

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian, Along With a Group of Managers and Deputies of The Ministry Renewed their Commitments to Ideals of the Founder of the Islamic Revolution in Imam Khomeini's Mausoleum

IRAN NEWS

On the Occasion of the Anniversary Of the Liberation of South Lebanon From the Occupation of the Israeli Regime, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Felicitated the Lebanese Nation

VOL. XXIX, No. 7776 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY MAY 27, 2023 - KHORDAD 06, 1402

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Iran Does Not Recognize Taliban

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian has reiterated the necessity of establishing an inclusive government in Afghanistan while clarifying that Tehran does not recognize the ruling faction in Kabul.

"We insist on the formation of an inclusive government in Afghanistan because the Taliban are just part of and the entire reality in Afghanistan," he told Iranian diplomats at the mausoleum of Imam Khomeini Thursday during an event renewing allegiance to the late founder of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

He also expressed Tehran's displeasure over the Taliban's move to deprive Afghan women and girls from pursuing studies and getting education.

"We regard such measures as contrary to the teachings of Islam's prophet," Amirabdollahian said.

Hirmand River water rights must follow legal channel

The Iranian top diplomat further pointed to Iran's water rights from Afghanistan's part of the Hirmand River according to the 1973 bilateral accord between the neighboring countries and underlined the need to abide by legal path of the agreement.

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Iran Wheat Output to Rise 10% to 14.5m mt

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the United States Department of Agriculture (USDA) show that wheat output in Iran is going to increase by 10% this year.

USDA figures cited in a report by Iran's official IRNA news agency showed that total wheat output in Iran could reach 14.5 million metric tons (mt) this year, up from 13.2 million mt reported in 2022.

The figures mean Iran will be the 12th largest wheat supplier in the world in 2023, said the USDA.

That comes as global wheat production is expected to remain almost flat this year at 789 million mt from 788 million mt reported last year, showed the figures.

The USDA said Iran's wheat imports will drop by 0.5 million mt to 4 million mt this year, adding that wheat inventories in the country will remain at levels seen at the end of 2022 which were reported to be 4.44 million mt.

The figures showed that Iran's barley output is also expected to increase by 7% to 3.2 million mt in 2023 while imports will reach 2.3 million mt over the same period, up slightly from 2.2 million mt of imports reported last year.

Iran has sought to rely more on domestic agricultural output for its food security purposes since 2018 when the United States imposed sanctions on the country and restricted its access to international trade.

Iran Launches New Precision-Guided Kheibar Ballistic Missile



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran successfully test-launched its most advanced Khorramshahr-class ballistic missile called Kheibar, a medium-range precision-guided missile that can carry a 1,500 kg warhead.

The Khorramshahr 4 missile was unveiled Thursday morning in the presence of Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani during an event marking the 41st anniversary of the liberation of the southwestern city of Khorramshahr.

Kheibar is a liquid-fueled missile with a range of 2,000 kilometers and a warhead weighing 1,500 kilograms, designed by the Ministry of Defense's Aerospace Industries Organization.

The missile's extended range, advanced guidance and control system, and improved structural features further solidify Iran's status as a formidable missile power.

"The message of the Ministry of Defense... is that we are fully committed to defending our country and the achievements of the Islamic Revolution," Ashtiani said during the unveiling ceremony.

"We are taking steps to equip the Armed Forces in various sectors of defense such as missiles, drones, air defense, and more. Undoubtedly, more (achievements) will be unveiled in the future," the defense minister stated.

The Khorramshahr class of missiles have impressive strategic and tactical capabilities.

They are known for their unique guidance and control system during the mid-course phase - the longest stretch of flight when the missile is coasting, or freefalling towards its target.

This feature allows Kheibar to control and adjust its trajectory outside the Earth's atmosphere, and to deactivate its guidance system upon entering the atmosphere, giving it complete immunity against electronic warfare attacks.

"One of the distinguishing features of this missile is its radar evasiveness and the ability to bypass enemy air defenses due to its low radar cross-section (RCS)," Gen. Ashtiani said.

Thanks to its advanced control system, Kheibar's warhead does not need the typical thin-wing arrangement, which in turn allows the missile to pack up a heavier explosive load.

The Kheibar missile also boasts an incredibly short preparation and launch time.

The use of self-igniting (hypergolic) fuel and the absence of the need for fuel injection and horizontal alignment after the verticalization phase have cut Kheibar's launch time down to less than 12 minutes.

Furthermore, Kheibar is powered by an advanced liquid-fueled engine that enables the missile to reach speeds of 16 Mach outside the atmosphere and 8 Mach within the atmosphere, giving the missile an exceptional impact force.

The high speed at which the warhead makes impact with the designated target also prevents enemy air defense systems from detecting, tracking, and taking action to shoot down the missile.

The unveiling of Kheibar marks a significant advancement in Iran's ballistic missile capabilities and demonstrates the country's commitment to enhancing its defense and deterrent power.

Iranian officials have long asserted that the country's military capabilities are entirely meant for defense, and that its missile program will never be up for negotiations.

Pakistan Seeks U.S. Nod for Iran Gas Pipeline to Avoid \$18b Penalty

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Pakistan is believed to have asked the United States to allow it to build a pipeline for buying gas from Iran or help it pay an expected \$18 billion penalty it would face if it did not complete the project by March 2024.

Diplomatic sources told Dawn that Petroleum Minister Musadik Malik raised this issue with US officials when he visited Washington earlier this month, explaining to them that it's legally bound to either complete the project by March 2024 or pay billions of dollars in penalty.

According to these sources, "Washington is still reviewing the request."

And Michael Kugelman, a scholar of South Asian affairs at Washington's Woodrow Wilson Centre, told Dawn the Biden administration "understands Pakistan's problem" but was in no rush to respond. "With US relations with Iran having worsened in the Biden era, I don't expect the administration to go out of its way to help any country move the needle forward on commercial cooperation with Tehran," he said.

"But Washington also understands that Islamabad's economic interests drive the need to take policy steps that may go against US interests," he added.

"This suggests the administration will be in no hurry to make any move at all, even if this entails the possibility of China stepping in to help Pakistan cover the costs."

When Pakistani journalists asked the US State Department about a recent meeting between Pakistani and Iranian leaders during the opening of a border trading post, one of their spokespersons said: "We are aware of this meeting" where energy cooperation between the two nations was also discussed but "we do not have any comment to provide on the engagement."

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Inflation Rate Increased To 49.1% in May

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's annual consumer inflation rate in the calendar month to late May climbed to 49.1% year-on-year, just shy of an all-time record.

Iran's statistics agency SCI said on Thursday that the annual inflation rate in Iran had increased by 1.5% from the same rate in April.

The rate is the highest reported in Iran in 27 years and the second highest since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in 1979, based on figures and tables provided by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI).

Like many countries in the West Asia region and around the world, Iran has been experiencing high but controlled levels of inflation in recent years.

The country has been hit by double whammy of global inflation and continued US sanctions targeting its oil exports.

Experts say measures adopted by the government to reduce Iran's reliance on oil revenues have fueled inflation although some believe that the measures will pay off in the long-run. Those measures include a decision last summer to cut subsidies given to imports of some basic goods.

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Omani Sultan's Iran Visit To Further Boost Bilateral Cooperation

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian ambassador to Muscat says the upcoming visit by Oman's Sultan Haitham bin Tariq Al Said to Tehran will further strengthen cooperation between the two countries.

Speaking to the official Oman News Agency (ONA) on Wednesday, Ali Najafi said that Iran and Oman have enjoyed brotherly and continuous coordination and consultation regarding bilateral, regional and international relations.

"In addition to the historical, cultural and religious ties and commonalities, there is a broad prospect for promoting political, economic, international and regional cooperation between the two countries," he added.

"Sultan Haitham's trip to Tehran and his meeting with our high-ranking officials will further enhance the partnership and cooperation between Iran and Oman."

Referring to growing Iran-Oman economic relations, the envoy said that the volume of trade exchange between the two countries has tripled over the past two years and reached \$2 billion.

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Russia Advises U.S., UK To Leave Iran Alone

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The head of Russia's Foreign Intelligence Service (SVR) says the U.S. and the UK should leave Iran alone and mind their own business.

Sergei Naryshkin was quoted as saying by RT that he would advise the "Anglo-Saxons to take care of their own internal civil conflicts. Or better yet, go to their old pal - the devil."

He made the remarks commenting on the U.S. and UK's policies towards Iran at a security forum outside Moscow attended by foreign security officials.

Naryshkin said Washington and London are dismayed by the success of China in reconciling Iran and Saudi Arabia, and view the normalization in a strictly negative light.

The official said that the two allies are wary that Beijing's diplomatic activities in the region could undermine their long-term strategy to weaken the Islamic Republic.

He added that American and British government agencies have been tasked with derailing China's diplomatic efforts and discrediting its role as a mediator.

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Iran Embassy Slams Terrorist Attack in Pakistan

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad has vehemently condemned a Tuesday terrorist attack in northwest Pakistan, which claimed the lives of six Pakistani security forces.

In a statement, the Embassy also expressed its condolences to the families of the victims and expressed regret over the death of Pakistani forces in the terrorist attack. On Tuesday, terrorists stormed a natural-gas and oil extraction plant in northwest Pakistan, killing four police forces and two private guards, according to the police.

Iran Criticizes Int'l Bodies' Silence Over Assassination of Gen. Soleimani

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran criticizes the international bodies' inertia to pursue the assassination of the most brilliant figure in the fight against terrorism, Lt. Gen. Martyr Qasem Soleimani.

Secretary of the Islamic Republic of Iran's High Council for Human Rights said on Wednesday, the brutal attacks against the Iranian people, scientists, and government officials, especially Lt. Gen. Soleimani, who was at the forefront of the fight against terrorism in the region, have remained unanswered by the international community.

Speaking at the 32nd meeting of the UN Commission of Crime Prevention and Justice held in Vienna, Kazem Gharibabadi said Iran has shown its commitment to an effective fight against all kinds of crimes including, human trafficking and money laundering.

Gharibabadi stated that Iran's efforts have led to an effective fight against terrorist activities at the regional and international levels and the prevention of them.

He highlighted the complex nature of cybercrimes and the use of information and communication technologies for criminal purposes and stressed the development of a comprehensive document of cooperation as a priority to prevent the formation of havens for cybercriminals.



Despite the international community's efforts, the use of assassination terror against some nations and governments is still a major challenge ahead of the international community, as it has claimed many innocent lives and brought about detrimental consequences, he said.

Gharibabadi rebuked the actions by certain countries under the flag of counterterrorism that often pose serious challenges to international peace and security.

Using unilateral coercive measures, which is a clear violation of the fundamental principles of international law and the principles mentioned in the Charter of the United Nations, continues to be an obstacle to effective collective reactions to crimes at the international level, as such illegal acts prevent the cooperation of Member States, particularly affected countries in confronting crimes and criminals.

He pointed out Iran's determining role against such terrorist groups as Daesh (ISIS), and its effective help to the terrorist-hit countries in dealing with the US-backed terrorist groups including Al-Qaeda, ISIS, and Jabhat al-Nusra.

Dezful Role Model of Resistance Beyond Borders

TEHRAN (IP) - The Commander of Qods Force of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the people of Lebanon, Iraq, and Syria followed Iran's Dezful in their resisting against the U.S.-backed terrorist group.

Commemorating the Resistance Day, Brigadier General Esmail Qaani said one of the good role models of resistance against enemies is the people of Dezful of Khuzestan, southwestern Iran, who, through their resistance, supported the Iranian force against the Iraqi Baathist regime's 8-year war on Iran.

General Qaani pointed out that Resistance Day in Iran is not confined behind the borders of the country and has inspired other nations of the world.

The reason for naming May 25, Resistance Day of Dezful is due to the people of this city's resistance against the Iraqi Baathist regime's non-stop bombardments during the imposed war.

The people of Dezful did not evacuate the city but kept on their routine life despite the Iraqi regime's bombardments.

The Iranian city was shelled by rockets more than 200 times and was 20,000 times by bullets.

Dezful was at the forefront of the Iranian cities against the Iraqi invasion.

Majlis Receives Gov't Bill on Confronting Hijab Violations

TEHRAN (IFP) - Majlis receives a government-approved bill aimed at confronting violations of mandatory hijab, or headscarf, in public locations through fines and denial of banking services to wrongdoers.

In adopted, the bill, which was initially proposed to the administration by the Iranian Judiciary, will task Iranian law enforcement forces to notify those who remove hijab in public of their offense via text messages and other similar means, in the first stage.

If the recipient refuses to pay heed and fails to wear hijab for a second time, she will be ordered to pay one-sixth of 8 million tomans, which is the maximum amount of eighth-grade fine, and one-third of the same amount, in case of a repetition for a third time.

If the offender refuses to pay the fine within one month, the fine will double and the Central Bank will be ordered to collect the amount from her bank account. If it is not possible to collect the fine, the individual will be denied all banking services until the fine is settled.

Iran, Pakistan Not to Allow Saboteurs to Damage Mutual Ties

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - Pakistani Foreign Minister Bilawal Bhutto Zardari says that Tehran and Islamabad will not allow the saboteurs to harm the bilateral relations between the two neighboring countries.

The Pakistani foreign minister made the remarks on Thursday in an exclusive interview with IRNA in reference to a Saturday terrorist killing of five Iranian border guards at the joint border with Pakistan.

Zardari vehemently condemned the terrorist incident and said that Iran and Pakistan are determined not to allow such plots to overshadow the bilateral relations of the two countries.

Pakistani Ministry of Foreign Affairs had earlier issued a statement to slam the terrorist attack and said that Islamabad is committed to cooperate with Tehran in the fight against terrorism.

The border guards were martyred in Saravan late on Saturday after terrorists raided a border security checkpoint in the region. The terrorists then retreated to areas in the territory of Pakistan.

As a result of the confrontation, five border guards were martyred and two others were wounded.

Iranian Diplomat Highlights Need for Collective Security

TEHRAN (MNA) - An Iranian envoy said that as always Iran is ready to cooperate with other countries to ensure stable peace and security in the region and the world.

Hossein Maleki, Deputy Ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Moscow made the remarks at the 11th "International Meeting of High-Ranking Officials Responsible for Security Matters, where he also said, "Today, Iran has undeniable capacities that can provide great opportunities for cooperation in the region as well as on the international stage."

Stating that today the international system is facing many challenges that require the collective participation of countries, Maleki added, "Iran believes that all countries should contribute to international security and the creation of a new world order."

The Iranian diplomat further pointed out, "We believe that the solution to ensure collective security in our peripheral region is a local solution that is possible only with the participation of regional countries and without foreign intervention."

"Unilateral sanctions as a tool of domination have become a serious challenge for independent countries. These cruel sanctions, or in other words, economic terrorism, hinder the development and economic growth of countries," the Iranian diplomat continued.

Elsewhere in his remarks, Maleki referred to Iran's nuclear program and stressed that "Iran's peaceful nuclear program is not a threat to international peace and security."

He further condemned the campaign that the West has launched against the Iranian nuclear program, saying that it does not represent the international community's concerns, "but rather the reflection of the domination system's concern about the development and progress of independent countries such as Iran."

Iran Seeks Deeper Ties With Emerging Economies in Asia

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi underscored the country's balanced cooperation with emerging powers in Asia, saying the Islamic Republic adheres to the policy of regionalism and neighborliness in its relations with various countries.

Raisi made the statement on Wednesday upon his arrival at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport after a two-day trip to Jakarta on an official visit at the invitation of his Indonesian counterpart, Joko Widodo.

Raisi described Iran's policy as economic convergence and multilateralism as well as comprehensive and balanced cooperation with Asia's emerging powers, such as China, India and Indonesia.

"Our policy in Asia is comprehensive and we intend to cooperate with emerging economies in Asia; both with China and Russia and with India and Indonesia," the Iranian president said, adding, "Our economy and that of Indonesia are complementary. During this trip, we were able to sign 11 cooperation documents between the two countries."

Raisi stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran's relationship with different countries is based on

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



the "policy of regionalism and neighborliness."

The Iranian chief executive said the trip to the most Muslim-populated country in the world, which has a special and privileged position in the region and also in the ASEAN, had different dimensions, referring to the 10-nation Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

In a meeting held with Indonesia's high-ranking officials, as Raisi said, the will of the two countries to develop commercial, economic, political and cultural relations between the two countries was emphasized.

The Iranian president said Tehran and Jakarta have common views on regional and extra-regional issues, including on Palestine and the Palestinian cause.

Raisi also expressed his appreciation of the friendly and brotherly government of Indonesia for their warm welcome to the Iranian delegation.

During his visit to the Southeast Asian country, the Iranian president held meetings with his Indonesian counterpart and the speakers of the House of Representatives and the People's Consultative Assembly of Indonesia.

Iran and Egypt to Exchange Ambassadors in 2023

TEHRAN (IFP) - Tehran and Cairo are expected to exchange envoys within months, as part of a process mediated by Oman to normalize relations between the two regional powers, Egyptian officials told The National.

Two officials said that a meeting has been agreed in principle between President Abdel Fattah El Sisi of Egypt and his Iranian counterpart, Ebrahim Raisi.

They added the meeting is likely to take place by the end of the year.

The news comes days after Oman's ruler, Sultan Haitham bin Tariq, paid a two-day visit to Egypt where he and El Sisi discussed Cairo's relations with Tehran, according to the officials.

Heading a high-ranking official delegation, Oman's Sultan will visit Tehran on Sunday.

The Iranian Foreign Ministry has announced that Tehran welcomes any positive development or progress that would strengthen the relations between Iran and Egypt.

Iran and Egypt cut diplomatic ties in 1980 after Cairo admitted the former Shah of Iran and recognized Israel.

Iran, Uzbekistan to Share Experiences in Preservation of Historical Heritage

ISFAHAN (IP) - The political, security, and social deputy of Isfahan Governorate (central Iran) emphasized the need to share knowledge and capabilities between Iran and Uzbekistan in the field of preservation of historical heritage.

Mohammadreza Jannesari, the political, security, and social deputy of Isfahan Governorate, in a meeting with "Shohret Mahmoudov", the deputy of cultural heritage and tourism of Uzbekistan, referring to the cultural closeness between the two countries of Iran and Uzbekistan, said: "If we look at the historical monuments of the two countries, there are many commonalities, the reason for which is the friendship and brotherhood between the two nations from many years ago."

The political, security, and social deputy of Isfahan Governorate added: "The two nations have a very deep feeling of brotherhood with each other, and this is the feeling that stands out in the national symbols of the two countries."

Shohrat Mahmoudov, Deputy Director of Cultural Heritage and Tourism of Uzbekistan, also pointed out the cultural commonalities between Iran and Uzbekistan and emphasized the need to use Iran's experiences in the field of cultural heritage protection and said: "We have started renovations in the city of Bukhara, and in this regard, we need the help of Iranian masters, and we want to create educational workshops and exchanges of ideas so that this great art and science can be shared."

China Pavilion to Be Built at Iranian University Library

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Chinese Embassy in Iran and Iran's Allameh Tabataba'i University (ATU) agreed to establish a China Pavilion at the university library.

Under a memorandum of understanding signed between the two sides, a China Pavilion covering about 400 square meters will be built in ATU's central library, offering students with Chinese books and cultural products.

In an address to the ceremony, Chinese Ambassador to Iran Chang Hua said Chinese and Iranian peoples have had friendly ties since a long time ago.

"Ever since the establishment of their diplomatic relations over half a century ago, China and Iran have withstood the test of the vicissitudes of the international situation, and the friendship between the two peoples has grown stronger over time," he noted.

The Chinese envoy added in recent years, the China-Iran

cooperation has constantly progressed in all areas, stressing that the two countries' cultural and social exchanges have led to significant achievements.

"I believe that the future of the China-Iran friendship is in the hands of the two countries' youths," said Chang, expressing hope that the students would become envoys of the China-Iran friendship and make their own contribution to enhancing the traditional friendship between the two countries.

For his part, the ATU's president told Xinhua the China Pavilion will definitely help the researchers, Chinese culture fans, and Chinese language learners to get access to more Chinese resources at the university.

He added Iran is also ready to provide students studying the Persian language at China's universities with access to Iranian books.

ATU is an Iranian public university specializing in the areas of humanities and social sciences, with a Center for Chinese Research established in 2019.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:01
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:31
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:08
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:51

43. O ye who believe! Approach not prayers with a mind befogged, until ye can understand all that ye say, nor in a state of ceremonial impurity (Except when travelling on the road), until after washing your whole body. If ye are ill, or on a journey, or one of you cometh from offices of nature, or ye have been in contact with women, and ye find no water, then take for yourselves clean sand or earth, and rub therewith your faces and hands. For Allah doth blot out sins and forgive again and again.

Surah 4. Women (43)

ACU to Launch Banking System To Rival SWIFT

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Members of the Asian Clearing Union (ACU), a regional banking bloc that seeks easier clearing of payments between its member states, have agreed to launch a system that will rival the SWIFT international payment network.

ACU members agreed in a summit in the Iranian capital Tehran on Wednesday to launch their own banking messaging system within a month, according to a deputy governor of the Central Bank of Iran (CBI).

"The (ACU) countries decided to have a customized system for themselves considering that SWIFT is not available to all countries and given that it has its own costs," said Mohsen Karimi, CBI's deputy for international affairs.

Karimi said the messaging system will cover all demands for clearing monetary transactions among nine members of the ACU.

The move is in line with statements by ACU members in recent months suggesting



they are eager to join regional and international efforts to reduce the weight of the US dollar in global trade, a process which has become known as de-dollarization.

Countries like India and Iran, who are key members of the ACU, have accelerated efforts to de-dollarize their foreign trade, especially since a war broke out in Ukraine in early 2022, leading to Russia's exclusion from SWIFT.

CBI governor Mohammad Reza Farzin, who became ACU's rotating chair on Wednesday, said the bloc will seek to admit new members and will diversify the basket of currencies it accepts for payment settlements to help the de-dollarization campaign.

Belarus and Mauritius applied for ACU membership during the Wednesday summit in Tehran where top bankers from non-member states like Russia were also present.

Iran, Cuba Agree on Dollar-Free Exchange of Medical Items

GENEVA (IP) - The Iranian and Cuban Health Ministers agreed to cooperate in the elevation and exchange of health-based products while pursuing dollar-free trade.

Meeting with his Cuban counterpart José Angel Portal Miranda on the sidelines of the World Health Assembly (WHA) meeting, Bahram Einollahi said that Iran and Cuba have had close and constructive ties after the victory of the Islamic Revolution, an example of which was the cooperation in producing vaccine during the corona pandemic.

Einollahi expressed hope that effective connections would be formed between the health networks of the two countries, taking into account the existing common grounds.

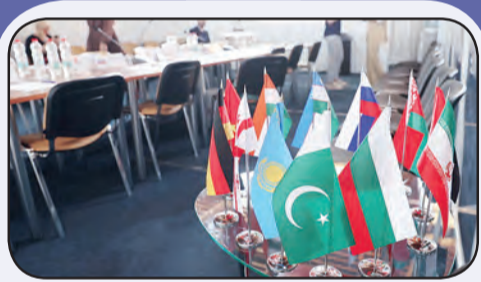
José Angel Portal Miranda, for his part, called for further exchange of health technologies, particularly vaccine production.

He said that Cuba would welcome cooperation with Iran in healthcare, disease prevention, treatment, medicines, and medical items.

Iran's Minister of Health left Tehran for Geneva, Swiss, to take part in the 76th meeting of the World Health Assembly which was kicked off on May 21 and is underway until May 30.

Representatives from 194 countries are participating in the meeting which is underway in the Geneva-based UN health headquarters.

Tehran, Minsk Have Great Potential for Cooperation In Petrochemistry



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Belarus and Iran have a great potential for cooperation in the field of oil, petrochemistry and other industries, Alireza Seyhoun, the commercial attaché of the Iranian Embassy in Belarus, told the media on the sidelines of the 24th edition of the Spring in Gomel expo.

Iran and Belarus in general and Gomel Oblast in particular have established good cooperation over the past 20 years, Alireza Seyhoun noted. "Iranian and Belarusian partners exchange delegations, sign agreements. In Gomel Oblast, these are BMZ, Gomselmash, Mozyr Oil Refinery," he noted. Over the years, mutual deliveries of products and goods have been established.

"At the Spring in Gomel expo we saw the huge industrial potential of Gomel Oblast. There are very good opportunities for cooperation," Alireza Seyhoun said.

He expressed hope that the exchange of delegations will continue in the future. "We always urge Iranian companies to visit Gomel Oblast and get acquainted with the capabilities of your companies," the commercial attaché added.

"We have a very great potential for cooperation in the field of oil and petrochemicals, and also in the manufacture of products, spare parts for industrial enterprises, mechanical engineering," Alireza Seyhoun is convinced.

Another area where, in his opinion, prospects for mutually beneficial partnership are great is food. "Several Iranian brands have already officially started working in the Belarusian market. They are 'probing' the tastes and culinary preferences of Belarusians. Our producers are ready to supply even more products to Belarus," the trade adviser said.

"In Iran, as well as in Belarus, all manufacturing industries are well-developed. We are trying to learn more about the possibilities of the Republic of Belarus in terms of organizing the supply of goods, both from Iran to Belarus, and from Belarus to Iran. The Iranians have a great interest [in Belarusian products]. We are always looking for something new, interesting, for example, in petrochemistry, mechanical engineering, including at this expo," Alireza Seyhoun summed up.

New Airport Launched in Iran's Remote East

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A new airport has been launched in Iran's remote east amid efforts to expand transportation infrastructure in the region.

A Thursday flight carrying Iran's Parliament Speaker Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf and other senior government officials was the first to land in the airport in Gonabad, a city of nearly 50,000 people located some 230 kilometers from the Iranian border with Afghanistan.

The airport has been launched to boost economic activity in the region, according to a report by the official IRNA news agency which said that businesspeople in Gonabad and other cities in the region had to travel some 300 kilometers to reach the nearest airports in Iran's east.

The project started some 30 years ago, said the report, adding that it accelerated in recent years amid Iran's plans to complete a north-south transit corridor that passes through its east.

Gonabad is one of the key cities in Khorasan Razavi, an Iranian province where Iran's second largest city of Mashhad is located.

Business activity in the region is expected to grow with the construction of a key railway from Mashhad to Zahedan near the border with Pakistan that passes via Gonabad. The railway will continue from Zahedan to Iran's only ocean port of Chabahar on the Sea of Oman.

The government has spent some 35 trillion rials (\$75 million) on the construction of a first phase of the airport in Gonabad, said the report by the IRNA which added that investors had agreed to pay for charter flights to and from the airport in the next

10 months to help boost its traffic.

Meanwhile in the ceremony Minister of Roads and Urban Development of the Islamic Republic of Iran emphasized that the completion of the Chabahar-Sarakhs railway is the most important transit project in Iran.

Chabahar-Sarakhs railway is 1,350 km long in the form of 2 sections of Chabahar-Zahedan and Zahedan-Sarakhs rail lines, the second step in the North-South Transit Corridor Project is the completion of the Chabahar-Zahedan railway, which last year (1401) Zahedan-Khash section was put into operation.

The Zahedan-Sarakhs railway, which is along the Chabahar-Zahedan axis, connects the region's only ocean port to the main rail transit border of the country, Sarakhs, and connects Turkmenistan and four other Central Asian countries to the Indian Ocean through rail lines.

Mehrdad Bazrpash, the Minister of Roads and Urban Development, said at the opening ceremony of Gonabad airport: "The south-north railway crossing line that connects Chabahar to Sarakhs will be one of the milestones in the development of the Razavi Khorasan as well as the region."

He said: "Completing the corridor chains in the country is emphasized by the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution, and completing the Chabahar railway crossing in Sistan and Baluchistan province and Sarakhs in Khorasan Razavi province is the turning point in the field of completing the country's crossings."

The Minister of Roads and Urban Development also said: "Neighbors and investors are waiting for the completion of Iran's railway crossings."

IRISL to Expand Activities in Ports of PSEEZ

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Pars Special Economic Energy Zone (PSEEZ) signed a MoU with the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Line (IRISL) to expand marine transport services.

According to reports, The CEO of IRISL Mr. Mohammad Reza Modarres Khiabani and the CEO of PSEEZ Mr. Sakhavat Asadi signed the MoU and both sides emphasized necessity of precise implementation of details of the MoU and termed the MoU a valuable step in line with developing transport services.

Modarres Khiabani hailed the introactive approach of PSEEZ and said that implementation of details of the MoU based on its timetable is very important. He said that the IRISL sees the MoU an auspicious event which can be a new chapter for regional



blossom and benefit of the country from the logistic services in exports by the IRISL.

Then the CEO of PSEEZ Mr. Asadi pointed to the mission of the portal services of Pars in offering portal services to incoming vessels carrying project goods of refineries and petrochemical companies and said that Pars Portal Complex as the main vein of imports and exports of goods in the region is one of the main factors in attracting the domestic and foreign investors and these services will be stepped up in the near future.

He expressed hope with broadening cooperation, the passenger shipping lines would be launched to Assaluyeh and Kish as well as the Persian Gulf.

It is worth noting that Pars port complex has 25 berths and 2 floating piers, and Pars service port has 10 berths with 150 hectares of land.

During this meeting, Modarres Khiabani continued his visit by traveling to Assalouyeh and meeting with officials of an investing group.

IRICA Records Nearly Three-Fold Increase in Non-Oil Exports to Tajikistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's non-oil exports to Tajikistan increased by 2.7 times in value and 2.6 times in volume, during the first month of the current Iranian year (March 21 through April 20, 2023), compared to the same month last Iranian year, Trend reports via the statistics of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Within the 1st month, Iran exported 19,800 tons of non-oil products worth \$13.4 million to Tajikistan.

Meanwhile, Iran's export of non-oil products to Tajikistan stood at 7,470 tons worth \$4.93 million in the first month of last Iranian year (March 21 through April 20, 2022).

Iran mainly exported petrochemical products, steel products, agricultural and food products and, etc. to Tajikistan in the first month. In total, Iran exported about 279,000 tons of non-oil products worth approximately \$79.6 million to Tajikistan in the last Iranian year (March 21, 2022 through March 20, 2023), which is an increase of 86.2 percent in value and 87.6 percent in volume compared to the preceding year (March 21, 2021 through March 20, 2022).

Overall, Iran exported about 10.5 million tons of non-oil products worth approximately \$3.65 billion for the first month of the current Iranian year (March 21 through April 20, 2023). This is a decrease of 12.9 percent in value, while an increase of 17.7 percent in volume compared to the same month in the last year.

Chinese Company to Build Iran-Russia Road for New Energy Facilities

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Shenzhen-listed Jilin Jinguan Electric Co Ltd signed a memorandum of understanding (MoU) to build a road between Iran and Russia for the construction of new energy facilities, it said on Wednesday.

The company plans to build 70 optical storage and charging stations worth 1.4 billion yuan and 3,400 charging facilities worth 68 billion yuan (\$9.8 billion), according to a filing on Shenzhen stock exchange, Reuters reported.

The total planned length of the road is 3,500 kilometres, the company said after signing the MoU with Russian's Chamber of Commerce and Industry in the Middle East (CCI).

Man Arrested After Crashing Into Gates at Downing Street

LONDON (Dispatches) - Police arrested a man on suspicion of criminal damage and dangerous driving, and local officers, rather than counterterrorism detectives, were handling the investigation.

Prime Minister Rishi Sunak was in his office at the time of the crash, which revived memories of attacks on London's government district.

It was not immediately clear whether the crash was deliberate. Video footage posted on social media showed a silver hatchback car heading straight for the gates at low speed across Whitehall, the main thoroughfare in London's government district.



Militia Leader Gets 18 Years in Prison Over U.S. Capitol Attack

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The founder of the far-right Oath Keepers militia was handed an 18-year prison sentence for seditious conspiracy in the 2021 attack on the US Capitol, the toughest penalty given yet over the January 6 assault.

Stewart Rhodes was one of more than 1,000 people charged over the attack, which, encouraged by then-president Donald Trump, aimed to block Congress from certifying Joe Biden as the winner of the November 2020 election. "Seditious conspiracy is among the most serious crimes an American can commit," said Judge Amit Mehta in pronouncing the sentence.



S. Korea, U.S. Troops Hold Large Live-Fire Drills



SEOUL (Dispatches) - The South Korean and U.S. militaries conducted large live-fire drills near the border with North Korea on Thursday, despite the North's warning that it won't tolerate what it calls an invasion rehearsal on its doorstep.

The drills, the first of five rounds of live-fire exercises through mid-June, mark 70 years since the establishment of the military alliance between Seoul and Washington. North Korea typically reacts to such major South Korean-U.S. exercises with missile and other weapons tests.

Since the start of 2022, North Korea has test-launched more than 100 missiles, but none since it fired a solid-fuel intercontinental ballistic missile in mid-April. It says the tests are a response to expanded military drills between the U.S. and South Korea, but observers say North Korea aims to advance its weapons development and then wrest greater concessions from its rivals in eventual diplomacy.

The U.S.-South Korean firing exercises, called "Combined annihilation firepower drills," are the biggest of their kind. The drills have been held 11 times since they began in 1977, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry.

The drills involved 2,500 troops and 610 weapons systems such as fighter jets, attack helicopters, drones, tanks and artillery from South Korea and the United States, according to the South Korean Defense Ministry. The most recent exercises in 2017 drew about 2,000 soldiers and 250 weapons assets from both countries.

The drills simulated artillery and aerial strikes on front-line North Korean military facilities in response to an attack. The troops later practiced precision-guided attacks on simulated targets in the rear areas to "completely annihilate" North Korean military threats, according to a ministry statement.

It said South Korea will seek to establish "peace through overwhelming strength" to counter North Korean threats. North Korea didn't immediately respond to the start of the drills. Last Friday, its state media called the drills "a

typical North Korea-targeted war rehearsal," saying it "cannot but take a more serious note of the fact" that the exercises are held a few kilometers (miles) from its frontier.

The North's Korean Central News Agency said the U.S. and South Korea would face unspecified consequences over "their madcap nuclear war racket."

Earlier this year, the South Korean and U.S. militaries conducted their biggest field exercises in five years. The U.S. also sent the nuclear-powered USS Nimitz aircraft carrier and nuclear-capable bombers for joint exercises with South Korea.

Moon Seong Mook, an analyst for the Seoul-based Korea Research Institute for National Strategy, said North Korea could use the South Korea-U.S. drills as a pretext to resume testing activities. He said domestic issues such as North Korea's push to increase agricultural production during the rice-planting season could still affect its decision on weapons tests.

"North Korea can't help feeling some burdens over the South Korea-U.S. joint firepower drills being held for the first time in six years and in the strongest manner," Moon said.

In a meeting last month, U.S. President Joe Biden and South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol announced steps to reinforce their deterrence capabilities such as the periodic docking of U.S. nuclear-armed submarines in South Korea, strengthened joint training exercises and establishment of a new nuclear consultative group. Biden also issued a blunt warning that any North Korean nuclear attack on the U.S. or its allies would "result in the end of whatever regime" took such action.

Wagner Army Starts Handing Bakhmut Over to Regular Troops

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's Wagner private army started handing over its positions in Bakhmut to regular Russian troops, five days after declaring full control of the devastated eastern Ukrainian city following the longest and bloodiest battle of the war.

Moscow says capturing Bakhmut opens the way to advances in the eastern region known as the Donbas. Kyiv says the battle drew Russian forces into the city, inflicting high casualties and weakening Moscow's defensive line elsewhere.

Wagner founder Yevgeny Prigozhin, who has repeatedly accused Russia's regular military of abandoning ground captured earlier by his men, said Wagner would be ready to return to the city if needed. "From today at five in the morning, May 25 until June 1, most of the (Wagner) units will rebase to camps in the rear," Prigozhin said in a video, wearing battle gear and standing beside a war-damaged residential block. He says 20,000 of his fighters died taking Bakhmut.

Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said in a message on the Telegram app that Wagner had handed over positions on the city's outskirts but "inside the city itself Wagner fighters remain".

The replacement of Wagner's forces with regular soldiers could provide a tempting target for Ukraine, after its advances on some higher ground around the city over the past week. Serhiy Cherevatyi, a spokesperson for Ukraine's eastern military command, said the number of Russian attacks in the area had fallen in the last three days, and that there had been two military engagements in the last 24 hours, though shelling continued.

"We can definitely note a reduction in attacks and possibly this is linked to their regrouping. It is clear that we have inflicted heavy losses and they need this (to regroup)," he said. Maliar said Russia was also reinforcing its positions on the flanks of Bakhmut and shelling Ukrainian forces to try to stop the Ukrainian advances. Ukraine says it retains a small foothold within the city.



Calls for Unity Dominate Africa Day Celebrations

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Calls for unity dominated Thursday's 60th anniversary celebrations for the continent-wide organization preceding the African Union (AU) that represented 55 member states. But critics say the AU has become a paper tiger where there's plenty of talk, but not much real clout to enforce its mandate.

Africa Day events across the continent honored the founding of the AU's predecessor - The Organization of African Unity (OAU) -- whose original purpose was to fight colonialism before evolving in 2002 to incorporate the aims of defending its members sovereignty and independence as well as encouraging their socio-economic integration.

In Addis Ababa where the AU is seated, Ethiopian Prime Minister Abiy Ahmed underscored that unity is "no more a catchphrase but a means of survival" in an increasingly complex world. South African President Cyril Ramaphosa echoed Abiy, appealing for unity and to "uphold the bonds that frame our destiny."

In his address, Abiy argued for the need of an African permanent seat at the UN Security Council and proportionate representation at the G7 and G20. Ramaphosa urged for improved governance across the continent amid the conflict in Sudan as well as previous coups in Chad, Mali, Guinea and Burkina Faso.

"We use Africa Day to reaffirm the importance of consolidating democracy and consolidating good governance across Africa," Ramaphosa said.

Critics say the AU has failed to achieve some of its objectives, but supporters argue that it's powers are restricted so as to allow the members' heads of state to remain in control.

Kenyan political analyst and lawyer Danstan Omari says the AU is a "dead bulldog" that lacks mechanisms to enforce any of its mandate.

"It's a talk show that has no impact at all. If you don't have the mechanisms to enforce anything, then why are you there? So in my own view it's a body that needs to be completely removed," Omari told the Associated Press.

Sri Lanka President Vows to Conclude Debt-Restructuring Talks by Sept or Nov

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Debt-laden Sri Lanka should be able to conclude a new round of restructuring talks by September or November at the latest, its president said, adding that the negotiations had made "remarkable" progress.

The island nation defaulted on its foreign debt for the first time in its history in April last year, as the worst financial crisis since its independence from Britain in 1948 crushed its economy.

Sri Lanka secured a \$2.9 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in March and has previously said it aims to complete talks on restructuring debt owed to bilateral creditors and overseas bondholders by September.

It was not clear whether President Ranil Wickremesinghe's comment signalled a possible delay in the process. He was speaking as he began a meeting with Japanese Prime Minister Fumio Kishida at the latter's office in Tokyo.

The two leaders affirmed the importance of transparent and fair debt restructuring, according to a summary of their discussions issued by Japan.

"We have made remarkable headway as far as the debt

restructuring talks are concerned," Wickremesinghe said.

"(We) should be able to conclude by September, or November the latest," which he said would mark an end to Sri Lanka's economic crisis.

A Japanese finance ministry official said they did not believe the president was signalling a delay.

Kishida, speaking after his first meeting with the Sri Lankan leader since last September, told a forum: "Sri Lanka is a hub of the Indian Ocean. Japan has led the debate among its creditor countries, and we will continue to contribute and strive to help Sri Lanka get back on a track for growth."

Last month, France, India and Japan unveiled a common platform for talks among bilateral creditors to co-ordinate restructuring of the debt.

"We have now started a creditors' meeting and all for a successful conclusion before the end of 2023," Wickremesinghe said. "Sri Lanka is dedicated to ensure equal treatment for all creditors. We want this exercise to succeed because our experience will enable more middle-income countries to utilise the IMF in ensuring multilateral coordination for debt relief."



Turkish Voters Weigh Final Decision on Next President, Visions for Future

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Two opposing visions for Turkey's future are on the ballot when voters return to the polls Sunday for a runoff presidential election that will decide between an increasingly authoritarian incumbent and a challenger who has pledged to restore democracy.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan, a populist and polarizing leader who has ruled Turkey for 20 years, is well positioned to win after falling just short of victory in the first round of balloting on May 14. He was the top finisher even as the country reels from sky-high inflation and the effects of a devastating earthquake in February.

Kemal Kilicdaroglu, the leader of Turkey's pro-secular main opposition party and a six-party alliance, has campaigned on a promise to undo Erdogan's authoritarian tilt. The 74-year-old former bureaucrat has described the runoff as a referendum on the direction of the strategically located NATO country, which is at the crossroads of Europe and Asia and has a key say over the alliance's expansion.

"This is an existential struggle. Turkey will either be dragged into darkness or light," Kilicdaroglu said. "This is more than an election. It has turned into a referendum."

In a bid to sway nationalist voters ahead of Sunday's runoff, the normally soft-mannered Kilicdaroglu shifted gear and hardened his stance, vowing to send back millions of refugees if he is elected and rejecting any possibility of peace negotiations with Kurdish militants.

The social democrat had previously said he planned to repatriate Syrians within two years, after establishing economic and safety conditions conducive to their return.

He has also repeatedly called on 8 million people who stayed away from the polls in the first round to cast votes in the make-or-break runoff.

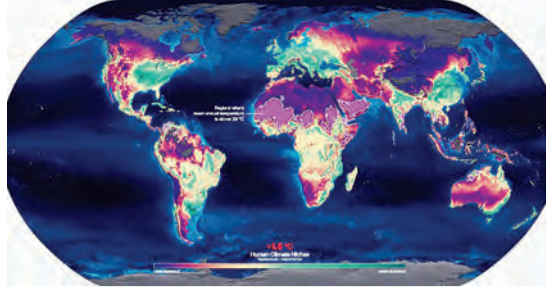
Erdogan scored 49.5% of the vote in the first round. Kilicdaroglu received 44.9%.

At 69, Erdogan is already Turkey's longest-serving leader, having ruled over the country as prime minister since 2003 and as president since 2014. He could remain in power until 2028 if reelected.

Under Erdogan, Turkey has proven to be an indispensable and sometimes troublesome NATO ally.



Middle East Countries Face Extreme Heat Risk



DUBAI (Dispatches) - Countries across the Persian Gulf region and the wider Middle East are highly vulnerable to extreme heat borne out of climate change, with poorer populations being particularly at risk in the decades ahead, a new study has warned.

The research, published in the *Nature Sustainability* journal and released on Monday, looks at how countries are exposed to “unprecedented heat” that it describes as mean annual temperatures of 29 degrees Celsius (84.2 degrees Fahrenheit) or higher.

It evaluates the exposure in two scenarios by 2070, namely if global temperatures rise by 1.5C (2.7F) or by 2.7C (4.9F).

In a scenario where the global population is 9.5 billion people and global temperatures rise by 2.7C (4.9F) by that time, Qatar would have the entirety of its population exposed to extreme heat, closely followed by the United Arab Emirates (UAE) and Bahrain with almost their whole populations exposed, the study found.

Kuwait and Oman would have more than 80 percent of their populations exposed, followed by Saudi Arabia with more than 60 percent and Yemen with about half.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE may be facing a dire situation in either temperature rise scenario as a majority of their populations are also projected to be exposed to extreme heat even if global temperatures rise by 1.5C (2.7F).

While faring relatively better, other countries in the Middle East are not completely safe either, and are expected to experience some levels of high median heat.

Iran, for instance, is cooler on the exposure map, but is still expected to have close to four million people vulnerable.

Last week, the World Meteorological Organization said the next five years will be the warmest period ever recorded as for the first time, global temperatures were now more likely than not to exceed 1.5C (2.7F) of warming until 2027.

Tim Lenton, one of the chief authors of the study, said the Middle East is an already hot region that is expected to face widespread extreme heat in the future.

“This will pose habitability challenges of coping physiologically with extreme heat, producing food, sourcing water, and working outside. These challenges already exist, meaning that adaptation strategies are at least partly already in place,” the professor of climate change at the University of Exeter told Al Jazeera.

According to Lenton, how wealthy a nation is can play a part in how vulnerable it will be. Poorer populations will face a greater risk, with the elderly and the very young, as well as pregnant women and people with illnesses being particularly vulnerable.

“So it is the poorer countries where the greatest risks tend to arise,” Lenton said. “But the rich cannot completely isolate themselves from the impacts of extreme heat even if they have air-conditioned buildings [and] vehicles.”

Muammer Koç, a professor of sustainable development at Qatar’s Hamad Bin Khalifa University, said he agrees with the findings of the study and others similar to it that have predicted extreme weather exposures as a result of global warming.

He told Al Jazeera that like many other places across the globe, the Middle East can also expect rising levels of temperature, heat, humidity and seas that will worsen living conditions.

This, he said, could make certain regions, including parts of the Middle East, unlivable for several months of the year, also leading to the deaths of humans and animals that are crucial to the environment.

Top U.S. Health Official Warns of Social Media’s Risk to Children



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States surgeon general has warned that social media can have a “profound risk of harm to the mental health and well-being of children”, calling for more regulations and research on minors’ use of internet platforms.

In a report released on Tuesday, Vivek Murthy – who acts as the top government spokesperson on public health and is known as the nation’s doctor – drew on existing research to outline social media’s effects on children.

The advisory highlighted potential harms to children and teens from social media use, including sleep deprivation, mental health issues, cyberbullying, access to extreme content and being susceptible to predatory behavior from adults.

“Excessive and problematic social media use, such as compulsive or uncontrollable use, has been linked to sleep problems, attention problems, and feelings of exclusion among adolescents,” Murthy wrote.

The report explained that children and teenagers are especially vulnerable to the impact of social media because they are undergoing a “highly sensitive period of brain development”.

The advisory comes amid growing concerns about the prevalence of social media use among children with government officials struggling to set guidelines.

Earlier this year, Utah passed laws that would require parental consent for minors to join social media platforms and block children’s access to the websites between 10:30pm and 6:30am. The regulations will go into effect next year, but questions have remained on how they will be enforced.

Medical developments, troubling variants, the human impact—it’s all here.

In Tuesday’s advisory, Murthy stressed that the lack of research was a challenge to understanding the issue. “Nearly every teenager in America uses social media, and yet we do not have enough evidence to conclude that it is sufficiently safe for them,” the report read. “Our children have become unknowing participants in a decades-long experiment.”

It added that it is critical for independent researchers and technology firms to work together to “advance our understanding of the impact of social media on children”.

Despite the concern, Murthy noted that social media can have potential benefits for children, including exposing them to others who share their identities and experiences and enabling them to form friendships and have positive interactions online.

But he underscored that social media platforms enticed users to spend more time on their websites through push notifications, infinite scroll, “likes” and content recommendations.

“Social media platforms are often designed to maximize user engagement, which has the potential to encourage excessive use and behavioral dysregulation,” the advisory read.

The report also warned of accessible “extreme, inappropriate, and harmful content” that could lead children to risk-taking and self-harm.

Viral “challenges” on social media often dare users to engage in unconventional and sometimes dangerous behaviour. Last month, a 13-year-old boy in Ohio died of an overdose on allergy medication while trying to copy a TikTok challenge.

“Social media may also perpetuate body dissatisfaction, disordered eating behaviors, social comparison, and low self-esteem, especially among adolescent girls,” Murthy said in his advisory.

The surgeon general issued lists of recommendations for policymakers, researchers, social media companies, parents and children, calling for a “safety-first” approach to protect consumers. He urged implementing age-appropriate health and safety standards for children.

Progress on Human Health in Peril

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Secretary-General António Guterres was addressing the annual opening of the World Health Assembly, the decision making body of the WHO, and said that the agency was born out of a spirit of cooperation, leading to dramatic improvements in human health.

“Global life expectancy – up over 50 percent; Infant mortality – down sixty percent in 30 years; smallpox – eradicated; And polio on the verge of extinction.

But progress is in peril. War and conflict threaten millions. The health of billions is endangered by the climate crisis.”

He said COVID-19 had stalled and even reversed, the steady improvements in public health, and led to backsliding on the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

“But this is not inevitable”, he continued. We can return to the path of progress. We can realize our ambitions for health and wellbeing for all. But only if the world works together. If we cooperate, despite the tensions straining relations between nations.”

He said promoting public health long-term, meant strengthening the independence, authority and financing of the WHO, “which stands at the heart of our international effort” and must have a key coordinating role in fighting the next pandemic.

As international negotiations continue for a new pandemic plan of action, “it is vital to prepare for the health threats to come – from new pandemics to climate dangers – so that we prevent where we can, and respond fast and effectively where we cannot”, the UN chief said.

Reinforcing that message in his introductory speech to the Assembly, WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, said that the world’s emergence from the dark tunnel of COVID-19, was “not just the end of a bad dream from which we have woken. We cannot simply carry on as we did before.”

The painful lessons of the pandemic must be understood, he said.

“Chief among those lessons is that we can only face shared threats with a shared response.”



Similar to the WHO Framework Convention on Tobacco Control, the pandemic accord under negotiation, “must be a historic agreement to make a paradigm shift in global health security, recognising that our fates are interwoven”, he added.

“This is the moment for us to write a new chapter in global health history, together; to chart a new path forward, together; to make the world safer for our children and grandchildren, together.

How to Unlock Japan’s Baby Boom Savings

TOKYO (Dispatches) - While Japan’s leaders like to argue the country is poor and complain about the ‘lost decades’ or even the ‘lost generation’, the macroeconomic reality is that Japan is the world’s largest creditor country and has been for the last 31 years. So much for ‘lost decades’.

Japan’s total net assets stood at \$3.2tn at the end of 2021 (and almost certainly rose again during 2022 – the latest available data is for end-2021). This was 1.3 times more than those held by Germany, the world’s number two creditor, and was well ahead of China. Japan is a very rich country. Its stock of assets is the envy of the world.

Unfortunately, being rich in financial assets does not mean that the assets are being deployed effectively. In the household sector, financial assets have basically doubled from ¥1,000tn to ¥2,000tn (\$7.2tn to \$14.5tn) over the past 30 years. This asset-doubling happened while wages and disposable income were basically stagnant and income from those assets dropped from ¥40tn in 1994 to ¥25tn in 2022 (\$289bn to \$180bn).

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida’s ‘new capitalism’ agenda is right to suggest an asset-income-doubling plan. But to actually achieve this, some policies worthy of being called ‘new capitalism’ must be designed. To start, it would be wise to focus on Japan’s undisputed strength – the enormous stock of assets accumulated.

Economic growth policies work best when they seize upon a natural trend. And inside Japan, the most powerful megatrend is the unlocking of Japan’s enormous household sector financial assets because of inheritance.

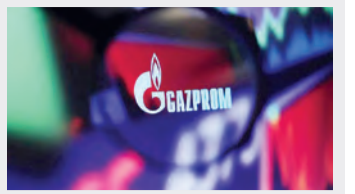
It is estimated that, of the famous ¥2,000tn of household financial wealth, as much as 50% is owned by people aged 70 or older. This implies that somewhere between ¥400tn-¥700tn (\$2.9tn-\$5.1tn) will become ‘unstuck’ due to Japan’s demographic make-up over the coming 10-15 years. While the exact numbers may be subject to debate, there must be no doubt that this is an unprecedented opportunity for policy-makers to get creative. The goal is simple: channel the stock of baby boomer legacy funds towards investments for Japan’s future.

Under ‘old capitalism’ and current policy settings this will not happen. Inheritance tax rates run at around 55%. This means that much of the stock of wealth freed-up by inheritance and generational transfer is destined to pay-down government debt. This is backwards looking – paying down debt is paying for past consumption and past investment. But what Japan needs is forward-looking investments. The coming megatrend of inheritance offers a once-in-a-generation opportunity to do so. Importantly, we are not advocating a cut in the inheritance tax rates. Far from it, we know that some of the usually much-admired Scandinavian countries have dramatically reduced inheritance tax rates. Sweden abolished it completely a couple of years ago. This is potentially dangerous as it opens the possibility of a ‘plutocracy’ developing. Societies can quickly become unstable when money and family privilege are valued higher than ability, initiative and the belief that value is based on merit. Japan abhors instability and fears a return to the ‘Zaibatsu’ plutocracy when eight families controlled as much as two-thirds of Japan’s wealth and economy in the 1920-30s. Japan must and can do better.



Gazprom 2022 Net Profit Falls 40%

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Gazprom's net profit fell more than 40% to 1.226 trillion roubles (\$15.77 billion) last year due to a tax hike in the second half of the year, the Russian energy giant said on Tuesday, adding it would not pay a full-year dividend. The West last year introduced a raft of sanctions against Russia and state companies over Moscow's actions in Ukraine. Gazprom's gas exports, a key source of revenue, have not been directly sanctioned, but export volumes almost halved last year to 101 billion cubic metres. Gazprom's shares fell around 4% after the Kremlin-controlled firm said its board had decided not to pay a full-year dividend after allocating a half-year dividend of 1.2 trillion roubles (\$15 billion).



Eurozone Business Growth Loses Momentum in May

LONDON (Dispatches) - Business growth in the eurozone remained resilient in May but slowed slightly more than thought, as the bloc's dominant services industry lost a little of its shine and the downturn in the manufacturing sector deepened, a survey showed. HCOB's flash Composite Purchasing Managers' Index (PMI) for the bloc, compiled by S&P Global and seen as a good gauge of overall economic health, fell to 53.3 in May from April's 54.1.

While still comfortably above the 50 mark separating growth from contraction, it marked a three-month low and was below a Reuters poll estimate of 53.5.

"Despite signaling a slower pace of growth in May, the overall PMI results so far in Q2 are, at face value, signaling a solid GDP gain. But this is at odds with other surveys and hard data," said Ricardo Amaro at Oxford Economics.

"The forward-looking indicators from the PMIs also temper optimism, showing new orders growth near-stalled in May, while confidence fell to a five-month low. Overall, we remain comfortable with our subdued outlook for Q2 and beyond."

With prices still rising sharply and indebted households having to pay increased borrowing costs, overall demand growth waned sharply. The new business index dropped to 50.4 from 52.5.

In Germany, business activity expanded for a fourth month running, driven exclusively by a services sector revival that more than offset a manufacturing decline in Europe's largest economy.

But in France, activity expanded at the slowest pace in four months as manufacturing continued to contract and growth in the dominant services sector decelerated.

British services companies increased prices at a rapid pace as they saw another month of strong demand, likely adding to the Bank of England's (BoE) worries about the persistence of high inflation.

A PMI for the eurozone services industry dipped from April's one-year high of 56.2 to 55.9, beating the Reuters poll prediction for a steeper fall to 55.6.

Despite a slowing of new business growth, services firms increased headcount at a strong pace - the employment index was at 55.0, albeit lower than April's 11-month high of 55.6.

Meanwhile, demand for manufactured goods sank and the factory PMI fell to 44.6 from 45.8, its lowest since May 2020 when the coronavirus pandemic was cementing its grip on the world. The Reuters poll had predicted a reading of 46.0.

An index measuring output, which feeds into the composite PMI, fell to a six-month low of 46.3 from 48.5.

But largely healed supply chains and lower energy prices meant input costs for factories fell at the fastest pace in over seven years, allowing factories to cut their prices for the first time since September 2020. The output prices index sank to 49.0 from 51.6.

Lebanon Set to Be Grey-Listed by Financial Crime Watchdog

BEIRUT (Dispatches) - Lebanon is likely to be placed on a "grey list" of countries under special scrutiny over unsatisfactory practices to prevent money laundering and terrorism financing, three sources familiar with the matter told Reuters.

Being added to the list would be another major blow to a country in a financial tailspin since 2019 and struggling to secure a deal with the International Monetary Fund.

The local pound has lost more than 98% of its value, plunging most of the population into poverty, and diplomats have been expressing concern for months that the increasingly cash-based economy could hide growing illicit flows of money.

The Middle East and North Africa section of the Financial Action Task Force, a financial crime watchdog, has carried out a preliminary evaluation of Lebanon's economy, which the sources said it will share with member states this week in Bahrain.

The cumulative score of that evaluation puts Lebanon "one mark over the threshold to be grey-listed," said a diplomatic source who had seen a copy of the preliminary report.

According to a draft seen by Reuters, Lebanon was scored as only partially compliant in several categories, including anti-money laundering measures, transparency on beneficial ownership of firms and mutual legal assistance in asset freezing and confiscation.

The FATF declined to comment on the report or the score ahead of its publication.

"Lebanon is pitching for more leniency, and trying to have an improved score on one of the categories so it is no longer within the grey-listing zone," the diplomatic source said.

Lebanon's deputy prime minister Saade Chami, who is heading the country's talks with the IMF, told Reuters he had not seen the draft report and declined to comment on the impact it might have on talks with the lender of last resort.

A financial source familiar with the matter said the draft gave Lebanon a score worthy of grey-listing. "Authorities are trying very hard to stop that from happening," the source said.

A second diplomatic source familiar with the matter said the draft document was already lenient, given the collapsing state of the Lebanese economy. "Anything but greylisting would be a scandal," the source said.

Both diplomatic sources said that the compliance department at the Central Bank's special investigations commission was lobbying FATF member states in a bid to change the score.



World Bank Seeks Grants, New Capital to Fight Global Crises

MANILA (dispatches) - The World Bank will press for more grants and new capital from member countries, even as it leverages its balance sheet to scale up lending for responses to climate change and other global crises, its managing director of operations said.

The lender will rally donor support for a newly established crisis facility for the world's poorest countries that face overlapping global crises, including severe climate events, Anna Bjerde said in an interview.

"We hope to be able to really conclude and have a very strong interest in funding this by the end of the year," Bjerde said, adding that multiple billions of dollars were needed for the crisis facility.

That facility sits within the International Development Association (IDA) fund, the World Bank's fund for the poorest countries. The last replenishment was fast depleted by the pandemic.

COVID-19 pushed many poor countries into debt distress as they were expected to continue servicing their obligations in spite of the massive shock to their finances.

Bjerde is hoping for major progress in courting interest in the facility at the annual meetings of the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and World Bank in Morocco in October.

"We need to really get grants from developed and higher income countries, rich countries, to provide resource transfers to the lower income countries," she said.

The World Bank, whose 25-member executive board on May 3 elected a new president, wants to increase lending to ensure it can better tackle issues such as climate change, pandemics and conflict.

"We need to continuously work on what we call under the evolution roadmap - a better bank but also a bigger bank," Bjerde said.

The World Bank's "evolution road map" calls on its management to develop specific proposals to change its mission, operating model and financial capacity.

It also prescribes exploring options such as a potential new capital increase to unlock more lending and new financing tools.

The capital increase was an ongoing conversation that needed engagement with shareholders, Bjerde said.

"There's a lot of good efforts by World Bank management to look at all opportunities to maximise capital and freeing up resources internally first, through balance sheet optimisation and so forth."

U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen in April said the next steps the World Bank must take include potential changes to allow the bank's private sector and poor country lending arms to lend to sub-sovereign entities such as cities and regional authorities.



IMF No Longer Expects UK to Fall Into Recession in 2023

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund (IMF) said that the U.K. is no longer heading for a recession this year, as it upgraded forecasts published last month and warned that the outlook remains subdued.

The IMF said British gross domestic product now looks set to grow by 0.4% in 2023. In April, it forecast a contraction of 0.3%, the weakest outlook of any major economy.

The Fund said the improved outlook reflected the unexpected resilience of demand, helped in part by faster than usual pay growth, higher government spending and improved business confidence.

The fall in soaring energy costs and the normalization of global supply chains also helped.

"The outlook for growth, while improving somewhat in recent months, remains subdued," the IMF said. "Economic activity has slowed significantly from last year and inflation remains stubbornly high following the severe terms-of-trade shock because of Russia's war in Ukraine and, to some extent, labor supply scarring from the pandemic," it added.

British inflation was likely to fall to around 5% by the end of this year from over 10% in March and should return to its 2% target by the middle of 2025 - broadly in line with forecasts from the Bank of England earlier this month.

The economy was likely to grow by 1% in 2024 and 2% in the following two years, before returning to a long-run growth rate of around 1.5%, the IMF forecast.

S.Korea's Economy No Longer Supported by China

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's central bank chief said on Monday the local economy is no longer supported by China given the sustained decline of its exports to the mainland.

Korea's shipments to China are on course to drop for a 12th straight month in May, according to customs data.

"Many Chinese businesses are manufacturing intermediate goods, which we mainly export," Bank of Korea Governor Rhee Chang-yong remarked on the slump in a meeting with

lawmakers. "The decade-long support from the Chinese economic boom has disappeared."

"Our competitiveness became weaker compared with the past. Securing competitiveness against China over the mid-to long term is a critical issue."

Rhee said other Asian countries such as Japan and Vietnam suffered similar problems as they sold industrial products to China.

Korea's exports to China made up 19.5% of its total overseas sales volume in the first quarter, falling below the 20% mark for the first time since 2005, according to the Korea International Trade Association.

Sales by Korea to its neighbor skidded 23.4% in the first 20 days of this month from a year earlier, separate data from the Korea Customs Service showed. The country's shipments to China have been falling since June 2022.

Total exports dropped 16.1% to \$32.4 billion during the May 1-20 period, with shipments to Vietnam and Japan down 15.7% and 13.9%, respectively. Sales to the US dipped 2% over the same period.

Overseas sales of microchips, Korea's top export item, slumped 35.5%. The country is home to the world's two largest memory chipmakers, Samsung Electronics Co. and SK Hynix Inc.

Imports slumped 15.3% to \$36.7 billion, resulting in a trade deficit of \$4.3 billion. That ramped up the cumulative trade shortfall to \$29.5 billion so far this year, more than 60% of 2022's total deficit.

Such a shortfall is expected to hurt the country's current account, Rhee said.

"The trade account is expected to suffer a deficit of some \$30 billion this year. But the current account is likely to see a surplus of \$24 billion to \$26 billion over the impact of other industries such as tourism," he said. "That still compared with a surplus of some \$80 billion in the heyday."

The country reported a current account surplus of \$85.2 billion in 2021 and \$75.9 billion in 2020, according to the BOK.

EU Risks Losing Energy Transition Race



BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Europe risks being left behind on green energy innovation and investment if various pieces of legislation are not aligned and simplified, the CEOs of Volvo Group and Vattenfall said.

Sweden's state-owned Vattenfall is a major producer of solar, wind and hydropower as well as nuclear and it agreed a 10-year wind power supply deal with Volvo.

Volvo CEO Martin Lundstedt told Reuters after an event in Brussels that Europe could lose the innovation race as a raft of new EU emissions targets and other renewable energy legislation do not align in terms of impact assessments.

Europe's car industry group said on Tuesday that proposed Euro 7 emissions regulations will lead to direct costs that are up to 10 times higher than European Commission forecasts.

"We will deploy these technologies in both North America and Europe because you need to have regional value chains to make it happen," Lundstedt said. "If we're slow ... the innovation power will happen where it happens first."

Legislation produced at the EU level must be more coherent, Lundstedt said, pointing to the U.S. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) that includes \$369 billion of subsidies for electric vehicles and other clean technologies.

"What Europe should think about is the demand signal. We're not building factories without demand... (The) investment clarity that IRA in its current construct is bringing is not only a clear signal to us but also to downstream customers," he said.

"If that (U.S.) demand is exceeding the European demand we have to plan accordingly. That's how markets work. Speed is everything."

Azerbaijan Not to Allow Israel To Attack Iran From Its Soil

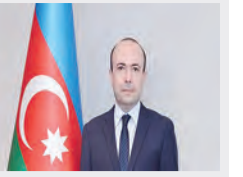
TEHRAN (MNA) – The Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Azerbaijan said that Baku will not allow the Zionist regime to attack Iran from its territory.

Fariz Rzaev made the remarks in an interview with Channel 9 television of the Israeli regime.

“Azerbaijan does not interfere in the conflicts of other countries,

therefore it will not allow Israel to attack Iran from its territory,” he said. “Unfortunately, our relations with Iran are at a very low level,” Rzaev asserted.

During the past three decades, the Republic of Azerbaijan has diplomatic relations with the Zionist regime and purchases weapons and military equipment from the regime.



Could BRICS Rescue Argentina's Economy?

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Patricia Bullrich is working the crowd. Speaking to representatives of more than 600 companies at the 2023 AmCham Summit in Buenos Aires, the former left-wing rebel fighter and current right-wing presidential hopeful acknowledges that she would be merely an electoral “option” during more stable times.

But these are not stable times in Argentina — not with the inflation rate topping 100 percent and poverty hovering close to 40 percent.

In Bullrich's telling, her “character and determination” could be the salvation for a country grappling with a \$44.5bn debt to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and a once-in-a-century drought that has halved its output of soy and wheat. Under these circumstances, would a Bullrich administration embrace membership in BRICS — an alliance that's an acronym for US adversaries Russia and China, along with Brazil, India and South Africa?

“We're not going to BRICS,” she says during a Q&A at the summit, adding that her geopolitical allies would be the “democracies” of the United States, Western Europe and Israel.

US politics, Canada's multiculturalism, South America's geopolitical rise—we bring you the stories that matter. Buenos Aires Mayor Horacio Rodriguez Larreta, another leading candidate for president from the same centre-right Juntos por el Cambio (Together for Change) coalition, made similar comments to the AmCham crowd this month but said he would be willing to trade with any nation, including those in BRICS.

Still, whoever prevails in this October's presidential election may not have the luxury of pursuing their political convictions in an increasingly multipolar world.

Argentina is facing its worst economic crisis since the depression of 1998 to 2002, when unemployment climbed above 20 percent and more than half of the population

slid below the poverty line. President Alberto Fernandez of the centre-left Frente de Todos (Everyone's Front) coalition has already announced that he will not seek a second term, while his vice president, Cristina Fernandez de Kirchner, has declined to run following a controversial fraud conviction.

Last June, in a video conference with BRICS representatives and heads of state, Fernandez requested full membership in the group on behalf of Argentina. More recently, Brazilian President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva pledged to help “remove [the IMF's] knife from Argentina's neck”.

Whether the South American nation will ultimately join BRICS remains an open question, although it is unlikely before the October election. There is also no guarantee that membership would move the needle. What is clear, however, is that Argentina could use all the help it can get. “When you're in the opposition, you're free to say whatever you want,” Vicky Murillo, director of the Institute of Latin American Studies at Columbia University in New York City, told Al Jazeera. “But if either coalition wins, the next government will have to pay close attention to Brazil and China. Those relationships are too important to make ideological distinctions.”

Coined by a Goldman Sachs analyst in 2001, BRICS (then BRIC) is an acronym used to describe some of the largest emerging markets in the world. The countries held their first diplomatic summit in Yekaterinburg, Russia, in 2009, and the nascent bloc added South Africa the following year.

Representing more than 40 percent of the world's population, BRICS was conceived as a counterweight to the G7 countries that have long dominated the global economy and its financial institutions. To that end, the bloc established the New Development Bank during its sixth annual summit in Fortaleza, Brazil, in 2014.

Tajikistan Calls for Iran to Cooperate in Oil, Gas Industry

TEHRAN (Shana) - Tajikistan's ambassador on Wednesday said his country is keen to cooperate with Iran in the oil and gas industry.

Nizomiddin Zohidi called for Iran to train human resources and share its experience in upstream and downstream sectors of the oil industry.

The ambassador, who attended a joint meeting between managers of Iran's Research Institute of Petroleum Industry (RIPI) and the Ministry of Petroleum's International Affairs Department and ambassadors of the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), said the Iranian people are proud of great progress made in their oil industry.

Iran has turned all threats into opportunities while its oil industry has fought brutal Western sanctions for more than 40 years, praised the diplomat.

Armenia's Commercial Attaché Vardan Kostanyan, who was also present in the meeting, pointed to his country's favorable cooperation with Iran in barter of energy and electricity.

He also referred to the extension of the contract on exports of Iran's gas to Armenia and added, “Iranian traders are the leading suppliers of petrochemical products to Armenia.”

According to Kostanyan, an Iranian trade center will be set up in Armenia in the near future, of which 2,000 square meters will supply petrochemicals.

The attaché said Armenia is eager to use the expertise of Iranian companies and contractors to construct an oil refinery. At present, Iran supplies 90 percent of bitumen Armenia needs, said the attaché, adding it could be even more.



Iran Lauds Africa's Amazing Unity

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Extending his congratulations on Africa Day, the spokesperson for the Iranian Foreign Ministry hailed Africa's independence and unity.

In a post on his Twitter account on Thursday, Nasser Kanaani sent congratulations on Africa Day, the annual commemoration of the foundation of the Organization of African Unity on May 25, 1963.

“60 years after the founding of the Org. of African Unity, the great continent celebrates its progress, amazing unity & independence,” the Iranian spokesman said.

“On Africa Day, extend my warm greetings to all African friends and colleagues, wish you a bright, prosperous & peaceful future,” Kanaani added.

In comments in January 2022, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi denounced the objectives and interests that the Westerners pursue in Africa, expressing the Islamic Republic's support for African nations' independence, development and welfare.

Describing plans to establish and strengthen relations with the African states as a priority in Iran's foreign policy, he said Iran seeks to enhance relations with the African countries in all fields.



FM Calls for Bolstering Iran-Iraq Banking Cooperation

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in a telephone call with his Iraqi counterpart Fuad Hussein has called for boosting banking cooperation between Iran and Iraq.

During a telephone conversation early on Friday, Amirabdollahian and Fuad Hussein discussed the latest issues of mutual ties.

They emphasized the implementation of the signed security agreement between the two countries. The two sides also reviewed the necessity of strengthening Iran's gas pipeline to Iraq as well as regional cooperation.

Thanking the Iraqi side for the financial and banking transfers related to the Iranian hajj pilgrims from Iran's financial sources, Amirabdollahian called for strengthening banking cooperation between the two neighboring states.

Iran, Afghanistan Ink MoU on Medicine, Medical Equipment Industry

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and Afghanistan have signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) for the supply of medicine, goods, and medical equipment.

The MoU was signed with the Iranian Health Ministry's Food and Drug Administration and Afghanistan's Food and Drug Authority in attendance.

“The two neighboring Islamic countries of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Afghanistan are committed to comprehensive cooperation in food, medicine and health products,” the MoU read.

It said that the supply of medicine and equipment is of prime importance due to its special role in treatment of some chronic diseases.

The two countries are determined to pave the way for expansion of production and supply of the pharmaceutical and medical equipment demands of both sides.

Russia Advises U.S., UK...

FROM PAGE 1

Citing to this effect in Western media, he noted that the US and the UK are unlikely to succeed with their supposed smear campaign “in the new geopolitical reality.”

Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed in March to restore diplomatic ties, and soon afterwards announced plans to open their respective embassies under the China-brokered deal.

On Tuesday, Iran appointed its new ambassador to Saudi Arabia, following a similar move by the Saudi kingdom.

The Russian intelligence chief accused the U.S. of training Daesh members for acts of sabotage in Russia in its al-Tanf military base located in Syria near the Arab country's borders with Jordan and Iraq.

“According to our information, the U.S.' al-Tanf military base located on the border of Syria, Jordan and Iraq is used to train Daesh militants for carrying out

subversive acts; moreover, not only on Syrian territory but also in Russian regions,” the foreign intelligence chief was quoted as saying by RT.

The United States continues to keep its illegal military presence in northeastern Syria, occupying part of the sovereign state, Naryshkin pointed out.

He also said the U.S. is waging an economic war in the form of sanctions against Damascus, which prevents the restoration of the country.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the official accused Washington and London of thwarting efforts to reach a settlement over the conflict in Ukraine and of turning a blind eye to increasing “terrorism and violence” inflicted on civilians by Ukraine.

Naryshkin also expressed satisfaction that most countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America have not imposed sanctions on Russia over its actions in Ukraine, despite what he called colossal pressure from Washington to do so.

Pakistan Seeks U.S. Nod...

FROM PAGE 1

The spokesperson, however, shared the details of recent US efforts to help Pakistan deal with this difficult situation. “Ensuring Pakistan's economic growth, energy security and environmental sustainability remains a priority for our bilateral relationship with Pakistan and a cornerstone of our Green Alliance,” the US official said.

He explained how the United States has been a leading investor in Pakistan for the past 20 years, with \$250 million in foreign direct investments in 2022.

The official said that US firms were already making

significant investments to “help Pakistan provide expanded access to a cleaner, more resilient energy supply.”

For example, General Electric (GE) wind turbines, power control systems and equipment are widely used in Pakistan, which will increase Pakistan's renewable energy capacity.

Last week, media reports suggested that Pakistan could hand Pakistan a whopping \$18bn penalty if Islamabad fails to complete its portion of the pipeline by March 2024.

The reports said that earlier this month Iran informed a visiting Pakistani delegation that Pakistan should

construct the gas pipeline as stipulated in their revised agreement or pay the penalty.

Iran has already finished its portion of the pipeline – from the gas field to the Pakistan border, where it should connect to the Pakistan portion. The pipeline would allow Pakistan to start receiving 750 million cubic feet of gas from Iran daily once it's completed and commissioned.

Pakistan signed the pipeline agreement in 2014, which included a condition that Islamabad will pay billions of dollars in penalties if it abandons the project.

Iran Does Not...

FROM PAGE 1

“We have mentioned to Afghan officials that the issues relating to water rights will not be resolved through political statements and that they must be followed through via a legal framework,” Amirabdollahian added.

Iran and Afghanistan have been locked in a long-running dispute over their shared water resources. At the heart of the dispute is the Hirmand River, which flows 700 miles (1,126 kilometers) south before flowing into Hamoun wetlands, located in Sistan and Baluchestan province.

Following more than a century of rifts over Hirmand's water supply, Iran and Afghanistan signed a treaty in 1973 to establish a means of regulating each country's use of the river.

Iran should receive an annual share of 820 million cubic meters from Hirmand under the accord, which Afghanistan has grossly violated in letter and spirit, endangering the lives of many Iranians who rely on Hamoun wetlands for drinking water, agriculture, and fishing.

Afghanistan has also built dams on the Hirmand which have constricted the water flow into Iran.

Amirabdollahian further expressed concerns over sporadic border clashes in the past months along Afghanistan's long border with Iran but reiterated the significance of a secure and stable Afghanistan for the Islamic Republic and stressed that there is no way to resolve existing issues other than “interactions between the two nations.”

The Iranian foreign minister then went on to express Tehran's desire to help Afghan authorities establish peace and security across Afghanistan.

“We don't want the repeat of the bitter incident in Mazar-i-Sharif,” he said, referring to the 1998 killing of eight Iranian diplomats in Iran's consulate in the city after Taliban militants ran it over.

Amirabdollahian reiterated that the foreign policy doctrine set by the current administration is based on “dynamic diplomacy” and “intelligent interaction”.

The administration follows “a doctrine based on a balanced foreign policy, which means interaction with all parts of the world”, he added.

The minister said strengthening ties with neighboring countries and Asian nations is Iran's top priority.

The foreign minister touched on the stalemated talks to revive the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), saying the agreement remains an international document despite its weaknesses and strengths, but Iran's top objective is the removal of the US-led sanctions.

“We have made good progress” towards the removal of the illegitimate sanctions, he said.

Talks between Tehran and other parties to the JCPOA resumed in Vienna in April 2021 aimed at bringing the US back into the accord and enforcing an end to Washington's brutal “maximum pressure” campaign against Iran.

The discussions, however, have remained at a standstill since August 2022 due to the Biden administration's insistence on not lifting all of the anti-Iran bans and its refusal to provide essential guarantees that it would not again abandon the agreement.

Inflation Rate Increased...

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However, SCI's data showed that month-on-month, the inflation rate in Iran had slowed to 2.8% in May from 3.75% in April.

The figures showed that the rate was 54.6% higher in May from the same month in April 2022.

The SCI announced earlier this year that it had changed in baseline year for calculation of inflation rate from 2016 to 2021.

Omani Sultan's Iran Visit...

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He also noted that there are great opportunities for the development of bilateral cooperation and trade given existing capacities in air and sea transport.

A visa waiver, he emphasized, has helped promote tourism and trade exchange, and increased the number of daily flights between various Iranian and Omani cities.

Najafi further said that Iran has always welcomed Oman's balanced and influential role in regional and global arenas.

“There is mutual trust at the highest levels of the two countries and we have always welcomed Oman's wise and benevolent initiatives,” he asserted.

Earlier in the day, the ONA reported that Oman's Sultan “will go on an official two-day visit to Iran... in response to an invitation from the Iranian president.”

“The visit will also touch on means of promoting cooperation between Oman and Iran in different spheres,” the report added.

Sultan Haitham's trip to Iran, scheduled for May 28-29, comes one week after his visit to Egypt.

Last year, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi paid a visit to Oman, during which the two countries signed a number of trade deals.

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ISSN 1024-6053
P.O. Box: 15875-8551
Address: No 13, Pajouhesh St.,
Golestan II St, Golestan St. Marzdaran
Blvd., Tehran, Islamic Republic of Iran
Printed by: Entekhab-e Rasaneh
Distributed by:
Cities of Iran Cultural and
Artistic Institute
Managing Director: Fereydoon Taherpour Asl

Southampton Will Not Renew Selles's Contract

LONDON (Dispatches) - Southampton interim coach Ruben Selles will not have his contract renewed at the end of the season, the Premier League club said today after their relegation from the English top-flight. "Southampton football club can confirm that it has held conversations with men's first-team manager, Ruben Selles, and decided that his contract will not be renewed when it expires at the end of the season," Southampton said in a statement.

Crystal Palace Midfielder Eze Gets England Call

LONDON (Dispatches) - Crystal Palace midfielder Leberechi Eze earned his first senior call-up for England as coach Gareth Southgate named his squad for next month's Euro 2024 qualifiers today. The 24-year-old was the only uncapped player in the 25-man selection for the two games in Group C, away to Malta and at home to North Macedonia. There was also a call-up for Brighton & Hove Albion defender Lewis Dunk whose one England cap came in 2018 and a recall for Aston Villa defender Tyrone Mings.

Djokovic, Alcaraz In Same Half of French Open Draw

PARIS (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic could face world number one Carlos Alcaraz in the semi-finals of the French Open after both players were placed in the same half of the draw. Djokovic is chasing a record 23rd men's Grand Slam title in the absence of the injured Rafael Nadal, who will miss the tournament at Roland Garros for the first time since his 2005 title-winning debut.

The third-seeded Djokovic, Roland Garros champion in 2016 and 2021, meets 114th-ranked Aleksandar Kovacevic of the US in the first round in Paris -- the first French Open since 1998 without Nadal or the now retired Roger Federer.

The 24-year-old Kovacevic is making his Grand Slam main draw debut. Djokovic, who turned 36 on Monday, has been bothered by a recurrence of a right elbow injury which has disrupted his clay-court season.

He failed to go beyond the last eight at any of the three events he played on clay this spring, losing his number one spot to Alcaraz.

Djokovic has also fallen behind Daniil Medvedev in the rankings after the Russian succeeded him as Italian Open champion last weekend.

US Open champion Alcaraz and Medvedev both start their Roland Garros campaigns against a qualifier or lucky loser.

Alcaraz faces a challenging path to a second Grand Slam title, with Lorenzo Musetti a possible last-16 foe before 2021 runner-up Stefanos Tsitsipas potentially awaits him in the quarter-finals.

For Djokovic to set up a blockbuster last-four clash with Alcaraz he may need to get past Monte Carlo Masters champion Andrey Rublev in the quarters.

Casper Ruud, who was thrashed by Nadal in last year's final, is seeded fourth and plays a qualifier in his opening match.

The in-form Holger Rune arrives in Paris at a career-high six in the world and takes on Christopher Eubanks of the US in round one.

Former Viking Peterson Open to NFL Comeback

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Former NFL Most Valuable Player and seven-time Pro Bowl running-back Adrian Peterson says he is willing to consider a comeback at the age of 38.

Peterson last played in the NFL for Seattle in 2021 and was without a team last season after he became a free agent.

But the former Minnesota Vikings star, who is fifth in the all-time yardage for a running-back, told the Fort Worth Star-Telegram that he hasn't filed his retirement papers and was ready for another season.

"Mentally, I haven't officially hung it up. We'll see what happens," he said.

"My mindset is, if God's willing, maybe an opportunity presents itself, and maybe it happens this season. I'll go from there. But (if) nothing happens this season, for sure, I will be hanging it up," he said.

Peterson's last touchdown came for the Seahawks against the San Francisco 49ers and made him the first player in NFL history to score a rushing touchdown with six different teams.

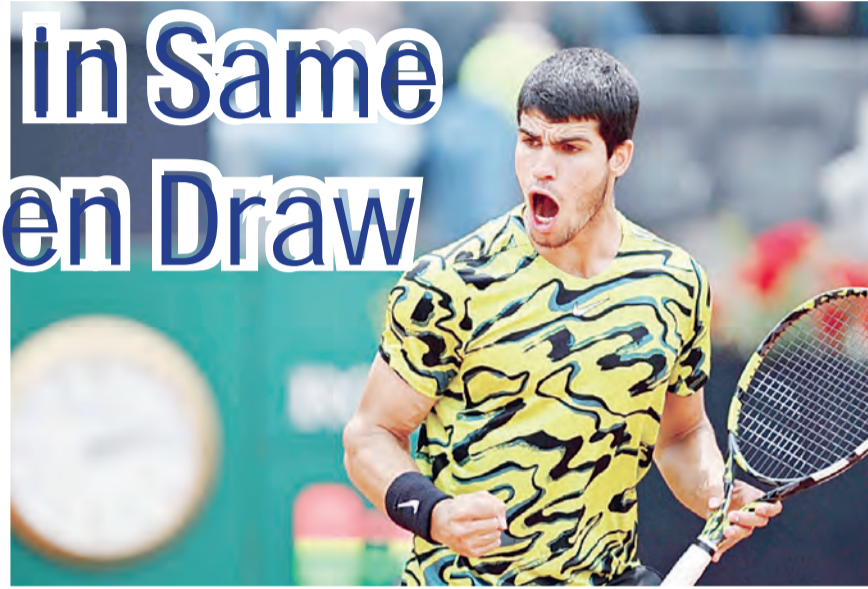
After playing for the Vikings from 2007 to 2016, Peterson had spells with the New Orleans Saints, Arizona, Washington, Detroit and Tennessee before his brief stint with Seattle.

Pundits once predicted he could beat Dallas Cowboys great Emmitt Smith's all-time rushing record of 18,355 but with 14,918 to his name, Peterson accepts that dream won't be realized even with a comeback.

"He set a standard there. You see why it's been there for such a long time. I feel like I had the great opportunity to do it. Unfortunately, I experienced some hiccups throughout my career and you know, injuries and things like that, just wasn't able to get there," he said.

Peterson said that with the NFL increasingly a pass-dominated league it will be tough for any of the current crop of running-backs to reach Smith's tally.

"I think it'll stand for a long time. Maybe eventually someone will break it but when you look at see how the NFL is going now, it might not happen".



She is seeded to meet 2022 runner-up Coco Gauff in the quarter-finals and could face Wimbledon champion Elena Rybakina, last week's Italian Open winner, in the last four. Rybakina has beaten Swiatek three times this season, knocking her out of the Australian Open Melbourne and Indian Wells before advancing when injury halted her rival in Rome. Barbora Krejickova, the 2021 winner, could await Swiatek in the last 16. The Czech lost in the first round a year ago.

"This is my favourite tournament. I always get this extra motivation to practise harder here. I'm really excited to be here," Swiatek said during the draw ceremony.

Aryna Sabalenka, who won her maiden Grand Slam crown in Melbourne, plays Marta Kostyuk of Ukraine in round one. Sabalenka has never got beyond the third round in Paris despite making at least the semi-finals at all of the other three majors.

Furthermore, her title win in Madrid this spring was followed by a first-up exit at the hands of 134th-ranked Sofia Kenin in Rome.

Third seed Jessica Pegula has a tricky opening match against fellow American and 2022 Australian Open finalist Danielle Collins, while Rybakina gets a qualifier first up.

Ons Jabeur, seeded seventh, is a potential quarter-final opponent for Rybakina, who defeated the Tunisian in the 2022 Wimbledon final. Jabeur also finished runner-up to Swiatek at the US Open.

Rybakina, a Russian-born Kazakh has yet to get past the last eight at Roland Garros.

French fifth seed Caroline Garcia meets China's Wang Xiyu as two-time major winner Victoria Azarenka squares off with 2019 US Open champion Bianca Andreescu in the first round.



Ronaldo Says Saudi League Could Become Top Five in the World

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Portuguese football great Cristiano Ronaldo believes the Saudi Pro League he joined this season could in time become one of the top five leagues in the world.

The Portugal skipper joined Al-Nassr in January on a contract estimated by some media reports to be worth more than €200 million (RM1.16 billion).

Ronaldo has played in three of the world's top leagues with stints at Real Madrid in Spain's La Liga, Manchester United in the English Premier League and Juventus in Italy's Serie A.

The 38-year-old said the quality of the Saudi competition had improved even in his short time in it.

"We are much better and the Saudi league is getting better and the next year will be even better," he told Saudi SSC channel.

"Step-by-step I think this league will be among the top five leagues in the world but they need time, players and infrastructure.

"But I believe that this country have amazing potential, they have amazing people and the league will be great in my opinion," he added.

The Saudis do not lack ambition and a source told Reuters earlier this month that Riyadh club Al-Hilal had made a formal offer to secure the services of Lionel Messi, Ronaldo's rival for the title of best player of his generation.



Dortmund Veteran Hummels Extends Deal to 2024

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Borussia Dortmund defender Mats Hummels has extended his deal by one year until the summer of 2024, the club announced.

The extension means Hummels, 34, one of Dortmund's three captains alongside Marco Reus and English teenager Jude Bellingham, will play a 14th season with the club.

"I didn't take the decision lightly," the 2014 World Cup winner said in a statement. "It was a long deliberation process but now, at the end of the season, I can say that I'm really in the mood for another year."

Dortmund are currently two points clear of second-placed Bayern Munich at the top of the Bundesliga table, with one game to play.

Dortmund face Mainz at home on Saturday and can guarantee their first league title in a decade with a win.

"From now on my focus is on the game against Mainz on Saturday. We still have 90 intense minutes ahead of us. After that, we hope to celebrate something big together."

Hummels came through the junior divisions at Bayern and was loaned to Dortmund in January of 2008, signing for the latter club in 2009.

He stayed with Dortmund until 2016, moving to Bayern for three seasons, before returning in 2019.

"Hummels is staying at Dortmund for another year. He identifies very much with our club. Dortmund and Mats simply belong together" said the club's chief executive officer Hans-Joachim Watzke.

Hummels won two Bundesliga titles and two German Cups with Dortmund, as well as playing in the all-German 2013 Champions League final, which his side lost 2-1 to Bayern.

Alongside Jerome Boateng, he was a crucial member of Germany's defence in their 2014 World Cup win in Brazil.

The defender has not played for Germany since the last 16 loss to England at Euro 2021, with coach Hansi Flick leaving him out of the squad which travelled to Qatar in 2022.

Martinez Double as Inter Retain Coppa Italia Crown

ROME (Dispatches) - Striker Lautaro Martinez scored twice as Inter Milan fought back to beat Fiorentina 2-1 and win their secured consecutive Coppa Italia title at the Stadio Olimpico.

With both teams preparing for major European finals next month and meeting for the first time in a major domestic final, Inter made nine changes from Sunday's defeat by Napoli, starting in-form striker Romelu Lukaku on the bench and Samir Handanovic replacing Andre Onana in goal.

Fiorentina took the lead after three minutes when Jonathan Ikone sent in a cross that found Nico Gonzales unmarked at the back post, and he drilled the ball into the net.

Edin Dzeko had a clear chance to equalise halfway through the half, but he could not keep the ball down when keeper Pietro Terracciano came rushing out and sent his shot over the crossbar.

"We started badly and had the wrong approach, which is rare for us, but the lads did well to stay in the game anyway and then turn it around," Inter manager Simone Inzaghi told Mediaset.

"I am happy, because we won a cup that we wanted, to confirm what we did last season. Fiorentina are a quality team who caused us a lot of problems."

Inter have had a successful season, retaining the Coppa Italia and Italian Supercup titles and reaching next month's Champions League final against Manchester City.



Barcelona Veteran Alba Leaving Club After 11 Years

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Jordi Alba will leave Barcelona at the end of the season after 11 years at the club, the Catalan side said.

"Barcelona and Alba have reached an agreement to release the player from the contract that he had until the end of the 2023-24 season," said Barcelona in a statement.

"Barcelona publicly expresses its gratitude to Jordi Alba for the professionalism, commitment, dedication and always positive and warm treatment he has always shown towards everything that makes up the Barcelona family."

Alba joined Barcelona from Valencia in 2012 and won six La Liga titles and one Champions League among 19 trophies with the Catalan giants.

The 34-year-old veteran Spanish left-back lost his place in the team to teenager Alejandro Balde this season.

Alba had one more year left on his contract, which expires in 2024, and Spanish reports say he will waive a significant percentage of the money due to help the club amid financial struggles.

The Spaniard follows in the footsteps of captain Sergio Busquets, who is also leaving the club this summer.

