develop oil

industry upstream and downstream sectors. More than five-billion-dollar agreements and 40-billion-dollar MoUs have been inked with international companies to develop oil and gas fields during the 13th (incumbent) administration, he said. The Oil Ministry has put implementation of prioritized projects on the agenda, particularly the development plans of oil and gas fields as well as shared offshore and onshore fields, Owji stated.



Moldova Wants to Join EU as Soon as Possible

PARIS (Dispatches) - Moldova wants EU membership "as soon as possible" as protection against a threat from Russia and hopes for a decision to start negotiations "in the next months," President Maia Sandu told AFP in an interview.

The small nation of 2.6 million people, nestled between EU neighbour Romania and war-ravaged Ukraine, will on June 1 hold its first major summit of wider Europe.

That gathering of the European Political Community -- a forum created last year that brings together leaders of all 27 EU countries with 20 neighbours of the bloc -- will be an occasion for Moldova to burnish its candidate credentials.

For Sandu, EU membership is the only guarantee against becoming Russia's next target. Her country, a former Soviet republic, already has a breakaway region, Transnistria, where Russia has stationed a small number of troops.

"Of course, nothing compares to what is happening in Ukraine, but we see the risks and we do believe that we can save our democracy only as part of the EU," she said.

"We do believe that Russia will continue to be a big source of instability for the years to come and we need to protect ourselves," added Sandu, on the sidelines of a Council of Europe summit in Iceland that wrapped up on Tuesday.

The 50-year-old leader, in office since 2020, in February accused Russia of fomenting a coup to try to seize power in Moldova.

She has called for Moldovans -- who polls show are overwhelmingly behind joining the European Union -- to hold a pro-EU rally on Sunday.

"The Ukraine war made things black and white. So it's very clear what the free world means, and what the authoritarian world means, for all of us," she said.

Russia's war next door suddenly firmed up the prospect of EU membership for Ukraine and Moldova.

Both countries applied last year to join the bloc and in June 2022 became candidate countries, along with Georgia.

"We do believe that this is a realistic project for us and we are looking forward to see this happening as soon as possible," Sandu said.

Membership, however, could take a decade or more to attain, given the long list of requirements candidate countries must meet to be able to sit alongside the other nations in the European single market.

Unlike Ukraine, Moldova is small enough to be able to be integrated into the European Union relatively easily.

But it faces several challenges to bring its democratic standards up to EU levels, notably in terms of fighting corruption.

Its fragile economy, energy security and the issue of Transnistria, with its 30,000 pro-Russian population, all need to be addressed as well.

Transnistria, in the east of Moldova, is not recognised by the international community. The zone sprang up in 1990 after a brief civil war that erupted when the Soviet Union collapsed, and ended up from 1992 as a frozen conflict.



"We are struggling to have peaceful resolution of the conflict, and we've been calling on Russia to withdraw its illegally stationed troops," Sandu said.

"We need a geopolitical opportunity to be able to solve the conflict."

The president, who has started the process of taking her country out of the Russia-dominated Commonwealth of Independent States, added: "What kind of relations can you have with a regime which kills innocent people in the neighbouring country?"

Moldova was ready to cooperate only with "democratic countries, with countries which respect the territorial integrity of other countries, which respect the international rules based system," she said.

Russia brandished Ukraine's desire to one day join NATO as one of its justifications for invading its neighbour.

For Moldova, that is not a door on which it is about to knock.

Moldova was not rethinking its stance of being a neutral country for now, Sandu said.

"But there are discussions in our society about whether neutrality protects us and if at some point people will change their view, of course we will reconsider this decision. In the meantime, we are trying to consolidate the defence sector of Moldova and we are counting on our friends."

For "friends" Moldova is leaning heavily on the other participating countries of the European Political Community.

The June 1 summit in Chisnau, Sandu said, "is important because we see that we are not alone, that we have many friends".

Democrats Warn Biden Against Toughening Aid for the Poor

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Democrats in the U.S. Congress expressed frustration with President Joe Biden's willingness to engage with Republicans demanding tougher work requirements for food aid recipients as part of any deal to raise the nation's debt ceiling.

They have stopped short of threatening to block such moves, as talks on lifting the federal government's \$31.4 trillion borrowing limit shifted into a bilateral format between Democrat Biden, Republican House Speaker Kevin McCarthy and their staffs.

If Biden and McCarthy reach a deal, possibly as soon as Sunday, Congress could struggle to get enough votes for passage ahead of a June.

Some hardline Republicans may push back against any increase in the debt ceiling, while some progressive Democrats voiced opposition to the work limits after spending months calling for a "clean" hike without conditions.

Liberal Democrats, including Senator Raphael Warnock and Representative Ro Khanna, put Biden on notice that they do not support more stringent requirements to existing law.

Khanna, asked whether revisions would prompt him to vote to torpedo a deal, said: "It would be a strong consideration."

Republicans have called for saving \$120 billion by expanding work requirements to qualify for food aid, monetary help for poor families and other assistance. Biden on Wednesday reiterated his opposition to imposing new requirements the Medicaid program for low-income Americans.

He added that there could be a "few" changes in current law but none "of any consequence."

Those assurances did not soothe Democrats, as negotiations kicked into high-gear over spending and the urgent need to raise the borrowing limit.

Warnock accused Republicans of "using poor people as pawns" in negotiations, saying their proposal "presupposes that poor people are in some way morally deficient. People want to work. And some people can't."

Warnock is a member of the Senate Agriculture Committee which, writes the farm bill that funds the Supplemental Nutrition Assistance Program, commonly known as food stamps.

A Republican bill that passed the House in late April would place more work demands for SNAP on adults without disabilities or dependents up to age 56, instead of the current cutoff of 49.

Massachusetts's Jim McGovern, a House Democrat known for his anti-hunger work, said: "I will not support anything that screws poor people -- period."

The Republican-controlled House Ways and Means Committee describes the steps as "common-sense work requirements to help lift families out of poverty and revitalize the American workforce."

Thailand's Move Forward Party Takes on Biggest Political Taboo

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - After shocking Thailand's military-backed elite with a historic election breakthrough, the Move Forward Party now wants to take on the nation's biggest political taboo -- laws on insulting the monarchy.

However MFP leader Pita Limjaroenrat's determination to modify the lese-majeste laws protecting King Maha Vajiralongkorn has quickly emerged as a key issue that could block his path to power.

The monarchy has long had an exalted status in Thai society, and is shielded from criticism by section 112 of the penal code, which punishes infractions with jail terms of up to 15 years.

Posters of the king are ubiquitous, from shops and homes to public buildings and motorway billboards, and cinema-goers are expected to stand for the royal anthem before screenings.

But youth-led pro-democracy demonstrators in 2020 breached the taboo against public discussion of the monarchy's status, with some protesters calling for the king's power and spending to be reined in.

MFP channelled the reforming zeal of the protest movement in its campaign for Sunday's election, pledging to limit who can bring lese-majeste charges and to cut the maximum sentence.

Critics say the law is abused to silence political dissent, and prosecutions rocketed in the years after the 2014 coup that brought Prime Minister Prayut Chan-O-Cha to power.

Section 112 outlaws defaming, insulting or threatening the king or certain members of his family.

But its interpretation has expanded to include almost any criticism, whether in public or on social media, including even indirect or lighthearted references.

Since the 2020 protests erupted more than 200 people have been prosecuted, including minors, some for seemingly trivial transgressions.

Earlier this year a man was jailed for two years for selling satirical calendars featuring yellow rubber ducks that a court ruled insulted the king.

MFP proposes to cut the maximum sentence for lese-majeste and restrict who can bring charges -- at the moment it can be done by anyone, and ultra-royalists are known to trawl social media looking for potential complaints to file.

Pita insists the changes are needed to heal rifts in Thai society, and that Move Forward will not eradicate the law.

"We want to amend, not abolish, act 112, which can be done in the parliament," he said.

Iran-Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

Shafei underlined the significance of the International North-South Transit Corridor (INSTC) which he said can be seen as another area on which the two countries can further cooperate.

Also speaking in another press conference in Kazan on Thursday, Shafei said that engagements between Iran and Russia within the framework of the Eurasian

Economic Union (EAEU) are turning to free trade.

He added that the membership of both countries in Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) which holds a large part of the world trade is another issue that can lead to the enhancement of bilateral relations of both countries.

The governments have to prepare the ground while the main role has to be played by the private sectors, Shafei said, adding that the private sector actors want nothing more from the governments.

Washington Issues...

FROM PAGE 1

The project, which is aimed at integrating the transport and information routes of Russia, Azerbaijan, Iran, and India, is carried out within the framework of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).

Meanwhile, the spokesman for the Iranian Foreign Ministry has slammed "unjustified and invalid" concerns voiced by the administration of US President Joe Biden 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.

U.S. Has Yet to...

FROM PAGE 1

General Salami stated that "although the Americans martyred Haj Qassem Soleimani, they received the first blow and now are receiving the second blow, which is nothing but their gradual withdrawal from the region."

"The final blow has yet to come to them [Americans]," the IRGC chief added, while also noting that the European regimes are facing different challenges today.

9/11 a License to Kill

FROM PAGE 1

Though the U.S. withdrew its military forces from Afghanistan in 2021, officially ending the war, Afghans are "suffering and dying from war-related causes at higher rates than ever."

The U.S. invaded Afghanistan in October 2001 following the September 11, 2001 attacks on the United States, despite the fact that no Afghan national was involved in the attacks. Hundreds of thousands of Afghans died in the US war of aggression on the country. Nevertheless, the Taliban returned to power in 2021, 20 years after their removal by US forces.

The report also called on Washington to make reparations for the damage inflicted by post-9/11 conflicts, saying, "Reparations, though not easy or cheap, are imperative."

"In laying out how the post-9/11 wars have led to illness and indirect deaths, the report's goal is to build greater awareness of the fuller human costs of these wars and support calls for the United States and other governments to alleviate the ongoing losses and suffering of millions in current and former war zones," it said.

Stephanie Savell, the report's author and co-director of the Costs of War project also noted that "there are reverberating costs, the human cost of war, that people for the most part in the United States don't really know enough about or think about."

The author further stated that the researchers applied the Geneva Declaration Secretariat's average ratio of four indirect deaths for every one direct death, adding that while that ratio may be lower in Iraq, it would be higher in Yemen or Afghanistan and thus the ratio was deemed accurate to arrive at the "reasonable and conservative" estimate of 4.5-4.6 million.

This report once again reiterated that the attack was dubious and it was a reason for military actions and killing of many people in the world under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

Of course, Western countries, especially the U.S., have always sought some reasons, either true or baseless ones, to take military action in different countries and the 9/11 was the best excuse for the all-out presence of the Western states in different parts of the world especially in Afghanistan and in the Middle East states.

We have not yet forgotten the Persian Gulf War and the U.S. attack on Iraq under the baseless claim of Iraq's having weapons of mass destruction that the world after months of destructive war learned that the West's claim was baseless and this continued when four coordinated suicide terrorist attacks were carried out by the militant Islamist extremist network al-Qaeda against the United States. That morning, 19 terrorists hijacked four commercial airliners scheduled to travel from the New England and Mid-Atlantic regions of the East Coast to California. The hijackers crashed the first two planes into the Twin Towers of the World Trade Center in New York City, which were two of the top five-tallest buildings in the world at the time.

When the attack was carried out, many analysts cast their doubt on the attack and claimed that there is something fishy about it and as the time passes on, we realize those analysts were right and the attack is used as an excuse for the presence of the U.S. and its allies in the Middle East or in any other part of the world where they feel their presence is needed.

The recent report shows that 9/11 is a reason and excuse for the West to continue their presence and crimes in any part of the world under the pretext of fighting terrorism.

Tehran to Keep Contacts...

FROM PAGE 1

Amirabdollahian told the French magazine that it was through negotiation that the release of the two Frenchmen on May 11 had been obtained, saying "We talked about all the misunderstandings between us. There have been agreements between us and part of our agreements has resulted in the release of the two French nationals a few days ago."

The Iranian diplomat said Iran and France "pursue their contacts" to regulate their misconceptions.

In response to another question about his recent remarks in which he had welcomed Mr. Emmanuel Macron's realistic approach, he said, "Mr. Macron started the work well with the current administration in Iran. In order to reach a positive result in the negotiations, he had constructive and good contacts with Mr. Raisi. Mr. Macron even asked his Iranian counterpart to intervene to establish a ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine. But during the riots [in Iran in autumn], a massive psychological and media warfare was launched against the people of Iran. At the time, Mr. Macron presented the wrong view of Iran, but he quickly realized that that was going to happen in Iran."

"Therefore, we are currently continuing our contacts to resolve misunderstandings between the two countries," the foreign minister further said.



Switchboard:
(+98) (21) 44253448
Public Relations Tel:
(+98)(21) 44253450
Editorial Board: 44253449
Public Relations Fax:
(+98)(21) 44253395
Advertising Department:
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234
Website:
http://www.irannewsdaily.com

E-Mail Address:
info@irannewsdaily.com
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Higa Grabs Early Lead At PGA Championship

ROCHESTER (Dispatches) - Kazuki Higa, last year's Japan Tour leading money winner, reeled off four consecutive birdies to seize an early three-stroke lead in the opening round of the PGA Championship.

The 28-year-old from Okinawa, a six-time winner on his home-nation circuit, had a horseshoe birdie lip-out at the 10th hole to begin his round then roared to the top of the leaderboard at Oak Hill.

Denz Wins From Giro Breakaway

RIVOLI (Dispatches) - Germany's Nico Denz of the Bora Hansgrohe team won a hilly stage 12 of the Giro d'Italia as Geraint Thomas safely defended the overall leader's pink jersey.

Denz and a clutch of cohorts covered the route from Bra to Rivoli a good eight minutes faster than the main peloton which was led over the finish line by Ineos rider Pavel Sivakov, showing his fall Wednesday had no profound effect.

Murray Propels Nuggets Past Lakers 108-103

DENVER (Dispatches) - After Nikola Jokic's monster game in the opener, his pick-and-roll partner Jamal Murray took the spotlight in the Western Conference finals. Murray scored 23 of his 37 points in the fourth quarter, propelling the Denver Nuggets to a 108-103 come-from-behind win over the Los Angeles Lakers for a 2-0 lead in the series.

"He was special," Jokic said. "He won us the game basically."

Murray missed 12 of his 17 shots through three quarters but found his touch in the fourth, going 6 for 7, including four 3-pointers, and fueling a 15-1 run that gave Denver a 96-84 lead.

"He made shots at the end of the clock," LeBron James lamented. "We guard for 24 seconds and he made two big-time shots, one over (Anthony Davis) and one over me. He had his 3-point shot going in the fourth. It's no surprise to me, he's done it before. Sometimes it's a never-miss league."

In all, Denver sank seven 3s in the fourth quarter after hitting seven all night.

"It would have been a lot easier if I had made them in the first half," said Murray, who is still playing through an earache he hasn't been able to shake since Round 2.

Jokic added 23 points, 17 rebounds and a dozen assists a day after ESPN sideline reporter Lisa Salters handed the Nuggets the no-respect card by acknowledging that she'd never seen the two-time MVP play before Game 1, when he had 34 points, 21 boards and 14 assists.

"For those that don't know him, he's got 13 playoff triple-doubles now," Malone sneered after Game 2. "It's just incredible what he continues to do on a nightly basis on the biggest stage in the world."

As for Jokic, he brushed off the slights on him and his teammates, saying, "It's nothing new for us."

Malone was plenty miffed by the Lakers getting all the pub.

"You win Game 1 and all everybody talked about was the Lakers," Malone said. "Let's be honest, the national narrative was, 'Hey, the Lakers are fine. They're down 1-0, but they figured something out.' No one talked about



how Nikola just had an historic performance. He's got 13 (playoff) triple-doubles now, third all-time. What he's doing is just incredible.

"But their narrative wasn't about the Nuggets. The narrative wasn't about Nikola. The narrative was about the Lakers and their adjustments. So you know, you put that in your pipe and you smoke it, you come back and you know what, we're gonna go up 2-0."

The Nuggets have never been this close to reaching the NBA Finals in their history. Game 3 is Saturday night at Crypto.com Arena, where James and the Lakers are 8-0 in the playoffs.

Malone said he reminded Murray heading into the fourth quarter not to fret over his shooting woes but to focus on contributing in other ways. He heeded that advice, grabbing three big boards on defense and stealing the ball twice besides hitting 4-of-5 from deep and 7-of-8 from the stripe.

"Three-point line is what killed us in the fourth," James said.

Malone knew that when Murray finally found the net, many more buckets would follow. "We all know ... he just has to see one go in," Malone said, and when that happened, "he kind of looked up to the heavens and that's all he needs. And after that he's shooting into a hula hoop."

Just like in Game 1, the Lakers didn't go down easily. They pulled to three points on Austin Reaves' jumper before Murray sank two free throws with 12 seconds left and Bruce Brown stole the ball from James, then dribbled out the final 8 seconds.

The Nuggets improved to 41-8 at home, best in the NBA, including 8-0 in the playoffs.

Klopp Given Two-Match Touchline Ban for Referee Rant



LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp has been given a two-match touchline ban after questioning the integrity of referee Paul Tierney following the Reds' win over Tottenham Hotspur in April.

Klopp landed himself in trouble with the authorities after blasting Tierney following the explosive end to Liverpool's 4-3 win at Anfield. The German celebrated Diogo Jota's stoppage-time winner, which came after Liverpool had blown a three-goal lead, by charging down the touchline to celebrate wildly in front of fourth official John Brooks.

Klopp was booked but later claimed what Tierney said to him was "not OK", claiming he did not know what the official "has against us".

The Football Association -- which also fined Klopp £75,000 (\$93,000, 86,000 euros) -- said Thursday the first game of the ban would be served immediately, with Liverpool facing Aston Villa on Saturday, while the second would be suspended pending the manager's future conduct.

An FA statement added Klopp had admitted his comments regarding Tierney in post-match media interviews "constitute improper conduct as they imply bias, question the integrity of the referee, are personal, offensive, and bring the game into disrepute".

Moyes Reveals Family Concern After Violence At AZ Alkmaar

LONDON (Dispatches) - West Ham manager David Moyes admitted he was concerned for the safety of his family after AZ Alkmaar hooligans attacked Hammers fans following Thursday's Europa Conference League semi-final in the Netherlands.

Pablo Fornals' stoppage-time goal sealed a 1-0 victory that booked West Ham's first European final appearance for 47 years.

But the semi-final second leg was marred by ugly scenes when a gang of black-shirted, hooded AZ fans attempted to storm into the area reserved for friends and family of the West Ham players and management.

West Ham stars including Michail Antonio, Said Benrahma, Aaron Cresswell and Flynn Downes climbed over the advertising hoardings in a bid to stop the trouble.

Moyes, whose 87-year-old father was at the match, said: "I can't explain what happened and why it happened."

"I can only say the players were involved because it was the family section and most of their family and friends were in there. That was probably the reason for the reaction."

"Was I worried? Yeah, my family were there and I had friends in that section. You're hoping they would try and get themselves away from it."

"I didn't recognise it because I'd gone onto the pitch. Security wanted to take me inside, but I had to make sure my players weren't involved."

"What we don't want to do is in any way blight the night because it certainly wasn't West Ham supporters looking for trouble. Hopefully they'll look into it."

During last week's first leg at the London Stadium, won 2-1 by West Ham, members of AZ players' families were involved in a confrontation with fans of the east London club.

"When families or friends are coming to the stadium we don't want to see things like that," Hammers goalkeeper Alphonse Areola said.

"They want to enjoy the event and we want to enjoy it with them as well. We were worried about them."

Moura to Leave Tottenham at the End of the Season



LONDON (dispatches) - Tottenham Hotspur striker Lucas Moura will leave when his contract ends at the conclusion this season, the Premier League club said.

The Brazil international joined the English club in January 2018 from French side Paris St Germain. During his time with the London club, he has made 219 appearances, scoring 38 goals.

"I will always love you," Moura said, followed by a video message posted on Twitter.

"We would like to thank Lucas for his tremendous services to our Club and wish him all the best for the future," the club said in a statement.

The 30-year-old's most memorable contribution was a second-half hat-trick he scored in an incredible 3-2 win over Ajax that secured Tottenham a place in the 2019 Champions League final, which they lost to Liverpool.

Seventh-placed Tottenham are level on 57 points with Aston Villa with two rounds left to play.

Nadal Pulls Out of Tournament Due To Injury

MADRID (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal withdrew from the French Open because his hip injury has not healed and said he expects 2024 to be his final year in professional tennis.

"It's not a decision I'm taking, it's a decision my body is taking," said the 36-year-old Spanish player, who has played at the claycourt major every year since 2005 and won it 14 times.

Nadal said he was taking a few months off, meaning he will also definitely miss Wimbledon and most likely the US Open, before starting to play again.

And he said next year would bring down the curtain on a career that has so far produced 22 Grand Slam singles titles.

"It's probably going to be my last year on the professional tour, I can't say this 100 percent because you never know what's going to happen," he told a news conference.

"The injury I suffered in Australia has not healed as we hoped."

"Roland Garros became impossible. I will not be there after many years, with everything that (tournament) means to me."

Nadal said he will not set a date for his return, but said the Davis Cup in November could be a potential target.

The former world number one has not played since the Australian Open in January where he picked up a hip injury in a shock second round loss to Mackenzie McDonald of the United States.

He was expected to recover inside six weeks, comfortably in time for the claycourt season and to launch an assault on a record-extending 15th title at Roland Garros.

However, with his 37th birthday little over two weeks away and having skipped Masters events in Indian Wells, Miami, Monte Carlo, Madrid and Rome, Nadal appears to be facing a final battle he cannot win.



Medvedev Crushes Qualifier Hanfmann To Reach Semis

ROME (Dispatches) - Daniil Medvedev continued his Italian Open clay breakthrough as the third seed reached the semi-finals with a 6-2, 6-2 win over Yannick Hanfmann.

The 2021 US Open champion freely admits he's never been comfortable on the dirt but has shattered that stereotype with his steady progress at the Foro Italico, reaching his seventh semi-final of the season.

He dominated number 101 German qualifier Hanfmann after settling in following breaks of serve in the opening three games in their quarter-final.

After going down a break in the second set, the 31-year-old Hanfmann complained to his coaching box that he had no legs left as he played on prior to losing serve for the fifth time in the match.

But he struck back briefly with a break of the seed to hold on for 2-4 before dropping serve again as Medvedev moved into winning position, closing it out on a second match point.

"I've been having good feelings in practice and I'm proving it here," Medvedev said.

"I'm happy with the win and happy to be in the semi-finals. Prior to this edition, Medvedev had never won a match in Rome and had little confidence in his game on the clay."

He is now into the final four after four victories and the loss of just one set.

"Against Hanfmann I wanted to put as many balls into the court as possible. He plays very aggressive."

"I played deep to try and make him miss -- and maybe he was not playing his best match. He was struggling more than me. I'm glad I was able to neutralise his game."



Medvedev also increased his lead in Tour match wins as he claimed his 37th of the season.