

**Iranian State-Owned Animal Feed Importer SLAL Is Believed to Have Purchased About 260,000 Tons of soymeal, Mainly From Argentina And Brazil, in an Int'l Tender Which Closed on Monday**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Food and Agriculture Organization Awarded the Globally Important Agricultural Heritage Systems Certificate to Two Iranian Sites of the Qanat-Based Saffron Farming System In Gonabad and Grape Production System in Jowzan Valley**

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## Threats Against Iran's Nuclear Industry Meaningless

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Threats against Iran's nuclear program have been rendered totally meaningless due to the indigenization of the country's nuclear industry, says the spokesman of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI).

Speaking at a gathering of the heads of Iranian diplomatic missions held at the Foreign Ministry in Tehran, Behrouz Kamalvandi said even the enemies acknowledge that the Islamic Republic's nuclear capabilities have reached a level that cannot be eliminated.

"Given that Iran's nuclear capabilities have been indigenized and have grown deep roots, any threat against the country's nuclear industry is completely meaningless," he said.

Kamalvandi further emphasized that the nuclear industry is a driving force in different industries and is not limited to a specific field.

He said Iran can provide one million patients with radiopharmaceuticals. The spokesman pointed to US sanctions against Iran, saying the US had claimed that medicines were not subject to sanctions, "but the truth was something else."

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## Iran-EU Trade Hits Nearly €1.2b in Q1

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The value of trade between Iran and the member states of the European Union (EU) has reached €1.18 bn in the first three months of 2023, according to data released by the European Union's statistics office Eurostat.

According to the Eurostat, exports by the Netherlands, Italy and France to Iran increased respectively by 63%, 24%, and 17% over the March quarter.

The figures showed that trade between Iran and 27 EU member states decreased by 11% in the first quarter of 2023, compared with the same period last year.

EU's exports to Iran from January to March 2023 reached €60 million, a fall of 9% compared with the same period of the previous year, according to the Eurostat figures.

The data showed that EU's imports from Iran reached €220 million in March quarter, down 20% from the same period last year.

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## Majlis Strategic Act to Counter Bewilderment in Nuclear Issue



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says the strategic law adopted by the Iranian Parliament in 2020 to counter sanctions saved the country from "bewilderment in nuclear issue".

In a meeting with lawmakers in Tehran on Wednesday, Ayatollah Khamenei hailed the strategic laws passed by the parliament, including the Strategic Action Plan to Counter Sanctions.

"The strategic action law saved the country from bewilderment in the nuclear issue," the Leader said. "This law clearly defined what we should do and we are witnessing its manifestations in the world."

Under the legislation, which was approved in December 2020, the Iranian administration is required to restrict the inspections by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) and accelerate the development of the country's nuclear program beyond the limits set under the 2015 nuclear agreement. It was adopted in a bid to counter illegal sanctions imposed on Iran by the United States and its Western allies.

Ayatollah Khamenei also congratulated the Iranian nation on the anniversary of the liberation of the city of Khorramshahr in the course of Iraq's war of aggression against Iran in the 1980s, describing the event as a "miraculous epic."

The southwestern port city was recaptured during a landmark operation code-named Beit ol-Moqaddas in 1982, putting an end to over 500 days of occupation by forces of the ex-Iraqi dictator's regime.

The Leader said that the initiatives used in the outstanding operation and the sacrifices made by Iranian martyrs were more important than the great victory, adding that these facts should not fade into oblivion.

He added, "The conquest of Khorramshahr was a miraculous event."

Referring to May 24, 1982, the anniversary of the liberation of Khorramshahr, the Leader of the revolution said: "The great saga of the conquest of Khorramshahr was truly and honestly a great feat."

He added: "After the conquest of Khorramshahr, some world's presidents and mediators paid a visit to Iran; Mr. Ahmed Sékou Touré, who was an important figure in Africa, came and told me that today your situation is different from yesterday because of the conquest of Khorramshahr."

The leader continued: "The greatness of the conquest of Khorramshahr attracts the eyes, but I want to say that the Bait-ul-Muqaddas operation is more or at least as important as the conquest of Khorramshahr, this operation that led to the conquest of Khorramshahr, these operations, those sacrifices, those initiatives, those plans and war plans that, in my opinion, should be taught in the war universities."

In this meeting, the Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Khamenei said: "From the beginning of the term of 11th Majlis, I believed that this parliament is revolutionary, and now after three years, I repeat the same".

## ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

## Iranians Right Not to Trust Britain

Iranians historically have been right not to trust aliens especially the Colonialist British Empire which has been behind most seditions in the world and especially in the Middle East and in Iran either pre- or post-Islamic Revolution era.

Iran because of its favorable geopolitical position has been always the target of world hegemony and colonialist governments and Britain has been one of them which has tried to strengthen its foothold in Iran but because of awareness of Iranian people and their hatred towards Britain, as we see every time some political incident and unrests happens in the country, Iranians immediate blame Britain as the mastermind of the sedition.

Some believe that Iranians have started hating Britain since 1813 when a settlement was reached with the help of a British man, Sir Gore Ouseley, following the Russo-Persian war. However, many Persians felt that the agreement was unfair, and the characterization of the UK as an "old fox" was born.

But some more people believe that it has happened since discovery of oil in Iran in 1908 under terms favorable to the wealthy British man William Knox D'Arcy, who had bought the rights in 1901.

During the World War II, the British forces invaded Iran and took control of the country's railway system and communication systems, only leaving at the end of the War.

Democratically elected Prime Minister of Iran Mohammad Mossadegh was overthrown after wanting to nationalize the Anglo-Iranian Oil Company. Autocratic Shah Mohammed Reza Pahlavi, who had been overthrown in the Iranian revolution, was instead brought back to power, before being removed in the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

After the Islamic Revolution in Iran, there have been ample of reasons for Iranians to hate the British governments more because of their anti-Islamic and anti-revolutionary acts.

Now on Tuesday a report showed the world that Iranians are right not to trust the British governments and blame them for any plot in the country.

The released report says Britain's Special Forces have carried out secret operations in 19 countries over the past 12 years.

The Guardian reported on Tuesday that 11 out of the 19 countries where UK Special Forces operated secretly were Muslim nations.

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## Iran Warns of Severe Impacts of Unilateral Sanctions on Civilians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Iranian diplomat has warned of the severe consequences of sanctions on civilians, especially women and children, urging an end to unilateral sanctions on countries.

Speaking before a Tuesday UN Security Council meeting on the protection of civilians and ensuring their security and dignity in conflict, Iran's Ambassador and Deputy Permanent Representative to the United Nations Zahra Ershadi argued that lifting unilateral sanctions would enable the international community to give swift, timely and effective humanitarian responses.

Lifting the sanctions would ensure that critical assistance reaches those in need without unnecessary delays or limitations, she said, warning that illegal sanctions also hamper healthcare systems and humanitarian organizations, restricting access to medical supplies and impeding aid delivery.

Emphasizing that the warring parties to a conflict should refrain from attacking civilian objects such as food supplies, water sources, and hospitals, she said, "Under international humanitarian law, all parties to a conflict are required to ensure that civilians have access to essential goods and services, including food and medical care."

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## 8 Iranian Banks Operating Abroad

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN Governor of the Central Bank of Iran said more than 8 Iranian banks operate abroad and 49 branches of Iranian banks are operating in different nations including England, Germany, Russia, Iraq, United Arab Emirates, and France.

Mohammad Reza Farzin made the remarks at the 51st edition of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) summit in Tehran where he considered the role of the Union in the global economy as important and strategic.

Referring to the financial and commercial characteristics of Iran's economy, Farzin said, "Although Iran's economy has been facing sanctions from Western countries for decades, these sanctions have intensified in the last decade and have targeted the monetary and financial sectors of the country."

"However, Iran's economy has been able to continue to have a wide and dynamic financial sector by relying on domestic capabilities and cooperation with regional countries," he added.

Referring to the capacities and capabilities of Iran's economy, Farzin said, "In the field of foreign trade, according to preliminary estimates, the total value of goods (customs) trade of Iran's economy with the outside world in 2022 will amount to 160 billion euros, which shows an increase of 18.1 billion compared to 2021. Also, the total value of services trade in 2022 is estimated at 25 billion euros, which indicates a 44.0% growth compared to 2021.

He also said that 150 countries in the world are export destinations for Iran's economy and from 121 countries the country's customs have imported goods. The high volume of trade in goods and services and the diversity of business parties have created a suitable field for the development of regional and international cooperation.

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# IRGC Dismantles Terrorist Group

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - A terrorist group has been dismantled by the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) and the intelligence forces in southeastern Iran, in a statement announced that

According to the IRGC statement, the terrorists were arrested in the south of Sistan and Baluchestan province before doing any terrorist operation.

During the operation, two terrorists were killed and another one was arrested. A hoard of weapons and ammunition was also discovered with them and confiscated.

## Iran-Indonesia Ties to Benefit Muslim World

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

**TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi says the era of unilateralism has come to an end, underlining that the expansion of relations between Iran and Indonesia will benefit the Islamic world and all Muslims.**

Raisi made the remarks in a meeting with Bambang Soesatyo, the speaker of the People's Consultative Assembly (MPR) of Indonesia, in the capital Jakarta on Tuesday.

Raisi described Indonesia as an important country with a privileged position in Southeast Asia and said, "The expansion of relations between the two countries is in the interest of the Islamic world and Muslims."

Stressing that the world order has taken a new shape and the era of unilateralism is over, the Iranian president said, "With these changes, new powers will be formed in the world, which is in the interest of developing countries."

"We believe the oppressed people of Palestine, Yemen and Myanmar are very close to having their rights fulfilled," he said.

Pointing to the extensive measures taken by the West to threaten and impose sanctions on Iran, the president said, "The great nation of Iran, by relying on Islam and believing in independence, not only declined to surrender to such pressures, but also created an opportunity out of such threats."

Raisi added that the progress achieved in various fields and areas is proof of the Iranian nation's success.

"The Islamic Republic's progress in the fields of science and technology has placed Iran among the countries with advanced technologies, such as in the space and nuclear field," he noted.

Soesatyo, for his part, described Iran-Indonesia relations as "historical" and said, "The development and deepening of ties between Tehran and Jakarta will benefit the Islamic world."

He also expressed concern about rising violence against Palestinian people and underscored their right to determine their fate.



The Iranian president also met with Puan Maharani, the speaker of the People's Representative Council of Indonesia, and discussed ways for the enhancement of ties between the two Muslim countries.

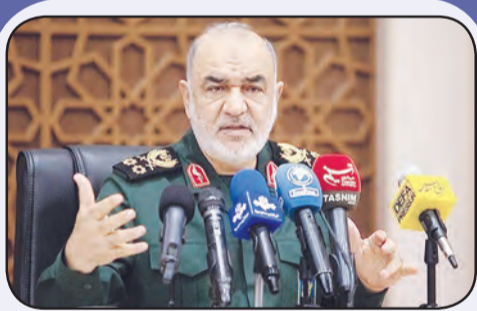
"Despite threats and brutal sanctions, the Islamic Republic of Iran has made great progress and has achieved capabilities that have created good capacities for the development of relations between the two countries," Raisi said.

Appreciating Indonesia's stance in supporting the oppressed peoples of Palestine and Afghanistan, the Iranian president said, "The development of relations is in line with the interests of the two countries, the people of the region and Muslims."

Raisi pointed to the talks and documents signed with Indonesian authorities in the fields of energy, medicine and science and technology, saying, "There are no obstacles in the way of the development of relations between the two countries."

Maharani, for her part, voiced the Indonesian Representative Council's support for the agreements made during Raisi's visit and said, "I am confident that the relations between the two countries will develop not only in the political field, but also in the fields of economy and medicine, especially in pharmaceutical products."

## Lebanese Warriors Impatient to Act against Zionists



TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps Major General Hossein Salami highlighted the resistance front's bravery on the battlefield, saying young Lebanese fighters are fully prepared to combat the Zionist regime.

"The depression of Zionists, the failure of Americans, and the frustration of their allies have become obvious today," Major General Salami said in an event held in Tehran on Wednesday to commemorate the anniversary of liberation of the port city of Khorramshahr from forces of ex-Iraqi dictator's regime in the course of 8-year Iraqi-imposed war on Iran in the 1980s.

Paying tribute to the Iranian commanders that made history in the war, the general said the incarnation of such devotion in the contemporary era are the young people who wish to fight against the army of heresy.

As the spirit of martyrdom and jihad still prevails, the devoted forces are still fighting in Yemen and Lebanon by getting inspiration from the Islamic Republic, he added.

"The Lebanese youth are looking forward to ambushing the Zionist aggressors," General Salami stated.

In comments in August 2022, the IRGC chief warned the Israeli regime that more than 100,000 missiles are prepared in Lebanon to create an inferno for the Zionists.

"In Lebanon, tens of thousands, even more than one hundred thousand missiles, are ready to be fired to create a hell for the Zionists at the moment of making the divine predestination happen," he warned.

He also cautioned the Zionist enemy that any mistake will force it to face "Bayt al-Muqaddas operation", saying the Lebanese Hezbollah is able to bring the Israeli regime to its knees with an operation similar to Fath-ol-Mobin, Bayt al-Muqaddas or Operation Kheibar.

## Iran Does Not Think Much of West Claims on Human Rights

TEHRAN - Interior minister said Tuesday that the Islamic Republic of Iran does not think much of the Western states claims on human rights violations in the country, calling them biggest violators of the right in the world.

Interior minister Ahmad Vahidi gave his opinion about Islamic hijab, peaceful protests or authorized gatherings bill and Iran's share of the water in the shared Hirmand River with Afghanistan.

"Western claims are not worth much to us," the minister said adding "Westerners themselves are the biggest violators of human rights and violate the basic rights of humans; Especially the French government, which must be the first to be held to account for the brutal actions it takes against the trade union demonstrations in the country."

"Based on its moral, human and legal principles, the Islamic Republic of Iran considers trade union requests and lawful and purposeful marches to be correct and acceptable, and accordingly, we are planning to allow and legalize requests for gatherings and demonstrations (peaceful protests)."

"Protests with a specific purpose that take place in compliance with social discipline are accepted by the Ministry of Interior, and this issue is emphasized in the gatherings Bill that is being discussed, and any gathering based on the framework and formula discussed in this

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK



bill is acceptable and will be allowed to be held without any problems," he said.

He added that the ministry just opposes actions that do not meet legal and judicial norms and standards.

"No riots will be acceptable under the gathering (peaceful protests) bill," he noted.

According to Vahidi, observing and respecting hijab and chastity laws is a matter of social value as well as a legal and social necessity as well as an important principle in protecting the family and the Iranian woman's rights.

He further said there are some people inside the country who are influenced by Western countries' propaganda and try to create inappropriate conditions in Iranian society, but they have failed to advance their plots so far, nor will they in the future.

Elsewhere in the interview, Vahidi rejected the claims made by the Afghanistan rulers for refusing to give Iran's share of the water in Hirmand such as drought and shortages of water in the neighboring country and said, "There are reports that contradict those claims, and for this reason, it has been offered to Afghanistan that Iranian experts and officials visit the dams on their soil, and if the water shortages are confirmed, the issue will be resolved; But if there is water, which is the case according to our experts, Afghanistan must fulfill its duty towards Iran and give our share of water."

## Riyadh Voices Readiness to Sign Health MoU With Iran

TEHRAN (MNA) - Saudi Health Minister announced readiness to sign a memorandum of understanding with Iran in the field of health cooperation and to form a working group to implement the MoUs.

Iranian Health Minister Bahram Einollahi held a meeting with the Saudi Minister of Health Fahad bin Abdulrahman Al-Jalajel on the sidelines of the 76th World Health Assembly in Geneva, Switzerland.

In the meeting, the two sides emphasized the promotion of regional health diplomacy with the participation of the two countries.

They also discussed stepped-up observation of health issues in large religious gatherings, especially Hajj.

The Saudi Health Minister announced his readiness to sign a memorandum of understanding with the Islamic Republic in the field of health cooperation and to form a working group to follow up on the implementation of the MoU.

The two sides also agreed that the relevant authorities in the Iranian and Saudi Health Ministries will soon hold a joint meeting to implement the discussed topics in the meeting.

Cooperation in the field of contagious and non-contagious diseases, exchange of health researchers, joint scientific conferences, and the development of health tourism were among the other topics discussed in the meeting.

## First Batch of Hajj Pilgrims Leaves Iran for Saudi Arabia

TEHRAN (MNA) - The first groups of Hajj pilgrims left Iran for Saudi Arabia on Wednesday morning.

In a ceremony attended by a host of officials, the first group of pilgrims was dispatched to Saudi Arabia this morning.

A total of 87,550 Iranian pilgrims are set to take part in this year's Hajj, departing from 21 airports across the country.

Saudi Arabia is expected to receive over 2 million pilgrims during the Hajj season this year.

Hajj is one of the five pillars of Islam and is a pilgrimage that every adult Muslim must make at least once in their lifetime if they have the means.

In 2022, nearly 900,000 pilgrims, including some 780,000 from abroad, were welcomed to Islam's holiest cities of Mecca and Medina.

Hajj is a sacred pilgrimage that is required of every Muslim at least once in their lifetime - it is one of the fifth pillars of Islam. Each year, millions of Muslims from across the world travel to and perform Hajj in Makkah, modern-day Saudi Arabia.

## Iran Army Ground Forces Equipped With Precision-Guided Weapons

SHIRAZ (IRNA) - The Iranian army's ground force has achieved a very high level of capability to carry out missions using precision-guided weapons, a senior commander has announced.

Deputy Commander of the Iranian Army's Ground Force Brigadier General Nozar Nemati made the remarks at a ceremony held in the southern city of Shiraz to equip the 55th Airborne Brigade with modern weapons.

Referring to new military equipment and precision-guided weapons delivered to the Army's ground force, Nemati said that the force is undergoing a transition to a modern military force.

Today, Iran's Army ground forces have become more agile and more offensive, he said.

The commander said that the Iranian Army's ground force currently uses the most modern equipment including mechanized and armored brigades, drones, electronic warfare units, rapid response and mobile attack brigades.

## Iran Expects Afghanistan's Adherence to Water Right Treaty

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran adheres to the Hirmand Water Right Treaty and the Afghan brothers also announced their adherence to the treaty, so there is no problem," President Raisi's legal advisor noted.

On the sidelines of the cabinet meeting, Vice-President for Legal Affairs Mohammad Dehghan in an interview with Iran Press stressed: "Negotiations have been held with the Afghan officials. Iran and Afghanistan have a comprehensive agreement to solve the problem of water rights in Hirmand. Iran asks the Afghan brothers to fulfill their promise."

Dehghan noted that Iran-Afghanistan negotiation is expected to solve the problem according to the treaty, if not, it will be solved through arbitration."

## Major Drug Trafficking Network Dismantled

ZAHEDAN (IRNA) - The commander of the border guards of the Islamic Republic of Iran has announced that the Iranian naval forces have annihilated a large drug trafficking network in the country's southeastern waters and arrested its members.

The traffickers who were faced with Iranian forces' huge fire surrendered themselves, Iran's police website quoted Brigadier General Ahmad-Ali Goudarzi as saying.

Goudarzi said that the gang was to import different types of narcotics to the country via a launch.

In two separate operations, the naval forces in southeastern Iranian region of Chabahar could seize over one metric ton of illicit drugs and arrested four traffickers, the commander said.

## Minister Affirms Huge Turnout At 34th Tehran Book Fair

TEHRAN (IP) - On the sidelines of the cabinet meeting, the Minister of Culture and Islamic Guidance stressed the huge turnout of people at the 34th book fair exhibition.

"On the day of Imam Sadiq's martyrdom, more than 1,500,000 people attended the exhibition," Mohammad Mehdi Esmaili noted.

"Peoples' daily attendance surpassed 1000,000, and on the aggregate, more than 7000,000 people attended Tehran Book Fair Exhibition," Esmaili stated.



## PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:30
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:10
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:52

41. How then if We brought from each people a witness, and We brought thee as a witness against these people!  
42. On that day those who reject Faith and disobey the apostle will wish that the earth Were made one with them:  
But never will they hide a single fact from Allah.

Surah 4. Women (41 - 42)

# De-Dollarization Serious Threat to U.S. Int'l Influence

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN** De-dollarization is not a voluntary choice, but it is a necessary response to the weaponization of the dollar, Iran's First Vice President said Wed., adding that ditching the dollar will endanger U.S. influence in the world.

Addressing the 51st edition of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) summit in Tehran on Wednesday, Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber praised the intention of the ACU member states to create a new chapter of economic relations and financial and commercial interactions.

A country with a size of 1.64 million square kilometers and a population of about 85 million who are mostly young and educated people, Iran has a high capacity to attract domestic and foreign investments and take advantage of the demographic opportunities in increasing production and economic growth, Mokhber said.

Iran enjoys having strategic geography as it shares water and land borders with 15 countries and is located at the hub of the international transportation and transit corridors, Mokhber also said, noting there are appropriate infrastructures in telecommunication and air, road, and rail transportation sectors in the country.



These components can play an effective role in facilitating trade between Asian and European countries as well as the Asian Clearing Union.

Elsewhere in his remarks, VP Mokhber examined the role of the dollar in the world economy and said, "De-dollarization is not a voluntary choice by countries anymore, it is the countries' inevitable response to the "weaponization project of the dollar."

In the past decades, the "Weaponization of the dollar" has forced countries to find a way to get rid of the impact of possible sanctions in the future, Mokhber further asserted.

Referring to the increasing number of countries that are looking to reduce their dependency on the US dollar, the vice president said that the weakening of the dollar can be a serious threat to the United States' influence at the international level.

Iran's First Vice President went on to conclude that the Islamic Republic of Iran is ready to develop its banking and trade relations with other countries, especially ACU member states.

## ISIPO Inks Cooperation MOU With Germany's BWA

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran Small Industries and Industrial Parks Organization (ISIPO) has signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with Germany's Federal Association for Economic Development and Foreign Trade (BWA) for cooperation in various fields.

The MOU has been signed by ISIPO Head Ali Rasoulzadeh and the Chairman of the Board of BWA Michael Schumann, IRNA reported.

The MOU covers a variety of areas including technology exchange between Iranian and German companies, holding technology-based conferences, holding B2B meetings between Iranian and German companies, supplying machines needed by Iranian companies, holding industrial and commercial events with the participation of BWA in the countries of the region, holding educational workshops for Iranian companies including technical and professional courses for managers.

## Iran Stresses Boosting Trade Ties With ASEAN States

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's Deputy Foreign Minister for Economic Diplomacy Mahdi Safari says that developing trade relations with ASEAN member countries is highly important in the economic diplomacy of the current Iranian government.

Considering the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to Indonesia (which is a state in the ASEAN region) important, Safari stressed, "As the most populous Muslim country, Indonesia has a special place in the foreign policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Safari, who had traveled to Jakarta earlier in order to organize the President's visit, met with different Indonesian officials in recent days.

Referring to the 11 cooperation documents signed between Iran and Indonesia during this visit, the senior Iranian diplomat called for the implementation of the documents completely and accurately.

Describing the bilateral economic opportunities between Tehran and Jakarta as favorable, Safari cited "We are trying to increase the volume of commercial exchanges between Iran and Indonesia to an acceptable level."

## Iraq's Electricity Minister Due in Iran

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - An official with the Iraqi ministry of electricity said that Iraqi minister of electricity will pay a visit to Iran at the head of a high-ranking delegation next week.

Spokesman for Iraq's Ministry of Electricity Ahmed al-Abadi said Iran has decreased the volume of gas exported to the Arab country by up to 20 million cubic meters over the past two days.

Stating that Iraqi Prime Minister al-Sudani has placed special emphasis on the issue of electricity and the improvement of its infrastructures, he said Iraqi Minister of Electricity Ziad Ali Fazel will visit Iran next week to discuss bilateral ties and issues of mutual interests, particularly the import of electricity.

The process of paying Iraq's debt to Iran for importing energy is carried out via Iraqi Tejarat Bank, he said, adding there is not any delay in paying the debt to Iran.

Earlier, the Iraqi ministry of electricity had said that Tehran has reduced its export of gas to Iraq's Basra due to a technical problem, he added.

## Minister Rejects Reports on Joint Warship Production With Russia

TEHRAN (IFP) - Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani dismissed "baseless" media reports about Tehran's joint production of warships with Moscow. Meantime, he did not rule out cooperation in the research process to that end.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Ashtiani said the media speculations on the joint production of warships between Iran and Russia are groundless.

"We ourselves are manufacturer of fighter jets and destroyers," he added.

The minister explained that Iran and Russia have "strategic" relations and are cooperating in various sectors.

The general noted, however, that Iran may take advantage of Russia's know-how to sort out a series of problems in the research process.

In March, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian unveiled plans to finalize a draft agreement on comprehensive and strategic cooperation with Russia.

## Iran, Russia Central Banks Stress Using Local Currencies



TEHRAN (MNA) - The governors of the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation emphasized strengthening trade exchanges and using the local currencies in bilateral trade.

According to a report by the public relations department of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), in the meeting with Governor of the Central Bank of Russia Elvira Nabiullina, the CBI chief Mohammad-Reza Farzin emphasized the need to increase banking and monetary exchanges between the two countries.

Farzin also said strengthening and accelerating the development of brokerage relations between commercial banks of Iran and Russia is on the agenda.

After referring to the vast commercial capacities and potentials that Iran and Russia have, the CBI chief further emphasized increasing the banking infrastructure cooperation between the two countries.

Referring to the potential of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) member states, Farzin invited Russia to participate in the 51st edition of the ACU summit which started on Tuesday in Tehran.

Nabiullina, for her part, stressed the strengthening of monetary and banking exchanges and the optimal use of the banking infrastructure of the two countries in order to develop trade and economic cooperation.

She also stated that "the exchange of technical and specialized teams of the central banks of the two countries with the aim of developing and deepening monetary and banking relations are considered important in this regard, which has already been done."

## Iranian-Made Tele-Surgical Robots Delivered to Indonesia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Minister of Information and Communications Technology Issa Zarepour has announced the delivery of a first batch of telesurgical robots developed and manufactured in Iran to Indonesia.

Zarepour, who is also the head of Iran-Indonesia Joint Economic Commission, made the announcement late on Tuesday in an interview with Iran's state TV.

He said that more than 100 Indonesian surgeons have been trained to use the robots, which are named Sina after the prominent Iranian polymath Ibn Sina (Avicenna), adding that the devices have been manufactured by Iranian knowledge-based companies and experts.

According to the minister, Iran and Indonesia have stressed the need to boost scientific and technological cooperation between the two countries, especially in the field of medical equipment.

Elsewhere in the interview, Zarepour said that Tehran and



Jakarta are firm on implementing the agreements reached between the two sides during President Ebrahim Raisi's ongoing visit to Indonesia.

He said the implementation of the agreements will be followed up soon with the convening of the 13th session of the joint economic commission between Iran and Indonesia in Tehran.

The minister explained that Iranian and Indonesian teams

have been holding negotiations in recent months to finalize agreements that were inked between the two countries earlier on Tuesday.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, President Raisi departed Tehran for Jakarta late on Monday for a two-day state visit which he described as a turning point in the development of ties between the two Muslim nations.

On Tuesday, the two sides signed 11 cooperation documents and memoranda of understanding to develop economic and political interactions in different fields.

## Tehran, Islamabad to Expand Banking Ties Within ACU Capacities

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The chief bankers of Iran and Pakistan braced for enhancing and expanding the two countries' banking relations within the framework of capacities of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU).

Governor of Central Bank of Iran Mohammad Reza Farzin and his Pakistani counterpart Jameel Ahmed met in Tehran on Wednesday on the sidelines of the 51st edition of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU) meeting.

Farzin called for the interaction of the central banks of the member states in the field of applying a non-SWIFT financial messaging system, connecting the banking payment cards between Iran and Pakistan and also setting up a joint committee to follow up on banking agreements. He expressed hope that Iran and Pakistan would expand their banking cooperation.

Stressing the clearing of accounts using the high capacity of the Union, the new periodical chief of the Asian Clearing Union called for launching a banking channel with neighboring Pakistan in this field and noted, "Talks have been made with Pakistani banks in relevant field and they have welcomed the issue of launching a banking channel between Iran and Pakistan."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the CBI governor placed special emphasis on the significance of application of a non-SWIFT financial messaging system in interbank relations and added that the financial messaging created by Iran could replace SWIFT (Society for Worldwide Interbank Financial Telecommunication) and help the exchange of financial-banking messages between the two countries.

Turning to the membership of Iran and Pakistan in joint international banking institutions including the Asian Clearing Union (ACU), Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), World Bank (WB) and International Monetary Fund (IMF), Iran's top banker called for evermore development of relations of banks of the two countries and formation of a joint working group. The governor of the Central Bank of Pakistan, for his part, welcomed the development of banking relations between the two countries through the establishment of a non-SWIFT messaging system.

# Sanctions Endanger Iranian People's Health

TEHRAN (MNA) - Minister of Health and Medical Education said that the sanctions have prevented the people of Iran from gaining access to some foreign-made medicines and medical equipment.

Bahram Einollahi made the remarks while speaking to reporters on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly meeting in Geneva.

Einollahi said that in his address to the assembly, he recalled the participants of the rights of the Iranian people that have been violated in the field of health as a result of the negative effects of the foreign sanctions.

"Unscrupulous, oppressive and illegal sanctions have deprived the people of Iran of access to some medicines and medical equipment, and the World Health

Organization must take effective measures in this regard", he added.

Referring to the health condition of the oppressed Palestinian people who are oppressed by the Zionist regime, the Iranian health minister said that the oppressed Palestinian people are in dire health condition due to the war crimes committed by the Israeli regime. He further stressed the need for the WHO to take action in that regard.

"We suggested to the countries participating at the World Health Assembly (WHA76) form groups like Group 5 in their regions and resolve their regional health issues", the Iranian minister also noted.

The Seventy-sixth World Health Assembly is being held in Geneva, Switzerland, on 21-30 May 2023.

## Imran Khan Questioned On Graft Charges

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Former Pakistani prime minister Imran Khan was questioned by an anti-graft agency on corruption charges, his lawyer said, less than a week after he rejected a summons to appear and denounced the allegations against him.

The embattled Khan, who says corruption charges have been concocted, is embroiled in a confrontation with the powerful military, which has ruled Pakistan directly or overseen civilian governments throughout its history.

Khan was arrested and detained on May 9 in the same case, sparking widespread protests by his supporters, and raising new worries about the stability of the nuclear-armed country as it struggles with its worst economic crisis in decades.



## East Timor's Opposition Party Wins Most Seats in Parliamentary Election

DILI (Dispatches) - East Timor's opposition party won Sunday's parliamentary election, meaning independence fighter Xanana Gusmao is likely to return as prime minister in Asia's youngest democracy.

The final vote count released by the National Elections Commission on Tuesday showed Gusmao's National Congress of the Reconstruction of East Timor, known as CNRT, won 41% of the votes and gained 31 seats out of 65 in the National Parliament. That is just short of the 33 needed for an outright majority, and Gusmao will have to join at least one other party in a coalition to form a government.



## Russia Repels One of War's Most Serious Cross-Border Attacks



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's military said it quashed what appeared to be one of the most serious cross-border attacks from Ukraine since the war began, claiming to have killed more than 70 attackers in a battle that lasted around 24 hours.

Moscow blamed the raid that began Monday on Ukrainian military saboteurs. Kyiv portrayed it as an uprising against the Kremlin by Russian partisans. It was impossible to reconcile the two versions, to say with certainty who was behind the attack or to ascertain its aims.

The battle — which took place in southwest Russia's Belgorod region, about 80 kilometers (45 miles) north of the city of Kharkiv, in eastern Ukraine — was a fresh reminder of how Russia itself remains vulnerable to attack, in addition to Russian-occupied regions of Ukraine.

The region is a Russian military hub holding fuel and ammunition depots and was included in Russian President Vladimir Putin's order last year to increase the state of readiness for attacks and improve defenses.

Such cross-border attacks embarrass the Kremlin and highlight the struggles it faces in its bogged-down invasion of Ukraine.

The Belgorod region, like the neighboring Bryansk region and other border areas, has witnessed sporadic spillover from the war, which Russia started by invading Ukraine in February 2022.

Far from the 1,500-kilometer (932-mile) front line in southern and eastern Ukraine, Russian border towns and villages regularly come under shelling and drone attacks, but this week's attack is the second in recent months that also appears to have involved an incursion by ground forces. Another difference from earlier cross-border attacks is that Russia's effort to repel it continued into a second day for the first time.

Russian Defense Ministry spokesman Igor Konashenkov claimed local troops, air strikes and artillery routed the armed attackers.

"The remnants of the nationalists were driven back to the territory of Ukraine, where they continued to be hit by fire until they were completely eliminated," Konashenkov said, without providing evidence. He did not mention any Russian casualties. Russian forces destroyed four armored combat vehicles and five pickup trucks the attackers used, he said. Local officials alleged the invaders used also drones and artillery.

The governor of the Belgorod region, Vyacheslav Gladkov, said the raid targeted the rural area around Graivoron, a town about 5 kilometers (3 miles) from the border. Twelve civilians were wounded in the attack, he said, and an older woman died during an evacuation.

The Russian news portal RBK, quoting unidentified sources in the regional interior ministry and territorial police, said Graivoron came under heavy shelling that lasted about five hours early Monday. After that, tanks fired at the Graivoron border checkpoint while the adjacent village of Kozinka came under mortar and rocket fire, RBK said, citing the same sources. Gladkov later reported that a Koznika villager had been killed.

The attacking force was made up of 10 armored vehicles and an unspecified number of troops, RBK said.

Earlier Tuesday, the regional governor urged residents who had evacuated not to return home until they received official instructions to do so. He said a "counterterrorism operation" was completed by early Tuesday evening.

Gladkov also said fire from the Ukrainian side of the border on Tuesday hit the Borisovka area, about 20 kilometers (20 miles) northeast of Graivoron. No casualties were reported, he said without elaborating on the incident.

## Sporadic Shelling as Combat Eases After Sudan Ceasefire

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - Sporadic artillery fire still echoed in Sudan's capital Tuesday but residents said fighting had calmed following a U.S. and Saudi-brokered ceasefire, raising faint hopes in the embattled city.

In the sixth week of war, witnesses reported a relative calm had taken hold, both in greater Khartoum and in the Darfur region's cities of Nyala and El Geneina, which have been among the other main battlegrounds.

"We have not heard shelling in our neighbourhood since last night," said a witness in southern Khartoum.

Residents had reported combat and air strikes in different districts of the capital minutes after the ceasefire formally started at 9:45 pm (1945 GMT) on Monday.

The battles since April 15 have killed an estimated 1,000 people, sparked mass evacuations of foreigners and forced more than a million people to flee their homes internally and across borders, fuelling concerns for regional stability.

The week-long truce aims to allow desperately needed humanitarian aid for civilians, and restoration of essential services.

United States Secretary of State Antony Blinken said in a video message that the truce is "backed by a remote monitoring mechanism" supported by the U.S.

"If the ceasefire is violated, we'll know," he said. "And we will hold violators accountable through our sanctions and other tools at our disposal."

Fighting pits the army, led by Sudan's de facto leader Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, against the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces of his former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.

Those unable to flee have run low on water, food and basic supplies, and more than half the population, 25 million people, are in need of humanitarian aid, according to the UN.

"Seven days is not a long time if you look at the massive scale of humanitarian emergency in Sudan," International Committee of the Red Cross regional director for Africa, Patrick Yousef, told AFP on Tuesday.

"But we are also in a situation where every minute counts and can provide a much needed respite," he said.

The text of the truce deal says warring parties agreed to secure "unimpeded road access along designated corridors or routes for humanitarian assistance delivery."



## Protesters in Ethiopia's Tigray Demand Eritrean Troops Withdraw

AMHARA (Dispatches) - Thousands of people demonstrated in northern Ethiopia's Tigray region to demand the return of people displaced by a two-year war there and the withdrawal of outside forces now that the conflict has ended.

The war between federal troops and their allies from neighbouring Eritrea and the Amhara region on one side and Tigrayan forces on the other, concluded with a truce last November after killing tens of thousands of people.

Millions were forced from their homes, including hundreds of thousands from land disputed by Tigray and Amhara, whose security forces and fighters continue to occupy the area.

Eritrean troops — who are not mentioned in the truce — also remain inside Ethiopian territory in several border towns, according to humanitarian workers. Its government has declined to comment on the matter.

Demonstrators peacefully rallied on Tuesday in several major cities, including the regional capital, Mekelle, Adigrat and Shire. They held signs with slogans like "invaders must leave our homeland", according to footage broadcast on Tigray TV, which is controlled by the Tigray People's Liberation Front (TPLF) party that runs Tigray.

Henok Hiluf, who took part in the protest in Mekelle, told the press that about 3,500 to 4,000 people were demonstrating there.

The peace deal has held since November, with both sides acknowledging progress in implementing key provisions. Tigrayan forces have begun disarming, an interim government has been set up and many basic services have been restored.

But Tigrayan authorities have complained about the continuing presence of the outside military forces. Last week, Getachew Reda, who leads the region's interim government, said Eritrean forces had recently prevented a team monitoring implementation of the peace deal from carrying out their work.

Spokespeople for Eritrea and Ethiopia's governments and the regional administration of Amhara did not immediately respond to requests for comment.

## EU Welcomes F-16 Jet Decision for Training Ukraine Pilots

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - The European Union's foreign policy chief said that the U.S. green light to allow Ukrainian pilots to get training to fly F-16s has created an inexorable momentum that will inevitably bring the fighter jets to the Ukrainian battlefield.

"You know, it's always the same thing: we discuss, at the beginning everybody is reluctant," said Josep Borrell, giving the example of the long debate and initial opposition to the dispatch of advanced Leopard battle tanks to Ukraine.

"And at the end — with the Leopards, with the F-16 at the end — the decision comes to provide this military support because it is absolutely needed."

NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg confirmed that the training decision was the exact thrust necessary toward making the jets available to Ukraine.

"Announcing clearly that they will start training — this is an important step that partly will enable us to deliver fighter jets at some stage," Stoltenberg said before meeting with EU defense ministers. He said it also proved that the West wouldn't stand down in the face of Russia, saying such a decision "is sending a very clear signal that we are there for the long term and that Russia can not wait us out."

Borrell added that training for Ukrainian pilots had already begun in Poland and some other countries, though Polish Defense Minister Mariusz Blaszczak said that such training was still in the planning phase.

The Netherlands and Denmark, among others, are also making plans for such training.

No decision on actually delivering fourth-generation fighter jets has been taken yet, but training pilots now — a process that takes several months — will help speed up battle readiness once a formal decision is made.

"We can continue and also finalize the plans that we're making with Denmark and other allies to start these these trainings. And of course, that is the first step that you have to take," Dutch Defense Minister Kaja Ollongren said.

"We will continue discussing with our allies and with countries that might have F-16s available about that next step. But that's not on the table right now," Ollongren said.

Ukraine has long begged for the sophisticated fighter to give it a combat edge as it battles Russia's invasion, now in its second year. And this new plan opens the door for several nations to supply the aircraft and for the U.S. to help train the pilots.

With the decision, the Biden administration has made a sharp reversal after refusing to approve any transfer of the aircraft or conduct training for more than a year because of worries that it could escalate tensions with Russia. U.S. officials also have argued against the F-16 by saying that learning to fly and logistically support such an advanced aircraft would be difficult and take months.



## Overseas Indians Cheer for Modi at Rally in Sydney

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Thousands of overseas Indians cheered Prime Minister Narendra Modi at a campaign-style rally in one of Sydney's biggest sporting arenas.

Modi, who is visiting Australia for the first time since 2014, will look to use his popularity among expatriate Indians to boost support at home ahead of the general elections next year, after his Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) lost a key state election in southern India this month.

Thousands of supporters thronged the 21,000-capacity Qudos Bank Arena in Sydney Olympic Park, one of the city's biggest indoor stadiums which has hosted international stars like Bruce Springsteen and the Backstreet Boys, though there were significant numbers of empty seats as Modi began his speech.

The Indian leader, who arrived to cheers from the crowd after a programme of song and dance from across India, paid tribute to the many connections between the two countries, from cricket and tennis to films and Indian street food in Sydney.

Australian Prime Minister Anthony Albanese played the warm-up act and emcee. To chants of "Modi! Modi! Modi!", Albanese introduced his "dear friend" to a jazzed-up crowd of Indian-Australians, who he praised for making Australia "stronger and more inclusive".

"The last time I saw someone on the stage here was Bruce Springsteen and he didn't get the welcome that Prime Minister Modi has got," Albanese said. "Prime Minister Modi is the boss!" he said, breaking into a broad smile and boasting the pair had met six times in the past year.

It was an unusually personal show of support for Modi — a Hindu nationalist leader who faces re-election next year and has been criticised for sustained democratic backsliding and discrimination against India's 200 million Muslims and other minorities.

Modi reciprocated his host's lavish welcome, offering a long list of interests that bind the two countries: from cricket to curry, yoga to Masterchef.

"The most important foundation of our ties is mutual trust and mutual respect," he said in Hindi, promising trade between the two countries would double in the next five years.



## EU's Next Food Fight: Regulating Gene-Edited Crops



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Extreme weather caused by climate change has damaged food production across Europe.

Confronted with a deteriorating situation, divided European Union decision-makers are debating new rules for genetically modified crops.

Last year's drought ravaged the continent's farms, starving everything from Spanish olive harvests to Hungary's maize and sunflower crops, Italian and Romanian corn fields to France's dairy production.

Some argue the answer to Europe's problems is deregulating gene modification techniques to produce better crops. Others claim this would be a "smokescreen" to avoid having to radically change the way the bloc farms.

Supporters say seeds produced using gene editing techniques are less vulnerable to drought and disease -- and require less water.

The European Commission, the EU's executive arm, will propose a law in July that will loosen the rules on plants produced by certain new genomic techniques (NGTs), branded by critics as simply "new genetically modified organisms (GMOs)".

The proposals will open a new battlefield among the EU's 27 member states -- with drought-hit countries especially in favour -- and between EU lawmakers.

The new techniques are a mix of genomic editing tools that alter a plant's genetic make-up without the addition of foreign genetic material, unlike "transgenic" GMOs that include DNA from other species.

The commission says the current rules on GMOs including permission and labelling are "not fit for purpose" for the new technology.

"Plants produced by new genomic techniques can support sustainability," the EU's health commissioner, Stella Kyriakides, said last month.

The proposals, she said, "will strongly signal to farmers, researchers and industry that this is the way forward in the EU".

In a document from February seen by AFP, the commission looked at whether it should treat traditional seeds and those produced using the new techniques, with modifications that could in theory have happened naturally, as the same.

France, severely affected by drought last summer, backs changing the rules.

In April, French Agriculture Minister Marc Fesneau expressed his concerns over what he called Europe's "delay", arguing there should be a push to allow biotechnology that gives Europe the tools to deal with climate change by producing more resistant seeds.

Late last year, his Spanish counterpart, Luis Planas, hailed the techniques as a "magnificent tool to have seeds that need less water and fertiliser".

Other countries are more wary.

In March, Austria criticised a commission study that it claimed was based on "assumptions" rather than scientific data and called for a comprehensive analysis of any environmental and health risks.

Cyprus, Germany, Hungary and Luxembourg support that position.

The powerful European farming lobby group Copa-Cogeca supports the new rules.

"If we need to supply society with food in Europe, and if we want to be self-sufficient, then we need to adapt rules," said Thor Gunnar Kofoed, chair of the seed working group at Copa-Cogeca.

A majority of EU lawmakers support relaxing the rules.

## Paris Olympics Ticket Prices Mar Image of Games for All



PARIS (Dispatches) - Athletes have joined the clamor of criticism at the high cost of tickets for the 2024 Paris Olympics, decried as undermining organizers' promises of a Games accessible to all.

Phase two of sales got underway on May 11, with nearly 1.5 million individual tickets available, after over three million were sold as multi-event packs during phase one.

Sales have been swift with two thirds of the latest batch snapped up on the first day, organisers said.

Tickets for the men's judo heavyweight final, in which France's triple Olympic gold medallist Teddy Riner is expected to compete, sold out in two hours.

"Frankly it started very strong, almost too much so. It's proof of the huge enthusiasm," the organizing committee said.

But just as during phase one, there were vocal protests, particularly on social media, that the exorbitant prices conflicted with the "Games for all" promised by Paris 2024 chief Tony Estanguet.

"We expected the criticism, we were warned that the sales periods were a difficult time. But we underestimated the scale," conceded Estanguet, a former three-time Olympic canoeing champion.

"With four million registered in the draw for 1.5 million tickets on sale, we knew that some people would be disappointed."

Of the promised one million seats at 24 euros (\$26), the lowest price for next year's Olympics, nearly 150,000 went up for sale in phase two.

But as these tickets were the first to go, potential buyers quickly found themselves facing much higher prices.

Three days after the launch of the second phase, sports fans were offered tickets at 690 euros and even 980 euros for athletics semi-finals, and as high as 2,700 euros for the opening ceremony.

Athletes were also unhappy with the prices.

Belgian Nafissatou Thiam, a two-time Olympic heptathlon champion, told Belgian media DH: "I'm not even sure that my family will be able to come to see me, it's so expensive."

French judoka Amandine Buchard, a world bronze medallist, slammed organisers on Twitter: "Olympic Games accessible to all, you said... In fact, you have to take out a bank loan so that families and loved ones can have the chance to come and see us... Well at least if by then there are still tickets."

"How can we put such high prices for our sport?" French runner Jimmy Gressier wrote on Instagram.

French Sports Minister Amelie Oudea-Castera defended the pricing policy, telling parliament on May 16 ticket prices were lower than at previous Olympics.

She did admit though that: "The accessible tickets, at 24 euros, exist but they go too quickly."

For sports policy expert David Roizen, in the money-spinning world of modern sports, a Games for all "doesn't exist".

"The Champions League final, the Olympics, are events reserved for a financial elite," Roizen told AFP.

"It is a mistake to have raised the prospect of a Games for all."

## Apple Makes iOS More Accessible With New Updates



KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Global Accessibility Day (GAAD) happens on May 18 every year, focusing on inclusivity for the disabled in the digital space as well as spreading awareness.

As the disabled activists I know frequently say: Designing for the disabled means designing for everyone.

If it's accessible to the disabled that means it is for every single person and it's always great to see how accessibility in tech is highlighted each year.

Apple has made accessibility a core feature in its software design and the next iOS update continues in that vein.

A challenge for low vision users is dealing with all the various icons on a screen and so the upcoming iOS 17 makes that easier with Assistive Access.

Instead of struggling with icons, apps and experiences are instead minimised to a highly simplified interface with larger buttons and labels.

Users can even choose whether they prefer text or a visual grid. The Calls app for instance will combine Photos, Music, Messages and Camera for easy access.

An interesting new feature is Personal Voice, where you can create a digital voice that sounds like you.

It takes just 15 minutes, no further training needed to recognise and then create your own individual digital voice. You just need to read from a set of text prompts to record the audio for creation.

While the feature is for those with a risk of losing the ability to speak, such as people with degenerative diseases, I could see the feature being used by people with chronic anxiety or speech impediments.

## Eight EU Countries Oppose Bloc's Car Emissions Limits

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Eight EU member states including France, Italy and Poland urged Brussels to scrap its planned vehicle emissions limits, warning they risked hurting investment in a document seen by AFP Monday.

The EU proposed changes late last year, known as the "Euro 7" standards, to reduce air pollution from new vehicles sold in Europe with limits to pollutants such as nitrogen oxides and carbon monoxide.

The caps were set to enter into force in July 2025.

"We oppose any new exhaust emission rules (including new testing requirements or new emission limits) for cars and vans," the countries -- Bulgaria, Czech Republic, France, Hungary, Italy, Poland, Romania and Slovakia -- wrote.

"These new rules would divert the industry's investments from achieving the net-zero transition pathway," they added in a letter sent to member states.

France and Italy have large auto industries, but not as big as Germany's.

The EU agreed on a planned phaseout of sales of new fossil fuel cars by 2035 earlier this year as it pushes for 100 percent electric vehicles.

The ban on internal combustion engines is key to the EU's ambitious plans to become a "climate neutral" economy by 2050, with net-zero greenhouse gas emissions.

Air pollution linked to road transport is responsible for 70,000 deaths each year, according to the EU.

The draft calls for a reduction in the emission of NOx, the nitric oxide and nitrogen dioxide that cause smog and acid rain, by 35 percent from cars and 56 percent from trucks and buses compared to previous rules.

The automotive industry opposes tougher petrol and diesel vehicle standards, insisting they will have very little positive environmental impact since the industry is moving towards electric cars.

The sector employs 13 million people in Europe.

Environmental activists say the EU's limits are not enough to tackle air pollution, accusing Brussels of acquiescing to pressure from the auto lobby.

The 27 member states must find a common position despite their differences before they can begin what will likely be tense negotiations with the European Parliament.

Italian Business Minister Adolfo Urso called on the European Commission, the EU's executive arm, on Monday to be "reasonable and pragmatic".

Germany, the EU's biggest car manufacturer, did not sign the text but has previously expressed concern about tougher standards for its businesses.

The German coalition government of greens, social democrats and liberals, has struggled to find common ground on the issue.



## Climate: Dangerous Heat Could Afflict Billions by 2100



PARIS (Dispatches) - Current policies to limit global warming will expose more than a fifth of humanity to extreme and potentially life-threatening heat by century's end, researchers warned.

Earth's surface temperature is on track to rise 2.7 degrees Celsius above preindustrial levels by 2100, pushing more than two billion people -- 22 percent of projected global population -- well outside the climate comfort zone that has allowed our species to thrive for millennia, the scientists reported in Nature Sustainability.

The countries with the highest number of people facing deadly heat in this scenario are India (600 million), Nigeria (300 million), Indonesia (100 million), as well as the Philippines and Pakistan (80 million each).

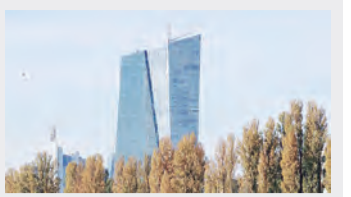
"That's a profound reshaping of the habitability of the surface of the planet, and could lead potentially to the large-scale reorganisation of where people live," said lead author Tim Lenton, director of the Global Systems Institute at the University of Exeter.

Capping global warming at the 2015 Paris climate treaty target of 1.5C would sharply reduce the number of those at risk to less than half-a-billion, some five percent of the 9.5 billion people likely to inhabit the planet six or seven decades from now, according to the findings.

Just under 1.2C of warming to date has already amplified the intensity or duration of heatwaves, droughts and wildfires beyond what could have occurred absent the carbon pollution generated by burning fossil fuels and forests. The last eight years were the hottest on record.

## ECB Rates to Peak by Summer

PARIS (Dispatches) - European Central Bank interest rate hikes are likely to peak out by the end of summer, but the more important issue now is how long rates stay elevated than the exact level, French ECB policymaker Francois Villeroy de Galhau said. Villeroy said the lag between the ECB's exceptionally fast rate hikes over the last 10 months and their impact on the economy was more likely at the upper end of the two-year range economists expect. That made monitoring the pass-through of those hikes, which saw rates increased by 375 basis points, more important for monetary policy moves in the coming months than how much further rates are increased. "I expect today that we will be at the terminal rate not later than by summer," Villeroy told an event held at the Bank of France.



## Inflation Has Eroded U.S. Households' Financial Security

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The inflation wave that crested at a 40-year high last year and remains elevated has eroded U.S. households' sense of financial security, the Federal Reserve reported Monday, with many saying they had reduced their savings to make ends meet, felt less secure about retirement, and had delayed purchases or swapped into cheaper products as they shopped.

In an annual survey showing the corrosive effects of inflation on Americans' economic confidence, the Fed said the percentage of respondents who said they were doing "at least okay financially" in 2022 tumbled by 5 percentage points - the most since the survey was launched a decade ago - to 73%. It had stood at a record high the year before.

The share of those saying they were worse off shot up 15 points to 35%, the highest level by far since the Fed first started asking that question in 2014. The Fed launched the "Survey of Household Economics and Decisionmaking" in 2013.

Those who considered their retirement savings "on track" fell to 31% among those not yet retired, compared to 40% in 2021.

With a 2024 presidential campaign already in its early stages, the survey also suggested Americans' souring mood about their own finances carried over to their view of the national economy.

Even though the unemployment rate has been low, below 4%, since January of 2022, only 18% of respondents rated the national economy as "good" or "excellent," down from 50% as of 2019.

The survey was conducted in October, and the results included responses from a representative sample of 11,775 people.

Inflation emerged as a key risk for the U.S. in 2021 as the economy reopened from the pandemic-era restrictions imposed on many public and commercial activities the year before.

Annual inflation as measured by the Consumer Price Index peaked at 9.1% last summer, the highest since the early 1980s, and remains elevated now at 4.9%. Fed officials have raised interest rates aggressively in response and have repeatedly expressed their determination to bring inflation to heel by whatever means necessary.

Fifty-four percent of adults said that their budgets had been affected "a lot" by price increases, with parents of children under 18, Black and Latin American adults and those with disabilities ranking among the most likely to report an impact from inflation.

Indeed, overall one-third of households cited inflation as their main financial challenge, up more than fourfold from 2016.

A question meant to measure households' wherewithal to overcome a modest financial emergency showed fewer thought they had the ability to meet an unexpected \$400 expense using cash or the equivalent, such as a credit card expected to be repaid in full at the next statement. Sixty-three percent said they would use cash for such a cost, down from a record high 68% in 2021.

Meanwhile, the survey's measures of household incomes and respondents' sense of the job market showed more adults last year received or asked for a pay increase or promotion.

## China Enters Sri Lanka's Domestic Fuel Market

COLOMBO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka signed a deal on Monday allowing a Chinese company to enter the island's domestic fuel market in competition with an Indian oil firm and a local state-owned retailer.

The agreement makes China's Sinopec the first newcomer in the Sri Lankan market in 20 years, and follows months of fuel rationing triggered by a foreign exchange crisis that choked off imports last year.

President Ranil Wickremesinghe's office said he witnessed the signing of the agreement with Sinopec, adding that it "marks a crucial step in ensuring a steady and uninterrupted fuel supply for the nation".

Shortages of fuel and other essentials such as food and medicines led to months of protests that culminated with the toppling of former president Gotabaya Rajapaksa last year.

At the height of the crisis, the shortages were such that motorists had to queue for days to fill their tanks.

Energy minister Kanchana Wijesekera said on Monday that Sinopec would be handed 150 pumping stations currently under the state-owned Ceylon Petroleum Corporation (CPC).

The new agreement will grant Sinopec a licence to operate in the island for 20 years, and allow it to invest in the setting up of another 50 retail stores, Wijesekera said.

The government in March approved in principle the entry of Chinese, Australian and US oil giants into the local retail market, with Sinopec the first off the block. The decision sought to end a 20-year duopoly enjoyed by CPC and the Indian Oil Corporation -- the first foreign operator allowed into the market since Sri Lanka nationalised petroleum companies 60 years ago.



Officials said private companies will have to finance the import of oil from their own foreign exchange reserves and agree to retain their profits in Sri Lanka for at least a year.

Sri Lanka has raised fuel prices threefold in the past year to offset huge losses at CPC, which is set to undergo restructuring in line with a \$3.0 billion IMF bailout Colombo secured in March after a lengthy stretch of economic turmoil.

## Oil Supply Not to Be Affected by Stricter Price Cap Enforcement

HIROSHIMA (Dispatches) - The International Energy Agency (IEA) does not expect moves by the Group of Seven nations to counter the evasion of price caps on Russian energy will change the supply situation for crude oil and oil products, the IEA's Executive Director Fatih Birol said.

The G7, the European Union and Australia agreed to impose a \$60-per-barrel price cap on Russian seaborne crude oil and also set an upper price limit for Russian oil products to deprive Moscow of revenues for its invasion of Ukraine.

The G7 will enhance efforts to counter evasion of the caps "while avoiding spillover effects and maintaining global energy supply", the group said on Saturday, without giving details, during its annual leaders' meeting.

The IEA, which provides analysis and input to the G7 on energy, does not see the enhanced enforcement of the price caps affecting the global oil and fuel supply, Birol told Reuters in an interview on the sidelines of the summit.

"Any significant changes in the markets as always we will reflect in our analysis, in our reports, but for the time being I don't see a reason to make a change in our analysis," he said.

According to Birol, the price cap reached two main objectives: it did not trigger tightness in the markets as Russian oil continued to flow but at the same time Moscow's revenues were reduced.

"Russia did play the energy card, and it did fail. But there are some loopholes, some challenges for the better functioning of the oil price cap," Birol said.

The G7 has also brought support for the gas investment back to the communique on Saturday in that it said was a "temporary" solution to address potential market shortfalls and as nations are trying to de-couple from the Russian energy.

The move has alarmed climate activists who warned the group may fail to deliver on its goal to achieve net-zero carbon emissions by 2050 and limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius (2.7 Fahrenheit).

"It may have some impact but countries once again reiterated that if there are some impacts to slow down in that area, they are going to accelerate in the other areas that it will not change their determination of reaching the 1.5 degree Celsius goal," Birol said.

"The clean energy transition is happening and much faster than many think."

The language change was brought in by Germany, once a top buyer of Russian gas, sources have said, and the communique did not have a time frame for investments into the gas sector.

## Inflation in Pakistan Could Reach New Heights in May

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Inflation in Pakistan is likely to hit fresh peaks, and is projected to reach over 37% year-on-year (YoY) in May against 36.4% recorded in April, JS Global Securities, a brokerage house, said in a report on Monday.

"We expect the datapoint to clock in at a record-high of 37.27%, as current workings suggest another sequential increase of 1.07% month-on-month," said JS Global.

"This would take 11MFY23E headline Consumer Price Index (CPI) to 29.03%," it added.

The brokerage house was of the view that the rise in inflation is attributed to a higher increase in food prices, which is 30% of the CPI basket.

"We expect food inflation to clock in at 47.99% YoY this month, with a sequential increase of 0.81% MoM, finally pacing down from its recent run rate of ~4.5% MoM since the past four months," it said.

It added that the recent decline in POL product prices is not expected to reflect in May's readings, which is expected to be the peak for inflation readings.

After May "we expect the YoY trend to soften on account of base affect from June," it said.

The State Bank of Pakistan (SBP) Monetary Policy Committee (MPC) is currently scheduled to meet on June 12, 2023. CPI-based inflation clocked in at a record high of 36.4% on a year-on-year basis in April 2023 compared to an increase of 35.4% in the previous month and 13.4% in April 2022, as per the Pakistan Bureau of Statistics.

## Brazil Economists Lower Inflation Forecasts

SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - Private economists in Brazil lowered their expectation for the country's inflation index this year, but the move failed to impress central bank Governor Roberto Campos Neto as he continues to see them running well above official targets.

"Inflation expectations are still very high," Campos Neto told a seminar hosted by newspaper Folha de S.Paulo on Monday, highlighting elevated long-term forecasts as particularly problematic.

Policymakers in Brazil have highlighted de-anchored inflation expectations as one of the reasons for high interest rates, with Campos Neto having previously ruled out imminent cuts despite government pressure for rates to be lowered.

A weekly central bank survey on Monday showed economists now forecast inflation to hit 5.80% at the end of this year, down from a median forecast of 6.03% in the previous week.

The estimate for 2024, however, came in nearly unchanged at 4.13%.

Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said the forecasts were now "in line" with projections from his team, days after reiterating the government thinks there is room for rate cuts to begin.

But Campos Neto was unimpressed, linking the short-term cut to a new fuel pricing policy announced by state-run oil giant Petrobras, which led to lower refinery gate gasoline, diesel and cooking gas prices.

"Long-term forecasts remained little changed," the central bank chief said. "And we have a problem that are long-term inflation expectations persistently stuck around 4%".

Brazil has an inflation target of 3.25% for 2023, which will be lowered to 3% in 2024.

In the minutes of its May meeting, the central bank expressed concerns about inflation expectations, saying it continued "to assess that de-anchored expectations raise the cost of bringing inflation back to the target".

The autonomous central bank has kept benchmark rates at a six-year high of 13.75% since September 2022 in a bid to tame high inflation, driving criticism from President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva, who sees it hindering economic growth.

At the same event attended by Campos Neto, Senate President Rodrigo Pacheco renewed calls for rates to be lowered.

Campos Neto acknowledged that headline inflation has been slowing down in Brazil, but noted that the core index remains "high" and "well above target".

## Nearly Half of UK Firms to Defer Investment Due to Tax Rises



LONDON (Dispatches) - Almost half of medium-sized British companies plan to delay investment plans due to last month's rise in corporation tax, a survey published on Monday found.

Low business investment is one of the reasons economists give for the weak growth in British productivity and living standards over the last decade, and businesses have complained that higher tax rates reduce their incentive to invest.

Britain's headline rate of corporation tax rose to 25% in April from 19% the year before, under the enactment of a policy announced in March 2021.

Accountants BDO said 46% of businesses surveyed with a turnover of between 10 million and 300 million pounds (\$12 million - \$379 million) reported that the rise in corporation tax would delay investment, while 39% said it would slow hiring or lead to job losses.

To try to limit the impact on investment, finance minister Jeremy Hunt said in March that businesses would be able to immediately offset investment in plant and machinery against tax, a policy known as full expensing.

"The recent rise in the headline corporation tax rate will dampen current business investment plans although the positive reaction to the new full expensing capital allowances regime suggests this may only be a short-term effect," said Paul Falvey, a tax partner at BDO.

Britain's overall tax burden remains lower than that in almost all other European countries, but has risen steadily in recent years - reflecting an ageing population and slow economic growth - and is on track to reach its highest since World War Two.

Hunt told businesses at the British Chambers of Commerce's annual conference last week that he wanted to reduce their taxes, but that he did not know if that would be possible when the government is next scheduled to set out its budget plans towards the end of the year.

The BDO survey was based on responses from 512 companies polled between March 30 and April 16.

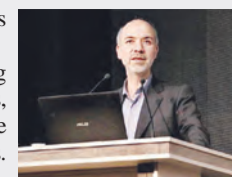
## Iran Among Top Countries In Engineering Sector

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran is among the pioneering countries in the world in the field of engineering, the minister of energy said, adding that Iran has so far exported diversified technical and engineering services to other countries.

Speaking at the 14th Iran International Tunnel Conference in Tehran on Tuesday, Ali Akbar Mehrabian said digging tunnels has been

important for humanity since long ago but today, its significance has doubled for the ministry of energy.

A tunnel is a structure that can play a leading role in various fields including road construction and urban development, water transmission installations, electricity transmission lines, etc., he said, adding that Iranians have more than 3,000 years of fruitful experience in designing and constructing tunnels.



## France Reveals Plan to Cut Greenhouse Gas Emissions by 50% by 2030

PARIS (Dispatches) - The French government unveiled a plan to accelerate cuts to its greenhouse gas emissions, targeting a reduction of 50 percent by 2030 compared with 1990 levels.

Unveiled by Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne, the roadmap includes detailed figures for reductions for individual sectors of the economy, ranging from the transport industry to households.

The objectives – from speeding up the transition to electric cars or switching freight from road to rivers – are aimed at bringing France’s ambitions for slashing carbon pollution into line with the EU’s target for 2030.

France has so far cut its emissions by 25 percent compared with 1990 levels, requiring major fresh efforts if it is to hit the new 50-percent target.

The centrist government of President Emmanuel Macron is wary of provoking consumers with costly initiatives, with memories still fresh of an increase in fuel taxes and vehicle emissions restrictions in 2018 which sparked major protests.

The so-called “Yellow Vest” revolt against Macron began in small and medium-sized towns and the countryside where locals felt they were being penalised for using their cars when no other forms of transport were available.

“We’re asking for a bit from the smallest (polluters) and a lot from the biggest,” an aide to Borne told reporters, meaning around half of efforts would be for companies, a quarter for households and a quarter for local administrations.

Concern about climate change has leapt up the political agenda in the last 12 months, with the country experiencing its hottest year since records began last year which left rivers dry, crops withered and widespread water shortages.

A record nation-wide winter drought during January and February has also led to fears about water supplies this summer.

Macron, who has admitted to grasping the scale of the planet’s environmental problems late, promised to put climate change at the heart of his second term in office which began in May last year.

He pledged to make France the first major nation to abandon fossil fuels and gave Borne an extra job title for “planning the ecological transition.”



But the 45-year-old former investment banker has been derided by environmental groups and Greens lawmakers for going too slow and he sparked criticism on May 11 by calling for a “pause” on EU environmental legislation.

Among other developed countries, the United Kingdom has the most ambitious short-term goals of any major economy, with an objective of 2030 emissions being 68 percent below 1990 levels.

The United States has committed to cut greenhouse gases 50-52 percent by 2030 below 2005 levels, while Germany has set a 65 percent reduction target compared to 1990.

The UN’s climate science panel has said the world must slash emissions 43 percent this decade to keep within the Paris Agreement’s 1.5C global warming limit.

China and India have set long-term goals to become carbon neutral by 2060 and 2070 respectively, but do not have emissions reduction targets for 2030.

### Iranians Right...

FROM PAGE 1

An investigation by a research group, Action on Armed Violence, revealed that the UK’s elite military units carried out covert operations in Russia, Ukraine, Nigeria, Kenya, the Philippines, as well as Muslim countries of Iraq, Algeria, Libya, Tunisia, Oman, Somalia and Yemen.



They were most recently involved in Sudan after the outbreak of violence in the African country.

This picture purportedly taken in Cyprus in 2020 shows UK Royal Marines of 40 Commando light infantry unit working with a Malloy T150 cargo drone during a three-month deployment to the Mediterranean and Black Sea region to conduct Exercise Olympuss Warrior in for Future Commando Force (FCF) training.

UK special forces units were also sent to Pakistan and Afghanistan, according to the report.

The authors of the investigative report said UK Special Forces carried out secret operations in France, Mali, Cyprus and Estonia, as well.

Particularly in Syria, UK Special Forces have had continuous military activity since 2012 in a joint effort with opposition forces aimed at toppling the government of President Bashar al-Assad.

In Ukraine, the Pentagon documents leaked earlier this year showed that fifty members of UK Special Forces were in the former Soviet republic alongside Kiev forces fighting against Russia.

The exact mission of the UK Special Forces was not stated in the Pentagon’s leaked papers.

Britain’s operations in the past included extracting, evacuation and transporting UK nationals from conflict zones, hostage rescues, exfiltration, training courses and protection.

During his tenure, Britain’s former Prime Minister David Cameron had even reportedly granted a “carte blanche,” otherwise a license to kill, to the members of the elite Special Air Service (SAS) of the country.

High-risk operations across the globe -- which are largely carried out by members of the SAS, Special Boat Service and Special Reconnaissance Regiment, among other secretive military units such as the 18 (UKSF) Signals Regiment and the Future Commando Force (FCF), are directly ordered by the prime minister or defense secretary and are kept highly secret.

Major military acts of war conducted by UK special forces must be approved by the British parliament; however, small-scale special forces operations can be carried out without MPs’ permission and are not subject to committee investigations.

In this regard, UK Special Forces were the subject of scrutiny after a public inquiry found that units had carried out more than 50 summary executions of alleged Taliban members in Afghanistan between 2010 and 2011.

Meantime, the UK policy, detailed in the Command Paper, Defense in a Competitive Age, mandates the military to increase its secret operations in other countries to protect Britain’s interests across the globe.

Of course this is a small part of British Empire’s mischiefs against countries and we know well that they follow the doctrine of divide and rule and London governments are behind many religious and political rifts in the world and they make most out of rifts among nations, and for years even after the Islamic Revolution, the UK has resorted to this policy of creating rift among the people especially putting the nation against the establishment.

The Guardian’s report is another seal of confirmation for Iranians’ claim that nobody should trust the West especially the colonialist British Empire and the new version of it is the U.S., and fortunately the world is awakening and people worldwide are gradually realizing what is going around them and especially they are thwarting British and American plots for domination of new way of colonialism which this time is not through occupying the lands but through controlling the governments and nations and looting their wealth.

### 8 Iranian Banks...

FROM PAGE 1

The CBI Governor further added, “In the field of tourism, due to Iran’s vast historical, cultural, natural and economic capacities, many people from different countries travel to Iran every year. Last year, more than 4.8 million people from different countries of the world entered Iran. Also, this year, about 9.8 million Iranians have also visited other countries, which shows the interest of Iranian people to learn about other cultures and nations.”

Elsewhere Farzin further stated that “The conditions for the presence of foreign banks in Iran have been facilitated, and despite the economic and banking sanctions, we are currently witnessing the presence of some foreign banks or the establishment of joint banks in Iran.”

## Greek Vote Shows Public Mellowing From Crisis-Era Anger



ATHENS (Dispatches) - A resounding defeat of radical parties in Greece’s election on Sunday has shown voters have mellowed after more than 15 years of fuming over austerity triggered by a crippling debt crisis.

The conservative New Democracy party romped to victory with 40.8% of the vote in Sunday’s poll which sent opposition Syriza into a tailspin after taking 20.1% of the vote and tumbling more than 11 points since the last election in 2019.

A new electoral system means New Democracy fell just shy of an absolute majority, paving the way for coalition talks this week though a second vote in June is more likely.

But the outcome was still a surprise. Prime Minister Kyriakos Mitsotakis emerged stronger despite a wiretapping scandal, the COVID pandemic, a cost of living crisis and a deadly rail crash in February which triggered public outrage.

It was a stunning defeat for Syriza, whose style of a radical, anti-establishment movement opposed to all, had resonated with angry voters more than a decade ago when Greece was forced into bailouts.

Then leader Alexis Tsipras and his finance minister Yanis Varoufakis were global household names when Greece was racked with violent street protests against swingeing wage and pensions cuts imposed by the international community.

After winning the election in 2015, the grouping of Marxists, anti-capitalists, socialists held chaotic talks with lenders that almost cost Greece its place in the euro zone.

But since Greece’s bailout programme ended in 2018, it has regained market access, wrestled down its record debt and growth is set to outpace the euro zone’s average - and politics and public anger have quietened down as a result.

Syriza lost power to New Democracy in 2019, but four years on, polling had showed it could still be a force to be reckoned with, especially against an incumbent government facing so many challenges, running just 4-7 points behind Mitsotakis’ party.

“I think what Syriza missed was the willingness of the electorate to move away from the crisis politics era. That is what Mitsotakis understood whereas Syriza didn’t,” said Wolfango Piccoli, co-president of political risk advisory at Teneo.

While voters’ priority was the economy and their pockets, Syriza focused on other issues.

Its rallying cry for the election was “We Know, We Can Bring Change” and “Justice everywhere”. It had proposed policies it said would bring voters in from the far right.

### Threats Against...

FROM PAGE 1

Addressing the same event, Mohammad Eslami, head of the AEOI, highlighted Iran’s nuclear achievements, including developing the technology to produce heavy water.

Many companies from different countries want Iranian heavy water and its derivatives, he said.

“Today, the whole nuclear fuel cycle, namely exploration, extraction, processing from mines, conversion, enrichment, and production of fuel and its use in reactors, is being carried out by our young and hardworking experts and scientists,” Eslami said.

He also asserted that Iran’s capability regarding the nuclear fuel cycle “cannot be negated.”

The nuclear chief further said that if Iran did not have the nuclear fuel cycle and its reactors were not active, it could not produce radiopharmaceuticals to offset the impact of

sanctions endangering the lives of many patients.

Iran showed to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) with six world powers in 2015. But Washington’s unilateral withdrawal in May 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo.

Negotiations between the parties to the deal kicked off in Vienna in April 2021, with the intention of bringing the US back into the JCPOA and putting an end to its “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran.

The talks, however, have been at a standstill since August 2022 due to Washington’s insistence on not lifting all of the anti-Iran sanctions and offering the necessary guarantees that it will not exit the agreement again.

### Iran-EU...

FROM PAGE 1

Germany, Italy, and the Netherlands were Iran’s main trade partners among EU member states in the first three months of 2023, according to “Eurostat”, the statistical center of Europe.

In this period, Germany’s export of products to Iran showed a 28 percent decline but exports of products from the Netherlands, Italy and France to Iran increased 63, 24 and 17 percent respectively.

Based on the report, Iran’s trade exchanges with 27 EU member states in the first quarter of the current year registered an 11 percent decline compared to same period last year.

The trade exchanges between Iran and 27 member states of the European Union decreased from €1.30 billion to €1.180 billion in the first three months of the current year.

EU exports of products to Iran from January to March hit €960 million, showing a nine percent decline compared to a year earlier.

### Iran Warns of...

FROM PAGE 1

She pointed to the “critical” situation in the Middle East, saying that terrorism, occupation, illegal unilateral acts, and the presence of illegal foreign forces continue to wreak havoc on civilians and their infrastructure.

The Iranian envoy noted that a UN document showed a concerning increase in civilian deaths, with at least 16,988 recorded across 12 conflicts, marking a 53 percent rise compared to the previous year.

The report also highlights the persistent and devastating effects of armed conflicts on food security which has caused continued hunger in many regions, she said.

“These alarming statistics underline the urgent need for concerted efforts to address the impact of armed conflicts on food security and protect civilian populations,” Ershadi added.

She emphasized that the Israeli regime is systematically violating the human rights of Palestinians in the occupied territories through constant oppressive, expansionist, and apartheid practices.

According to the UN report, she said, last year witnessed the highest number of Palestinian civilian fatalities in the West Bank since 2005.

The Iranian diplomat described the situation in Gaza as “deeply distressing” because it has effectively become the “world’s largest prison.”

She said the persistence of the US and EU unilateral sanctions on Syria and the plundering of its natural

resources by illegal foreign forces have had a negative impact on the humanitarian situation in the country.

Ershadi added that people in Syria are facing exacerbating challenges impeding the Syrian government’s ability to provide essential services to those in need.

“The Israeli regime continues its aggressions and terrorist attacks against Syria’s sovereignty and territorial integrity with impunity and no repercussions from the international community,” she said.

Iran denounces such “heinous crimes” against civilian infrastructure and violation of international humanitarian law and the UN Charter, posing a severe threat to regional peace and stability.

The Iranian diplomat stressed the importance of prioritizing an end to the conflict, securing a political solution and scaling up humanitarian operations in order to provide effective civilian protection.

She went on to say that effective humanitarian operations for civilian protection “rely on international cooperation, proper and timely finance, and resource access; unfortunately, these elements are impeded by unilateral coercive measures.”

Ershadi urged all parties to armed conflicts to fully comply with their obligations under international law and to respect the humanitarian principles of humanity, neutrality, impartiality, and independence in the provision of humanitarian assistance, including medical assistance.

## Thomas Back in Pink At Giro d'Italia

**B**ONDONE (Dispatches) - Ineos rider Geraint Thomas took back the leader's jersey in the Giro d'Italia even though he lost out on the stage 16 win, crossing the line just after UAE Team Emirates' Joao Almeida at the top of Monte Bondone.

The two riders were part of a group of six which included another overall race favourite Primož Roglič, that hunted down the breakaway on the 203km mountainous stage before snapping off with five kilometres to go.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

**Switchboard:**  
(+98) (21) 44253448  
**Public Relations Tel:**  
(+98)(21) 44253450  
Editorial Board: 44253449  
**Public Relations Fax:**  
(+98)(21) 44253395  
**Advertising Department:**  
Tel/Fax:(+98) (21) 44253335-9/44253234  
**Website:**  
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## Italy Limits Russian Participation At World Championships

**R**OME (Dispatches) - Italy plans to impose restrictions on athletes from Russia and Belarus who will be allowed to compete at the fencing world championships in Milan in July, the head of its National Olympic Committee (CONI) said.

Sofia Pozdniakova, the Olympic champion daughter of Russia's Olympic Committee president, will be one of those to face exclusion under the restrictions, which are prompted by advice from the Italian government.

# Nuggets Shaking Off Team History To Reach NBA Finals

**L**OS ANGELES (Dispatches) - The Denver Nuggets played with disruption on their minds in Game 4 of the Western Conference finals.

Everybody on that tight-knit bench Monday night seemed to know their team had never reached the NBA Finals, had never swept a playoff opponent and had never beaten the Los Angeles Lakers in a postseason series. The Nuggets have given their fans comparatively little to cheer in their 47 seasons in the NBA, and they've rarely seized the basketball world's attention despite a solid list of famous alumni.

But with their confidence soaring in the midst of a dominant playoff run, these Nuggets were determined to secure their latest bit of history Monday night. They kept that attitude even after LeBron James dropped a 31-point first half that could have made a lesser team with a 3-0 series lead start thinking about Game 5 back home.

"Yeah, that's never been our mentality," Aaron Gordon said. "That hasn't been our mentality all year, like, to concede. We're not that type of team."

After Nikola Jokic conjured his latest triple-double playoff masterpiece and Gordon blocked James' shot at the buzzer, the Nuggets had torn up their franchise's history and written a bold new chapter with a clinching 113-111 victory.

They're the first Denver team to earn the right to play for an NBA title, and this often-overlooked franchise will be favored to win when the Nuggets get back on the court in nine days. No wonder the conference championship celebration had a little extra energy, with the Nuggets mobbing Jokic after he received his conference MVP trophy.

High-scoring Jamal Murray took a moment to savor the slow growth of a team that has finally blossomed into something beautiful and sturdy.

"We just want to make the most of the opportunity," Murray said. "First Nuggets team to do this and that. We want to go all the way and stay locked in. I think our chemistry is at an all-time high, the way we play, the way we read the game without even speaking.

We talk that language on the court. It's just beautiful basketball, honestly. It's so fun to play with this team and with (Jokic) and with the coaching staff that has groomed us into the team that we are."

This group led by Jokic and Murray has surpassed all the greats who have worn the many, many uniforms of the team that started life as the ABA's Denver Rockets in 1967. The Nuggets had plenty of



winning seasons and kept their fans entertained while frequently playing a high-octane, high-altitude style of ball in the NBA, but they never got closer to a title than the conference finals.

The team that showcased David "Skywalker" Thompson, Alex English, Dan Issel, Dikembe Mutombo, Mahmoud Abdul-Rauf and Carmelo Anthony to the world finally has the chance to hang its first championship banner, thanks to a Serbian second-round pick, a Canadian sharpshooter and its talented, selfless supporting cast.

"It's just a great mixture," Gordon said. "It's a great group of guys. The camaraderie is there, the chemistry is there, the talent is there, the IQ is there and the unselfishness is there. It's really a brotherhood. We really do it for the person next to us. It's rare in this league to find a team that has a bunch of unselfish guys that buy in and really do it for the man next to them."

The Nuggets are one of 11 active NBA franchises without a title, and three additional teams haven't won it in their current city. Denver lost the 1976 ABA Finals to the New York Nets in its only other championship series, but this June certainly looks like the Mile High City's turn to celebrate.

Coach Michael Malone shared warm hugs after the game with Nuggets owners Stan and Josh Kroenke, who are about to have the third team in their Kroenke Sports & Entertainment portfolio playing for a championship in the past 16 months: The Los Angeles Rams won the Super Bowl in February 2022, and the Colorado Avalanche claimed the Stanley Cup four months later. Arsenal is also finishing second in the Premier League in what could be its best season in nearly two decades.

## James Mulling Retirement After Lakers Exit

**L**OS ANGELES (Dispatches) - LeBron James is reportedly considering retirement from basketball after the Los Angeles Lakers were swept out of the NBA playoffs by the Denver Nuggets today.

ESPN reported that the 38-year-old was thinking about "walking away" from the sport after the Lakers' defeat brought the curtain down on his 20th season in the league.

Chris Haynes, a reporter for the TNT broadcaster, said in a separate tweet citing league sources that James' retirement was "under consideration."

James himself fuelled speculation about his future in a cryptic post-game press conference, saying that he planned to take time to reflect on the next stage of his career after the Lakers' exit.

Asked for his reflections on the past season, in which he became the league's all-time leading points scorer and took a rejuvenated Lakers to the brink of the NBA Finals, James said the campaign had been "challenging."

"I don't know. I think it was okay. I don't like to say it's a successful year because I don't play for anything besides winning championships at this point in my career," said James, who delivered a vintage 40-point performance in the Lakers' 113-111 loss.

## Halep Says ITIA Trying To Delay Her Doping Hearing Further

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Former world number one Simona Halep has accused the International Tennis Integrity Agency (ITIA) of seeking to further delay her independent tribunal doping hearing and said she is being denied her right to be heard.

The 31-year-old former Wimbledon and French Open champion has been provisionally suspended since October 2022 after testing positive for banned blood-booster roxadustat at the U.S. Open last year.

Halep has strongly denied knowingly taking the banned substance and has said she has evidence to show that small amounts of the anaemia drug entered her system from a licensed supplement that was contaminated.

Halep has said she sent evidence about the contamination to the International Tennis Federation in December and hoped her case would be heard by an independent tribunal in February but that it was postponed and a new date in March was also put back.

Last week Halep was charged with a further and separate breach of the Tennis Anti-Doping Programme and asked again to be judged by an independent tribunal.

In a statement posted on Twitter, Halep said that while the ITIA was publicly stating it was committed to engaging her in an "empathetic, efficient and timely manner" they were at the same time requesting the tribunal delay her hearing for a third time.

"I am once again extremely shocked and disappointed by the ITIA's attitude," she added.

"The ITIA publicly states one thing while privately doing another, I have repeatedly asked for my hearing and the ITIA has repeatedly sought to delay it.

"When is it going to stop? I ask the question once again," said Halep. "I am entitled to a quick hearing. Acting this way is contrary to my rights."

The independent ITIA, which was established by tennis' international governing bodies to oversee integrity matters such as doping and corruption, said in a statement to Reuters that it proposed both charges were heard together to avoid multiple hearings.

# Saka Signs New Long-Term Arsenal Deal



Saka joined Arsenal as an eight year old and has featured in all of the team's Premier League matches over the past two seasons.

The 21-year-old said he was at the ideal club to improve even further after emerging as one of Arsenal's key players.

"I think I have everything I need to become the best player I can be, and that's why I'm happy to stay here and be here for the future, because I really believe that we can achieve big things," he said on Tuesday.

"For me, it's about achieving my personal ambitions -- how much I push myself and demand from myself each game, week in, week out.

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Bukayo Saka has signed a new long-term contract at Arsenal, saying the Premier League club is the "right place to make the next step" in his blossoming career.

The England forward played a pivotal role in the club's unsuccessful title push this season, scoring 14 goals in all competitions and providing 11 assists.

Saka joined Arsenal as an eight year old and has featured in all of the team's Premier League matches over the past two seasons.

The 21-year-old said he was at the ideal club to improve even further after emerging as one of Arsenal's key players.

"I think I have everything I need to become the best player I can be, and that's why I'm happy to stay here and be here for the future, because I really believe that we can achieve big things," he said on Tuesday.

"For me, it's about achieving my personal ambitions -- how much I push myself and demand from myself each game, week in, week out.

"Then I have all the right people around me in terms of family, and when I come to the training ground, my teammates, the coaching staff."

London-born Saka, who made his Arsenal debut in 2018, said the club were moving in the right direction despite missing out on the Premier League title this year.

The Gunners topped the table for much of the season but stumbled in the home stretch as Manchester City collected their third consecutive title.

They are guaranteed to finish second and will play Champions League football next season for the first time since the 2016/17 season.

"Time is on our side," said Saka. "You can look at our team and a lot of the players are young. We're hungry, and a lot of us haven't won trophies at Arsenal so we want to achieve big things."

Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta welcomed the new deal, which will reportedly keep Saka with the Gunners until 2027.

"Retaining our best young talents is key to our continued progress and Bukayo represents such an important part of our squad now and for the future," said the Spaniard.

"As well as being a fantastic talent, Bukayo is a special person, he's loved by us all and he is a credit to himself and his family for the hard work and commitment they have all made to get to this level today."

## Spain Arrests Seven Over Vinicius Racism Incidents

**M**ADRID (Dispatches) - Spanish police arrested seven people over two incidents of racial abuse targeting Real Madrid's Brazilian star Vinicius Junior, including one this weekend that sparked an international outcry.

Spain's football league, La Liga, has been engulfed in a racism scandal after the 22-year-old forward was subjected to racist taunts during Sunday's 1-0 defeat at Valencia and later sent off.

The player has been taunted by opposition fans since joining Real in 2018 but the latest incident has kicked up a storm over whether Spain is doing enough to stamp out racism in football.

Police on Tuesday arrested three youths in Valencia for "insults and gestures with racist overtones" towards the player that amounted to "an alleged hate crime" during Sunday's match.

After their statements were taken, they were later "released on condition they appear when summoned" by the public prosecutor's office or the courts, a police spokesman told AFP.

Sunday's game was held up for several minutes and with the referee saying that shouts of "monkey" had been directed at Vinicius.



## Guardiola Urges Man City to Maintain High Standards

**L**ONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola expects a decline in Manchester City's performance after clinching the Premier League title but urged his treble-chasing side to maintain their high standards ahead of the FA Cup and Champions League final, the manager said.

City, who wrapped up the title when second-placed Arsenal were beaten at Nottingham Forest over the weekend, have won 12 successive games in the top flight. City have 88 points from 36 matches, seven more than Arsenal, who have one game remaining.

But City are now focused on sporting immortality by beating Manchester United in the FA Cup final and Inter Milan in the Champions League showpiece.

"The best way to prepare for the finals is to be ready. We set these types of standards and we have to maintain it," Guardiola told reporters ahead of trip to sixth-placed Brighton & Hove Albion.

"It is normal that we are going to drop because we expended a lot of energy already. The energy we spend was massive and once we lifted the trophy it's normal you drop.

