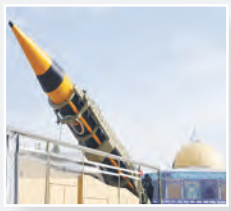
Iran Ambassador to Qatar Hamidreza Dehghani in Meeting With Foreign Minister Said That The Joint Economic commission Of the Islamic Republic of Iran and Qatar Will Soon Be Held in Tehran

IRAN NEWS

Border Outpost in Southeastern Iran Has Come Under Heavy Attack From Taliban Forces in Total Disregard for Int'l Law, Prompting a Strong Response From Iranian Border Guards, the Deputy Police Chief Said

VOL. XXIX, No. 7777 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials | www.irannewsdaily.com | SUNDAY MAY 28, 2023 - KHORDAD 07, 1402

2 DOMESTIC
Khorramshahr-4 Missile Capable of Neutralizing Cyber-Attacks
> SEE PAGE 2



3 DOMESTIC
China's Investment In Iran Up by 150%
> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL
Serb Clashes, West Condemnation As Kosovo Pushes Through Mayors
> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS
Heat Still Lead East Finals, But Celtics Roaring Back
> SEE PAGE 8

IRGC Navy Chief Warns U.S. Military

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has categorically dismissed the US military's presence in the Persian Gulf under the pretext of securing the strategic maritime region.

Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said on Friday that only Iran and other regional countries will ensure the security of the Persian Gulf and there is no need for the US and other countries to be present in the strategic waterway.

"You are damn wrong to be present in our region," Tangsiri asserted.

"If we back down against the enemy, it will definitely dominate us and we have no choice but to stand and resist, which is the path to the victory of our nation," he said.

The IRGC Navy chief made the remarks in an official ceremony in the city of Dezful in Iran's southwestern province of Khuzestan, where he lauded the city's remarkable resistance during the Iraqi aggression imposed on the country in the 1980s. Describing Dezful as the symbol of resistance and invincibility, Tangsiri said, "During eight years of the Sacred Defense (Iran-Iraq war), we showed the world that we did not and would not surrender to duress." *See Page 7*

Zelensky Making Worthless Charges Against Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has censured Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky's allegation that Iran has sent drones to Russia to be used in the war against Ukraine, saying the "worthless" claim is a plea for more Western weapons and funds for Kiev.

In a statement on Saturday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani slammed Zelensky's comments as a "blame game" with the aim of deflecting public attention.

He said the Ukrainian president put up a "political show" full of "worthless" and "groundless" allegations.

"The Islamic Republic of Iran has always stated that it is deeply saddened by the suffering of the people of Ukraine, emphasizes the need to find a political solution to end it as soon as possible, and is ready to assist in its realization," he said.

Kanaani also made clear that the Islamic Republic has always been against the war in Ukraine and its continuation.

"The repetition of false claims by the Ukrainian president against the Islamic Republic is in line with the propaganda and media war of the anti-Iranian axis against Iran's government and people with the aim of securing as much arms and financial aid as possible from Western countries," he noted. *See Page 7*

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Western States Seeking Division Between OPEC Countries

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Saying that several Western states are seeking division between OPEC member states, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi called on OPEC member countries to preserve cohesion and unity.

Raisi made the remarks in a meeting with the Secretary-General of OPEC Haitham al-Ghais in Tehran on Saturday.

Considering the constructive interaction of OPEC members with each other as an important factor in the success of this international organization, the Iranian president added that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always had constructive cooperation with this organization and wants to continue and improve the level and strengthen this cooperation.

Stating that the philosophy of forming OPEC is to support the rights of oil producers and prevent discrimination against them, Raisi expressed hope that the OPEC organization will be able to bring peace to the oil market in the new era of its activity.

Haitham al-Ghais, for his part, considered the Islamic Republic of Iran as one of the founding members of the OPEC that has always had useful, effective, and constructive cooperation with this organization and its members.

"Iran, both at the ministerial level and at the technical level, has always acted to strengthen the cohesion and unity of OPEC members," he stressed.

The OPEC Secretary-General also touched upon the latest situation in the oil market and said, "I hope that with the unity of opinion among OPEC members and benefiting from the support and constructive cooperation of the Islamic Republic of Iran, we will be able to bring peace to the market."

Al Ghais arrived in Tehran on Friday to hold talks with Iranian officials.

During his stay in Tehran, the OPEC chief was to discuss the global oil market, the outlook of demand and supply, and the upcoming OPEC and OPEC+ meetings.

OPEC appointed Kuwaiti oil executive Haitham Al Ghais as its 24th secretary general on January 3, 2022.

With 30 years of experience in the global oil and gas markets, he represented Kuwait in multiple governing bodies of renowned international institutions, including the Board of Governors of the Oxford Institute for Energy Studies (2008-2014), and the Board of Governors and subcommittees of OPEC (2016-2021).

Al Ghais, who managed international and regional teams in different countries, including Kuwait, Beijing, and London, began his tenure as secretary general of OPEC on August 1, 2022.

Al Ghais replaced Mohammad Sanusi Barkindo of Nigeria, who died at 63, when he was in the final weeks of six-year tenure.

Armenia Says Iran-EEU Free Trade Agreement Priority

TEHRAN (MNA) - The implementation of the free trade agreement between Iran and the Eurasian Economic Union is a priority, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at the meeting of the Supreme Eurasian Economic Council in Moscow.

"Given the high dynamics of the development of cooperation with Iran, the entry into force of the Free Trade Agreement and its subsequent implementation are priorities for us in the context of a real expansion of trade cooperation with third countries," Pashinyan was quoted as saying by Public Radio of Armenia.

He said continued negotiations with India and Egypt, as well as the development of comprehensive dialogue on the economic agenda and the deepening of trade and economic cooperation with the UAE and Indonesia, will give an additional impetus to the process of integrating EEU into the world economy.

Armenia expects Azerbaijan to be open for the transportation of Armenian goods to the Russian Federation and Iran on a parity basis, Armenian Prime Minister Nikol Pashinyan said at a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin in Moscow.

He noted that the border and customs services of Armenia are ready to ensure the normal passage of all vehicles through the country. "We expect that the Azerbaijani railroad will also be opened for trains of the Republic of Armenia through Nakhichevan and the Republic of Azerbaijan, for example, to the Russian Federation and the Islamic Republic of Iran. And we expect this issue to be resolved on a parity basis, on the basis of the sovereignty and jurisdiction of countries," he said.

According to a tripartite statement of Nov. 9, 2020, Armenia and Azerbaijan, mediated by Russia, agreed to unblock regional transport and economic communications. A special commission of vice premiers of the three countries has been set up to work on this issue.

Armenia has repeatedly stated that it is ready to fulfill this paragraph of the statement, noting that all communications should be under the jurisdiction of the countries through which they pass.

The Eurasian Economic Union may strike a deal on a free trade zone with Iran earlier than with other countries, Russian Deputy Prime Minister Aleksey Overchuk was quoted as saying by TASS. *See Page 7*

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

Any Iran Achievement A Thorn in Eyes of West

Have you ever noticed that after any achievement by the Islamic Revolution of Iran immediately the Western countries start crying foul and accusing Tehran of not abiding by the international laws? Of course the Islamic Republic of Iran is getting used to such accusations and even bullies, and it marches ahead by continuing more progresses and achievements.

On Thursday the Islamic Republic of Iran once again unveiled another achievement and better to say showed another winning card in the game with the world hegemony and especially with the West and above all the U.S., and as usual, the Western countries started criticizing and accusing Iran of not abiding by the international laws whilee they are themselves main violators of the international laws.

Iran on Thursday successfully tested its most advanced Khorramshahr-class ballistic missile named Kheibar, a medium-range missile that can deliver a 1,500 kg warhead with high accuracy.

The missile was revealed in the presence of Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani during an event commemorating the 41st anniversary of the liberation of the southwestern city of Khorramshahr.

Developed by the Ministry of Defense's Aerospace Industries Organization, Kheibar is a liquid-fueled missile with a range of 2,000 kilometers. Its enhanced range, advanced guidance and control system, and improved structural features further strengthen Iran's position as a formidable missile power.

Immediately after this success, Washington and Paris released statements to show their anger about this achievement.

"These activities are all the more worrying in the context of the continuing escalation of Iran's nuclear program," French foreign ministry spokesperson Anne-Claire Legendre told reporters on Thursday.

State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller also claimed that "Iran's development and proliferation of ballistic missiles poses a serious threat to regional and international security," as he addressed a Thursday briefing in Washington.

Western countries claim that Iran's missile tests and rocket launches violate UN Resolution 2231, adopted in July 2015 to endorse the 2015 nuclear agreement between Iran and the five permanent members of the UN Security Council plus Germany. *See Page 7*

Iran, Russia, Turkey, Syria to Hold Quadrilateral Meeting

TEHRAN (MNA) – The deputy foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Turkey, and Syria will hold a meeting to discuss normalizing relations between Ankara and Damascus in the coming days, top Turkish diplomat announced.

Speaking to the Turkish NTV channel, Foreign Minister of Turkey Mevlüt Çavuşoğlu said that the representatives of Turkey, Syria, Russia, and Iran will hold a meeting at the level of deputy foreign ministers to discuss drawing a road map to normalize relations between Ankara and Damascus in the coming days.

These representatives will make efforts to normalize Turkey-Syria relations, he said.

Referring to the recent quadrilateral meeting in Moscow, Çavuşoğlu said, "In this meeting, we agreed to prepare the infrastructure for the safe return of Syrian refugees to areas under the control of the Syrian central government."

A large number of Syrian refugees who reside in Turkey want to return to their country, but this process should be done within the framework of international laws and based on the plan of Turkey as the host country, he also said. *See Page 7*

Tehran to Host FINEX 2023 in Early June

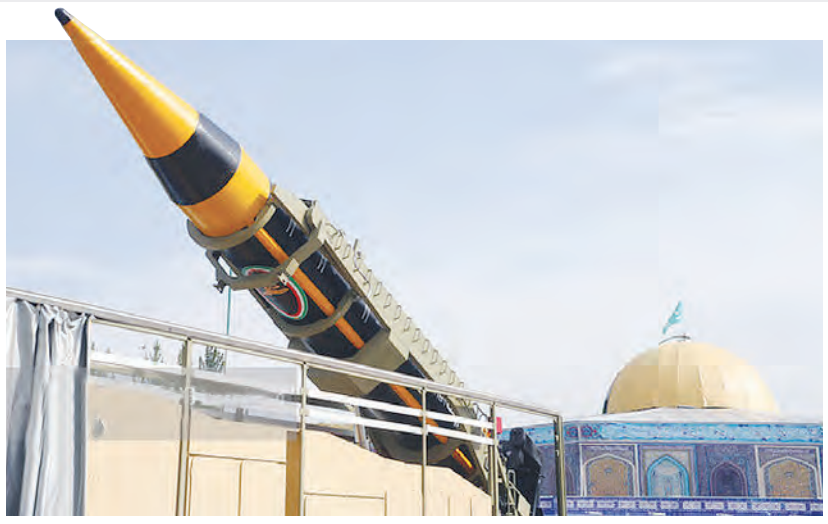
TEHRAN (MNA) - The 15th International Exhibition of Financial Industries (Exchange, Bank & Insurance) – Iran FINEX 2023- is slated to be held at Tehran Permanent International Fairground from June 6 to 9, IRNA reported.

The slogan of this year's exhibition would be "Propelling financial industry, growth of production and containment of inflation".

Raising awareness about financial markets and their services, increasing financial literacy, promotion of indirect shareholding, development and promotion of new services in insurance and financial markets, digitization of payment as well as electronic banking are among the most important goals of this exhibition.

Khorramshahr-4 Missile Capable of Neutralizing Cyber-Attacks

TEHRAN (MNA) – Newly-unveiled Khorramshahr-4 missile is capable of neutralizing enemy cyber-attacks, the Iranian deputy defense minister said, noting that countering the missile is almost impossible for defense systems.



Speaking in an IRIB TV program, Iranian Deputy Defence Minister General Seyyed Mehdi Farahi briefed about Iran's defense achievements in the field of missile systems.

In the last 40 years, Iran achieved many successes under the pressures and sanctions and the Khorramshahr-4 missile is one of them, General Farahi said.

The Khorramshahr missile is one of the most advanced missiles designed by the experts of the Aerospace Organization of the defense ministry, which has a range of 2,000 km and is equipped with a high-explosive warhead weighing 1,500 kg.

The Khorramshahr-4 missile has been equipped with a cyber defense system to resist and neutralize enemy cyber attacks, he said, noting that countering this missile is almost impossible for defense systems.

He also stressed that this missile is the best and most capable missile that the Islamic Republic has built so far.

Iran has the capability and technological capability to produce missiles with a range of more than 2,000 kilometers, Farhi further continued. But the Iranian defense industry acts in line with the country's macro policies and the instructions of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution that the construction of missile systems must be stopped at a range of 2,000 kilometers.

"If necessary, we have the ability to achieve longer ranges, but we have not done such a thing so far and we have no plans for it," he said.

Iran, Oman FMs Confer on Phone

TEHRAN (IP) - Foreign Ministers of Iran and Oman discussed and exchanged views on boosting bilateral relations in a telephone conversation on the eve of Oman's Sultan's upcoming trip to Tehran.

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian discussed relations between the two countries in a telephone conversation with Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi.

In this telephone conversation, on the eve of the visit of Haitham bin Tariq, Sultan of Oman, to Tehran, the parties discussed and exchanged opinions regarding the pre-planned content programs.

While conveying the greetings of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Amir- Abdollahian described the meeting and contacts between the officials of the two countries as very important.

Iran Petrochemical Packages Ready for Foreign Investment

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran's National Petrochemical Company (NPC) managing director said the country's packages are ready for foreign investment.

Morteza Shahmirzaei made the offer in his meeting with Iranian ambassadors and consuls general, calling for the diplomatic apparatus to facilitate and accelerate the participation of foreign investors in Iran's petrochemical projects.

The NPC CEO and diplomats exchanged views on "strategies to promote international cooperation in Iran's petrochemical industry", with Shahmirzaei underlining that domestic industry needs to diversify its products and customers and get into new international markets, Iranian Oil Ministry's news service SHANA reported.

Some $90 billion have been invested in Iran's petrochemical sector and there are more than 100 development projects in the country, added Shahmirzaei.

He described the prospect of Iran's petrochemical industry as "positive" and said, "Policies on attracting foreign investment and supplying products and equipment will be operated quite quickly through cooperation with the country's diplomatic apparatus."

To that end, the National Petrochemical Company is ready to fully cooperate with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, holdings, and petrochemical companies, stated the NPC head. Iran plans to capture the petrochemical markets in Africa, Eastern Europe, and the Commonwealth of Independent States (CIS), Shahmirzaei said and continued, "Iran's petrochemical industry is moving toward development with a 92-million-ton production capacity."

Around 70 percent of Iran's petrochemical products are exported, he said, explaining 550 grades of petrochemicals are produced in Iran and last year's exports fetched the country $16 billion. On May 18, the NPC investment manager invited domestic and foreign investors to fund 19 projects worth $9 billion.

Reza Nekouei introduced the investment projects on the sidelines of the 27th Iran International Oil, Gas, Refining and Petrochemical Exhibition in Tehran.

Despite the sanctions, countries with the same views had a strong presence in this year's exhibition, said the manager, expressing hope that such relations would lead to long-term investments in the petrochemical industry.

Diplomat's Release From Belgium Prison Victory for Iranians

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The release of Assadollah Assadi, an Iranian diplomat who was detained in Belgium on false terror-related charges, is a victory for the Iranian nation, according to a senior government official in Tehran.

Mohammad Jamshidi, the Iranian president's deputy chief of staff for political affairs, said in a post on Twitter on Friday that the president of the Islamic Republic had asserted that the first step for "engagement" is the release of the diplomat.

Assadi arrived in Iran on Friday. He was released after five years, following an Oman-brokered deal.

Earlier in the day, Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amir-Abdollahian tweeted that the "innocent" diplomat who was "illegally detained in Germany and Belgium for more than two years against international law" was freed after Muscat mediated a deal between Iran and Belgium to swap prisoners.

Iran released Belgian spy Olivier Vandecasteele, who was arrested on a visit to Iran in February 2022 and sentenced in January to 40 years in prison and 74 lashes on charges including espionage.

The freedom of diplomat Assadollah Assadi is a victory for Iranians. As Belgian officials used extreme language in parliament & media, on the phone they spoke of major engagement. Ayatollah Raisi stressed the first step for this is the diplomat's release. The road is now open.

In his tweet, Jamshidi said, "As Belgian officials used extreme language in parliament & media, on the phone they spoke of major engagement."

Iran's top human rights official also on Friday described Assadi's detention in a Twitter post as "illegal".

Assadi's release is the "outcome of efforts by responsible authorities to defend the rights of their fellow citizens abroad," said Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, promising to continue such efforts.

The Iranian administration's spokesman Ali Bahadori Jahromi tweeted on Friday that Assadi's unlawful detention failed to impact the "steely will" of the "revolutionary diplomat."

"Asadollah Assadi, our country's diplomat, returned to his homeland after 5 years of illegal detention," Bahadori Jahromi said.

He said Assadi's detention was against international law as he was under mental and physical pressure.

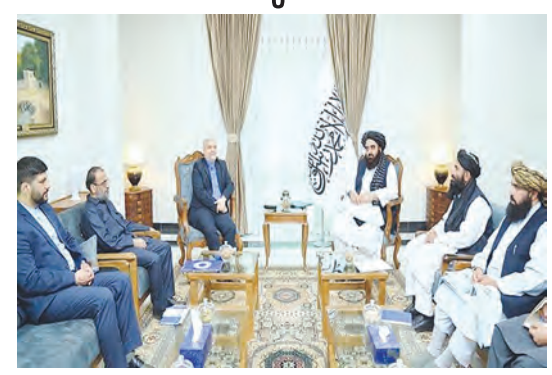
The Iranian administration will employ all its capacities to preserve the rights of Iranians, he added.

In June 2018, Belgian authorities said the country's police had intercepted a car transporting homemade explosives, claiming the Iranian diplomat handed the material to two people in Belgium.

The diplomat was accused of plotting an attack against the anti-Iran Mujahedin-e-Khalq (MKO) terrorist outfit, a claim categorically dismissed by Iranian authorities.

A Belgian court then sentenced the diplomat, who serves as the third counselor at Iran's Embassy in Vienna, to 20 years in prison.

Iran Envoy, Taliban FM Discuss Ties, Water Right Issues



TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Kabul Hassan Kazemi Qomi in a meeting with Taliban Acting Foreign Minister Amir Khan Muttaqi discussed Iran's water rights from the Helmand River and the relations between Iran and Afghanistan.

Taliban's senior diplomat Hafiz Zia Ahmad in a tweet announced that the Special Representative of Iran's President for Afghanistan Affairs met and held talks with the Taliban interim government's foreign minister on Saturday.

During the meeting, Kazemi Qomi expressed the positions of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Doha meeting and presented a report of the meeting, according to Zia.

Muttaqi, for his part, hailed the support of the Islamic Republic of Iran in the Doha meeting regarding the issues related to the Afghan prisoners.

He also called for solving bilateral issues and problems through dialogue and understanding.

Recently, Iranian officials criticized the Taliban for violating Iran's water rights from the Hirmand River (also known as Helmand).

Active Diplomacy, Boosting Economic Ties Power of 13th Gov't

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Active diplomacy and development of economic relations with the countries of the world are the strengths of the 13th government in Iran, First Vice-President Mohammad Mokhber announced.

During a meeting with Iranian ambassadors on Saturday, Mokhber termed the embassies and ambassadors of the country as the main and important tools for the country's fundamental economic leap.

Iran's ambassadors should be fully aware of the country's domestic talents and capacities in various fields to create economic opportunities for the private sector and foreign parties, he added.

Mokhber pointed out that the country's embassies had more political roles in the past, but today they are the main and important tool in line with the country's fundamental economic leap.

Iranian embassies are expected to follow up on signed memoranda of understanding (MoUs) and agreements on the president's foreign trips, as well as other country's official visits to Iran for removing obstacles in implementing the MoUs and agreements.

Commodities Worth Almost $3b Traded on IME Last Month

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN- During the past Iranian calendar month (ended on May 21) Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 13,429,985 tons of commodities and 1,075 vehicles with a total trading value of almost $3 billion on its physical market, registering growths of 21.7 percent in value and 17.5 percent in volume of trades compared with the month before that.

As reported by the IME's Public Relations and International Affairs Department, the exchange saw on both domestic and export pits of its oil and petrochemical trading floor, trade of 1,777,910 tons of commodities valued at nearly $860 million.

The IME's customers purchased on this floor 509,402 tons of bitumen, 421,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 418,260 tons of polymeric products, 184,000 tons of lube cut, 179,693 tons of chemicals, 37,840 tons of sulfur, 19,876 tons of oil, 12,098 tons of petroleum products, 1,670 tons of insulation, 1,000 tons of slop wax and 790 tons of feedstocks.

Moreover, the exchange saw trade of 11,506,598 tons of commodities and 1,075 vehicles worth more than $2 billion on its metals and minerals trading floor.

Items traded on this floor included 6,074,215 tons of cement, 2,778,000 tons of iron ore, 1,888,779 tons of steel, 748,100 tons of sponge iron, 36,030 tons of aluminum, 32,700 tons of copper, 5,305 tons of zinc, 2,000 tons of coke, 1,020 tons of molybdenum concentrate, 300 tons of cast iron, 60 tons of precious metals concentrate and 1,075 vehicles.

Last was the IME's side market on which the exchange traded 145,476 tons of commodities.

IME is one of the four major stock markets of Iran, the other three markets are Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Iran's over-the-counter (OTC) market known also as Iran Fara Bourse (IFB), and Iran Energy Exchange (IRENEX).

Notice of tender for export sale
No. Z/1402/07
GolGohar Mining and Industrial Company

Hereby Golgohar Mining & Industrial Co. announces selling and export 70.000 metric tons of Pellet (%Fe:65.00) on basis of F.O.B at Barco Jetty Bandar Abbas Iran. Interested bidders should find tender documents at Golgohar website: ww.geg.ir. All bids on conformity to tender instructions must be submitted no later than 14:00 P.M. on 12. June.2023 to Golgohar complex in sirjan (50 km in shiraz road).

Bidders are invited to the transactions commission department of the seller with an introduction letter of interested buyer and personal identification of the representative. Tender results shall be announced at 10:00 A.M. on 13.June.2023 at the office of the Seller.

Analysis %		
Min	65.00	Fe
Max	1.0	FeO
Max	0.05	P
Max	0.01	S
Max	3.5	SiO2
Max	0.7	Al2O3
Max	0.9	CaO
Max	2.5	MgO
Min 255		CCS(kg/p)
Min 90		8-16 mm%
Ave 5		-6 mm%
Max 4.0		A.I%
Min 94		T.I%
19-24		Prosity%
Min 90		Reducibility%

GOLGOHAR MINING & INDUSTRIAL CO.

PRAYER TIME

Noon (Zohr)	12:01
Evening (Maghreb)	19:32
Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:08
Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:51

44. Hast thou not turned Thy vision to those who were given a portion of the Book?
they traffic in error, and wish that ye should lose the right path.
45. But Allah hath full knowledge of your enemies:
Allah is enough for a protector, and Allah is enough for a Helper.
Surah 4. Women (44 - 45)

China's Investment In Iran Up by 150%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Commercial attache of Embassy of China in Tehran Zhou Zheng in meeting with the secretary general of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) Mr. Bahman Eshqi explored ways for boosting cooperation and said that China's investment in Iran has increased by 150%.

In the meeting, Mr. Eshqi pointed to the long political and economic cooperation between Iran and China and said reminded that Zhou of the actions taken by the TCCIMA in recent years for broadening economic cooperation between Tehran and Beijing and said that TCCIMA is the only Iranian NGO which has studied thoroughly the 25-year economic cooperation document of Iran and China and it has proposed its comprehensive ideas to Iran's government on the document.

He added that TCCIMA is ready to expand cooperation between Iran and China and it needs more interaction with the Embassy of China in Tehran especially with the commercial department of the embassy.

Then Zhou hailed the efforts of TCCIMA for efforts to broaden economic cooperation between the two states especially since 2021 and reiterated China's investment in 2022 increased by 150%.

He noted that this amount of investment in Iran is more than average volume of investment of China in other countries and reiterated that in 2022, the number of signed agreements between the two countries in the joint projects increased 10 fold comparing to the previous year.

He stated that this rise in trade cooperation was impossible without agreement and understanding of political officials of both states and stipulated that the programs of TCCIMA for connecting Iranian and Chines companies and helping the sustainable economic cooperation between the economic activists of the two countries is appreciable.

He also announced readiness of Chinese companies to enter Iran's market and to cooperate with their Iranian counterparts and added that introducing reputed Iranian companies by TCCIMA and its cooperation with the Embassy of China will pave the ground for broadening much more and better the economic relations and ties of economic enterprises.

Zhou also announced readiness of the embassy for accelerating visa process for economic activists and announced readiness of commercial department of the embassy for cooperation with Chinese companies for getting connected to their Iranian counterparts.

Private Sectors of Iran, Serbia Explore Ways of Expanding Ties

TEHRAN – In a meeting between the private sector representatives of Iran and Serbia in Tehran on Thursday, the two sides discussed ways of expanding mutual economic ties, the portal of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) reported.

During the meeting which was attended by acting head of the ICCIMA Department of International Affairs Niloufar Asadi and a delegation of Serbian private sector representatives, the two sides stressed the need for promoting joint investment and production in order to increase the level of trade.

According to Asadi, establishing a barter trade mechanism between the two sides can also significantly boost economic relations between the two countries.

The officials also explored common areas for cooperation including agriculture, petrochemicals, tourism, and especially health tourism.

The head of the Serbian delegation for his part expressed his country's readiness for welcoming Iranian economic delegations in the future, saying: "In addition to cooperation between the science and technology parks of the two countries, we are looking for trade in agricultural products, especially the import of chemical fertilizers from Iran and the export of corn, soybeans, and other products."

Official Calls for Preferential Trade Deal With Uzbekistan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - A senior Iranian trade official has called for a preferential trade agreement with Uzbekistan to remove trade barriers between the two countries.

Mehdi Zeighami, the acting director of the Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) of Iran, met with Uzbekistan's ambassador to Tehran, Bahador Abdullayev, on Friday to discuss ways to deepen bilateral trade and economic ties.

The main focus of the meeting was to plan for the Iran-Uzbekistan Joint Commission to be held in Tashkent, as well as a planned visit by Uzbek President Shavkat Mirziyoyev to Tehran in a few weeks.

During the meeting, both sides emphasized the mutual interest of Iran and Uzbekistan in removing trade barriers and developing trade exchanges, highlighting the necessity of signing a preferential trade agreement.

The Uzbek ambassador also appreciated Iran as the closest access route to the open seas for Uzbekistan and called for the removal of obstacles for transit of goods via Iran.

He expressed hope that a roadmap for trade exchanges between the two countries, aimed at reaching a $1 billion trade target, would be signed during President Mirziyoyev's visit to Tehran.

Once transit barriers were completely removed, Abdullayev said, the volume of trade would potentially rise to $4 billion.

Zeighami, the Iranian trade official, pointed to Tehran's efforts in removing obstacles for the transit of Uzbek goods via Iran, and said plans were underway to hold a trade conference between the two countries.

ESCO Chosen as Top Company on IME

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

ISFAHAN – In a ceremony for honoring the top companies on Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) which was last held last week in presence of economy minister, Esfahan Steel Company (ESCO) was chosen as one of the top companies on the IME.

In the ceremony the organizers hailed Esfahan Steel Company and awarded the company with top prize and the prize was given to the CEO of ESCO Mr. Mahdi Koohi.

On the sidelines of the event, Mr. Koohi said that it is an honor for ESCO as the founder of the metals bourse and then its role in the launch of IME and the company has always been present on the IME to support transparency for the prices in defense of customers' right. He added that ESCO is now ready t sell its products on IME with new methods and bourse tools.

It is worth noting that last year commodities worth 26,000b tomans were traded on the IME.

Official Call for Modelling MSC in Tackling the Challenges

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – Deputy Head of IRIB on development and technology Mr. Farshid Behjat Mohammadi during the visit of senior officials of development and technology of IRIP to Mobarakeh Sell Company (MSC) urged other companies to use Mobarakeh Steel Company in tackling the problems.

Mr. Behjat Mohammadi said that during the visit he got acquainted with the valuable achievements of products and two issues were very interesting for them that the first one was the way of tackling the challenges and problems ahead of the organization by MSC and the second one was efficient use from opportunities in the company which turns any threat to opportunity.

He added that today MSC has prioritized quality of products to quantity in its competition and it shows the management set achievable goals for the organization that it ultimately leads to the daily rise of productivity and profitability for the country and it is all source of pride.

He also expressed his concern over the approach of the young generation who do not choose industrial fields of study in the universities and said that in the upcoming years the company may face serious problems.

Behjat Mohammadi went on to say that the task of IRIB is to promote industrial fields and encourage young generation to continue studying in those fields and urged MSC also to do the same for encouraging the youths to study in the industrial fields in universities.

He added that unfortunately in our industries state-of-the-art technologies have not been used favorably and it will be a failure for the industry which will be behind the international standards, reiterating that achievements of MSCO should also be promoted for the like industries in the country.

Chadormalu Starts Operation for Transferring Water From Persian Gulf to Ardakan

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The operation for transferring water with laying pipe for 34 kilometers with the early prediction of 500 to 800 millimeters diameter and volume of 300 liters per second from the Persian Gulf to the industries in the town of Ardakan started by Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company.

In a ceremony which was held in presence of the CEO of Chadormalu Mining and Industrial Company Emg. Taherzadeh, governor of Yazd Province, representative of the town of Ardakan to Majlis and the Friday Prayer Leader of Ardakan, the operation was officially kicked off.

Addressing the ceremony, Eng. Taherzadeh said that the desalinated water of the Persian Gulf that previously was transferred for 80 kilometers from Bandar Abbas to Ardakan Industrial Complex is currently is allocated to the industries of Ardakan from the reservoirs of Chadormalu Co. with implementing pipe laying for 34 kilometers and with the early prediction of 500 to 800 millimeters of diameter and volume of 300 liters per second and it can be increased to 600 liters per second and with its implementation some drinking water will be used by the people.

Taherzadeh said that it is expected the project to cost between 3500b rials and it can come on stream six months after the contractor starts its work.

Meanwhile governor of Yazd Province Dr. Fatemi hailed Chadormalu Co. for this unique action in observing the social responsibility and added that since Ardakan and Yazd Province face problem in drinking water supply, this action can guarantee sustainable water supply for some 700,000 people of Yazd and it is considered a great service and it should be thanked.

In the ceremony also the 6000-seat sport hall of Chadormalu was inaugurated as this multi-functional sport hall is built on a land around 8,000 square meters and it has been built in 3 years and a half.

HOSCO Wins National Brand Award of Social Responsibility

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – During the national conference of the top 100 brands with social responsibility approach, Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) won the plaque of appreciation of top national brand in the field of social responsibility.

According to reports, the first nationwide conference on the top 100 national brands which was held in presence of state managers and top companies of the company at Conference Hall of IRIB, HOSCO as one of the top brands of national steel industry won the national brand award in the field of fulfilling social responsibilities.

The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company Ataollah Maroufkhani on the sidelines of the event said that the company beside fulfilling its main task which is the increase in production has also fulfilled its social responsibilities as well as carrying out the developmental projects.

He then pointed to the slogan of the year which is inflation control and increase of production, HOSCO has put on its agenda plan for increasing production comparing to the previous year and developmental projects for increasing the production and survival of the company in the domestic and international markets have been planned.

Maroufkhani reiterated that observing social responsibility is the duty of any economic enterprise and our country needs observing social responsibilities by big economic enterprises and it is ne3cssary to move in this line through planning.

HOSCO is the leading industrial in Hormozgan Province in observing social responsibilities. Maroufkhani reiterated that the company this year will also be a leading company in observing social responsibility as well as accelerating developmental projects.

Amazon City of Belem To Host COP30 in 2025

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - The city of Belem on the edge of the Brazilian Amazon has been chosen to host the COP30 round of global climate talks in 2025, President Luiz Inacio Lula da Silva announced Friday.

"I am convinced that it will be a great event... the world will love the people of the state of Para" of which Belem is the capital, the president said in a video posted on social media.

"I already participated in this conference (Conference of the Parties or COP) in Egypt, in France, and everyone was talking about the Amazon. So I said: 'Why not hold the conference there, so you know where the Amazon is?'" Lula said about his offer to host the annual talks.

Russia Summons U.S. diplomats Over Sullivan Comments

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned senior U.S. diplomats to protest against remarks by White House national security adviser Jake Sullivan, whom it accused of "effectively endorsing strikes" on Crimea.

The peninsula on the Black Sea was seized by Russia and unilaterally annexed from Ukraine in 2014, but is internationally recognised as Ukrainian territory.

"It is time for Washington to learn that any form of aggression against Russia will continue to be met with the strongest possible response," the ministry said.

Serb Clashes, West Condemnation As Kosovo Pushes Through Mayors

ZVECAN (Dispatches) - Police in northern Kosovo fired tear gas as Serbs protested the installation of ethnic Albanian mayors, a decision that drew sharp condemnation from the United States and European powers.

Serbia, which ruled Kosovo until a NATO intervention in 1999, placed its army on high alert and ordered forces towards the border, a step it has taken repeatedly in recent years.

Kosovo›s ethnic Serb minority boycotted elections in the north in April, allowing ethnic Albanians to take control of the local councils despite the vote›s tiny turnout of less than 3.5 percent.

Kosovo Prime Minister Albin Kurti since last week has gone ahead and installed mayors, defying calls by the European Union and the United States, which has championed the territory›s independence.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken said that the United States «strongly condemns» Kurti›s move.

«These actions have sharply and unnecessarily escalated tensions, undermining our efforts to help normalise relations between Kosovo and Serbia, and will have consequences for our bilateral relations with Kosovo,» Blinken said in a statement.

The United States also issued a joint statement with Britain, France, Italy and Germany that condemned the decision and urged Kosovo to «immediately step back and de-escalate.»

The Western powers said they were also «concerned by Serbia›s decision to raise the level of readiness of its armed forces at the border with Kosovo and call on all parties for maximum restraint, avoiding inflammatory rhetoric.»

In the Serb-majority town of Zvecan, Serb residents clashed with officers before being pushed back, an AFP journalist witnessed.

In videos posted online, gunshots and shock bombs could be heard.

Ambulances arrived at the scene, where around 10 people suffered minor injuries «from shock bombs and tear gas, and also visible facial injuries», Danica Radomirovic, deputy head of the local hospital, told local media.*

Five police officers sustained slight injuries from «heavy objects and shock bombs» that were thrown in their direction, Kosovo police said.

«Material damage was also caused to four official vehicles. One of them was set on fire... Gunshots were also heard nearby,» Kosovo police added.

Kosovo police earlier confirmed that the officers were escorting newly elected mayors into their workplaces.

Serbian state-run broadcaster RTS reported that Kosovo police also used tear gas in the Zubin Potok and Leposavic municipalities.

Local ethnic Serbs have begun to erect roadblocks in Leposavic as a sign of protest at the events, RTS reported.

Serbia last put its army on a heightened state of alert in December after Serbs erected barricades to protest at the arrest of an ex-policeman.

There are frequent bouts of unrest in Kosovo›s northern districts, home to many ethnic Serbs, who have remained loyal to Belgrade and never accepted Kosovo›s unilateral declaration of independence in 2008.

An estimated 120,000 Serbs live in Kosovo, many in the four northern districts.

Belgrade backed the local election boycott in April. It is pushing for an «association of Serb municipalities» -- a form of autonomy for the Serb minority in Kosovo, where the majority of the 1.8 million inhabitants are ethnic Albanian.

The main Serb party from Kosovo threatened a «decisive response» from ethnic Serbs if the «repression» by Kurti does not stop.

Russia Says Its Border Regions Attacked

KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia's southern Belgorod region bordering Ukraine came under attack from Ukrainian artillery fire, mortar shells and drones, authorities said, hours after two drones struck a Russian city in an area next to the annexed Crimea Peninsula.

Moscow's forces, meanwhile, struck a building containing psychology and veterinary clinics in the city of Dnipro, in central Ukraine, killing two people and wounding 30, including two children, Ukrainian officials said.

Video released by regional Gov. Serhiy Lysak showed fire engulfing the three-story building that appeared almost destroyed, with only parts of a wall standing, as firefighters battled the flames.

A Russian S-300 missile hit a dam in the Karlivka district of Donetsk province in eastern Ukraine, threatening nearby settlements with flooding.

The town of Graivoron in Russia's Belgorod region, about 7 kilometers (more than 4 miles) from the Ukrainian border, came under fire for several hours, damaging four houses, a store, a car, a gas pipeline and a power line, Gov. Vyacheslav Gladkov reported.

Closer to the frontier, a recreation center, a shop and an empty house were damaged in the village of Glotovo. One woman was wounded when nearby Novaya Tavolzhanka was shelled, Gladkov said.

Earlier this week, the Belgorod region was the target of one of the most serious cross-border attacks from Ukraine since the war began 15 months ago. Details of the raid were murky. Russia blamed the Ukrainian armed forces, but two Russian groups said they were involved, with the aim of bringing down Russian President Vladimir Putin.

Officials in Russia's southern city of Krasnodar, in the region of the same name bordering Crimea, said two drones struck there. Witnesses told local media they heard something like the sound of a moped and then two explosions.

The blasts smashed a hole in the roof of one building and blew out windows in an apartment building.

"We just went to bed and then there was such a strong, terrible boom," said resident Tatiana Safonova. "We ran outside. There were people running, but nothing else was going on."

Sudan's Warring Sides Appear to Be Better Abiding by Latest Cease-Fire

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia and the United States said the warring sides in Sudan's conflict are adhering better to a new, weeklong cease-fire following days of sporadic fighting.

The truce, brokered by Riyadh and Washington, went into effect on Monday, but fighting continued in the Sudanese capital of Khartoum and the western Darfur region. Particularly intense clashes flared up on Wednesday, the two mediators said in a joint statement.

The conflict in Sudan erupted in mid-April after months of escalating tensions between the military, led by Gen. Abdel-Fattah Burhan, and the Rapid Support Forces, a powerful paramilitary commanded by Gen. Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo. The conflict has killed at least 863 civilians, including at least 190 children, according to the most recent numbers from the Sudanese Doctors' Syndicate. The latest, weeklong cease-fire is the seventh attempt at a truce after the others were violated.

A new cross-party committee tasked with monitoring potential violations observed Wednesday the "use of artillery and military aircraft and drones, credible reports of airstrikes, sustained fighting" in Khartoum and Darfur.

Amid the reported calm on Thursday, humanitarian missions were able on to deliver "urgently needed medical supplies to several locations in Sudan," the joint statement said. Efforts were also underway to restore telecommunications services in Khartoum and other areas of the country, it said.

On Friday, Khartoum residents reported only sporadic gunfire. However, the Sudanese Defense Ministry issued a statement calling on all non-commissioned and retired officers under 65 to re-enlist. It remains unclear if the call-up is mandatory.

Earlier in the day, Sudan TV had broadcast a military statement asking former soldiers and men capable of fighting to head to the nearest military command to arm themselves for their own self-protection.

Over the past six weeks, looting has become widespread across many Khartoum districts, which are also without water and electricity.

Imran Khan Calls for Immediate Talks

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Former Pakistan Prime Minister Imran Khan appealed for immediate talks with state officials, as pressure increased on him amidst a crackdown on his top aides and supporters that has seen thousands arrested as well as many leaving his party.

Khan has been embroiled in a tussle with the military since he was removed from power last year in a parliamentary vote that he says was orchestrated by the country's top generals. The military denies this.

The stand-off intensified when earlier this month Khan's supporters were involved in violent protests following his brief arrest on May 9.

"I would like to appeal for talks, because what is currently happening is not a solution," Khan said in a live talk streamed on YouTube, warning that the country was headed towards anarchy.

The political unrest has worsened as Pakistan faces its worst economic crisis in decades. Inflation is at record highs, economic growth is anaemic, and there are fears that the country could default on external debts unless the International Monetary Fund unlocks delayed disbursements.

Most of Khan's top aides were arrested a shortly after his supporters stormed and set ablaze a number of military installations across the country. Many have been released and shortly after announced their resignations from Khan's party. Dozens of other mid-tier leaders have also left.

Khan said they were being made to resign under duress in a bid to weaken him and dismantle his party. He distanced his party from the attacks on military installations during the unrest that followed his arrest and reiterated a called for an investigation to determine who was involved.

Khan's party members have said they were leaving of their own free will. Many of them cited concerns for their family and health.

The former premier, however, struck a defiant tone, warning that his party's popularity was only rising because of the crackdown and would still win an election whenever it was held. He said he only wanted to talk to take the country out of the current crisis.

A national election is scheduled to be held by November, and polls show Khan remains the country's most popular leader.

Khan had said earlier this week that he would set up a committee to hold negotiations. He says previous attempts to speak to the country's powerful generals had gone unanswered. The civilian government, a coalition of his political rivals, has not indicated that it was willing to talk as the crackdown on his party continued.

Turkey Election Fever Cools Down Ahead of Decisive Run-Off

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - The two weeks between Turkey's first and second round of voting has seen a marked change in campaign intensity as the country enters the uncharted territory of a presidential run-off.

Sunday will be the first time Turkish voters have ever had to go to the ballot box for a second time to select their next president – and many seem to find it hard to resurrect the enthusiasm of the first round.

"It's a strange feeling. I feel like the election is finished, but I know there's another one on Sunday," said Soner Ugurlu, 49, as he sipped tea with friends in Istanbul's Tophane neighbourhood.

"Of course, I will vote again, but it seems weird because everything is much calmer compared to two weeks ago," he said.

Many voters see President Recep Tayyip Erdogan as the likely winner as he seeks to extend his 20 years in power by a further five years, adding to the sense that the second vote is something of an anticlimax.

Erdogan surprised pollsters and commentators on May 14 when he emerged ahead of his two challengers and came close to surpassing the 50 percent threshold to win the contest in the first round.

He now faces the second-placed candidate, opposition leader Kemal Kilicdaroglu, who secured about 45 percent of the vote to Erdogan's 49.2 percent, according to the most recent tally. It is only the third time Turks have voted directly for their president. Erdogan won the 2014 and 2018 polls in the first round.

Most opinion polls had predicted Kilicdaroglu coming first in the initial ballot with some even suggesting an outright win, and the opposition's confident messaging reflected this anticipated result.

Many opposition supporters now feel deflated after their hopes of removing Erdogan from power were dashed. Erdogan was seen as vulnerable as Turks struggle through an economic crisis and after criticism of his government for a slow initial response to devastating earthquakes in February.

"I was very hopeful before May 14 because it looked like we would finally get rid of him, but now it looks like he's unbeatable," said Olcay, who runs a clothing store in Cihangir, a fashionable district of Istanbul.

Europe Hits Resistance in Race To Finalize Green Laws

BRUSSELS (Reuters) - Increased political resistance to new EU laws to protect the environment has left the European Commission fighting to keep intact its vision for Europe's green transition.

Ahead of elections in the European Parliament in June next year, the European Union is racing to finish legislation that includes two landmark nature bills - binding targets for countries to restore damaged natural habitats and a goal to halve chemical pesticide use by 2030.

Much EU environment legislation has been passed over the last two years, but the appetite on the part of some lawmakers and member states for more is waning and farming groups say further change must be conditional on more financial support.

Brussels proposed the nature measures last June. Opposition has mounted in recent weeks, as EU countries and lawmakers prepare for the final negotiations. The European Parliament's biggest group, the European People's Party, has called for the nature law to be scrapped saying it would hurt farmers.

"It's just too much. People are frustrated with new rules every year," EPP lawmaker Peter Liese said.

The Commission proposal gives countries discretion to decide how and where to reverse biodiversity loss. But that flexibility, Liese said, makes it impossible for farmers to prepare.

"No farmer can predict what's happening on his land, what kind of rules he has to follow, in the next years," Liese said.

Other EU green proposals have also met resistance. And as the elections approach, unfinished laws are piling up. Their fate would be unclear under a new EU Parliament with a different composition.

French President Emmanuel Macron this month suggested a pause on new European environment regulation, to give industries time to absorb recently-agreed laws.

The Commission last week delayed another scheduled package of environmental proposals, plus a bill on microplastic pollution. A Commission spokesperson declined to comment on the reason for the delay.

Meanwhile, EU countries are pushing to weaken proposed pollution curbs for farms and methane emission limits for energy producers. Some capitals want to scrap new car pollution limits, and the EU's renewable energy targets are deadlocked by an argument over whether nuclear energy can be included.

In the last two years, the Commission, whose make-up will also change following next year's parliamentary elections, has proposed more than 30 laws designed to deliver green goals. The aim is to steer countries towards the EU's target to have zero net greenhouse gas emissions by 2050.

Most have been successfully passed, including tighter CO2 limits for cars, higher CO2 costs for industries and requirements to expand CO2-absorbing forests.

Many of the remaining bills are focused less on planet-warming CO2 emissions than on other environmental calamites - pollution, the collapse of bee and butterfly populations, or Europe's poor soil health.

EU officials say these crises are just as important as climate change, and are inextricably linked.

Restored ecosystems such as forests and peatlands, for instance, absorb more CO2 emissions. Greenhouse gas emissions from agriculture - the sector most affected by the nature laws - have barely fallen since 2005, the European Environment Agency has said.

Scientists have also raised alarm that drastic declines in insect populations have serious implications for other species and food crop yields.

"Without the nature pillar, the climate pillar is also not viable," EU climate policy chief Frans Timmermans told EU lawmakers this week.

Google Will Soon Remove Dormant Accounts. Here's How to Save Yours

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Old, unused Google accounts and all the messages and photos connected with them could soon be deleted.

The company this week announced plans to start deleting accounts that have been inactive for 2 years or longer. This will apply to products such as Gmail, Google Photos and Google Drive but not YouTube videos or enterprise accounts, Google said.

Before you panic, there's plenty of time to avoid losing any old files. The deletions won't start until December 2023 and, even then, the company is starting with the most obvious candidates, such as accounts that were created once and never used again. Google will send notices to any backup email addresses or phone numbers associated with the accounts ahead of time, it said.

The news is a reminder that you should plan ahead and make sure your accounts won't be lost down the line.

The quickest way to avoid deletion is to actually use your account and reset the clock. If it's collecting dust because it was overrun with spam or you just outgrew an embarrassing account name, log in now. This will buy you some time to decide what to do next. (More advice on that below.)

What if you can't just log in? If you've forgotten the password or your account was hacked, start with Google's account recovery page and try to reset it. It will likely ask you a bunch of questions and Google has tips to help you succeed, including using a device that logged into the same account before, avoiding typos and sharing your last known password. If you are trying to access the account of someone who has died, say to download their photo albums, you can try this same advice.

If your account was suspended for violating the terms of service or other reasons, you can attempt to appeal the decision to Google. Try to log into the account and look for an option that says Start Appeal. Some of these accounts will still be allowed to export data, but it depends on the reason it was disabled in the first place.

Make sure you have a local copy of your most valued images and documents in addition to saving them with a third party such as Google.

Cloud storage has revolutionized how we hold on to digital files and memories, letting us access our files from any device. But trusting a third party as the only keeper of years of emails, photos and documents is risky. A company can be bought or go under, change its rules, start charging for space, or lock you out of an account for any number of reasons, like violating the terms of service or a hack.

That doesn't mean you shouldn't use cloud services - just make sure you have a plan B in place and files saved somewhere you are completely in control, such as a computer or hard drive you own. Even having a copy saved to another company's cloud storage is better than nothing.

You may think, "Hey, I check my Gmail at least once an hour, this could never apply to me." No matter how online you are, you or a loved one could get locked out of an account, simply forget about it, become incapacitated or die.

To plan for the worst, go into your existing Google accounts now and make some easy changes. You don't need to go into settings for each Google product, like Gmail and Photos. Instead, do it in the main account settings at myaccount.google.com, and do it for each Google name you have.

Add a recovery email address: This can be key if you are locked out of your mail account or it's hacked in the future. Go to "Security" and scroll down to "Recovery email." If you don't have a secondary email address, you can add someone else close to you.

Japan Firms Feel Sense of Crisis Over Falling Birthrate

TOKYO (Dispatches) - More than nine out of 10 Japanese firms feel a sense of crisis about the country's accelerating birthrate decline, with few hopeful that Prime Minister Fumio Kishida's government can arrest the fall, according to a Reuters monthly poll.

Kishida unveiled a plan in March to reverse the birthrate trend, a problem that has worsened under successive Liberal Democratic Party (LDP) administrations, threatening to further shrink the country's workforce and sap consumer demand.

Those measures, which include expanding child allowance provisions, increasing paid parental leave and providing subsidies for fertility treatments came after the government revealed that annual births last year had dipped below 800,000 for the first time, eight years earlier than expected.

Of nearly 500 major companies surveyed by Reuters, 94% said they felt a sense of crisis when asked about the fall in annual births in 2022. Only 14% of firms said they were hopeful that Kishida's measures would work, with 34% saying they would not. The remaining companies that responded, did not express a view.

"The LDP response is about securing votes, it is not seriously tackling the problem," a representative from a transport machinery company said, on condition the company wasn't identified.

Like other major industrial economies, Japan is raising the retirement age and encouraging more women to work as its population ages. Unlike some countries, however, it has not sought out large numbers of foreign workers to fill its job vacancies.

Protecting India's Tigers Also Good for Climate

PARIS (Dispatches) - India's efforts to protect its endangered tigers have inadvertently helped avoid a large amount of climate change-causing carbon emissions by preventing deforestation, a study said.

Three-quarters of the world's wild tigers live in India, but the destruction of their natural habitat have seen their numbers plummet.

The number of tigers roaming the country's forests fell from 40,000 when India gained independence in 1947 to just 1,500 in 2006.

However their number rose above 3,000 this year, according to the latest official figures.

To help their numbers rebound, India has designated 52 tiger reserves where logging and deforestation are heavily regulated.

Aakash Lamba, a researcher at the National University of Singapore and the new study's lead author, told AFP that tigers are an "umbrella species".

This "means that by protecting them we also protect the forests they live in, which are home to an incredible diversity of wildlife," he told AFP. Forests are a "carbon sink", which mean they absorb more carbon dioxide from the atmosphere than they release, making them a crucial tool in the fight against climate change.

India, the world's third largest emitter of greenhouse gases, has pledged to lower its emissions.

Lamba, who grew up in India, said the team of researchers sought to establish an empirical link between tiger conservation and carbon emissions.

They compared the rate of deforestation in the special tiger reserves to areas where the big cats also live, but are less strictly protected. More than 61,000 hectares of forest was lost across 162 different areas between 2001 and 2020, according to the study.

More than three quarters of the deforestation was in areas outside of the tiger reserves.

Inside the tiger reserves, almost 6,000 hectares was saved from deforestation between 2007 to 2020. That equates to more than a million metric tons of carbon emissions avoided, the study estimated.

Lamba emphasized the economic impact of those saved emissions in a country that has been hit hard by the effects of climate change -- particularly the agricultural industry.

Taking into account the social cost of those emissions, more than $92 million had been saved, the researchers calculated. If counted as part of a carbon offset scheme, the avoided deforestation amounted to more than $6 million, they added. "The financial benefits of avoiding carbon emissions are more than a quarter of the annual expenditure on tiger conservation in India," Lamba said.

"This significant outcome highlights how investments in wildlife conservation not only safeguard ecosystems and wildlife but also benefit societies and economies."

The study was published in the journal Nature Ecology & Evolution.

The findings come after a study published in March suggested protecting or restoring a handful of wild animals such as whales, wolves and otters could help capture 6.4 billion tons of carbon dioxide every year.

Meandering Along the River Seine: France's Roving Plastic Rubbish

ROUEN (Dispatches) – The scrap of red plastic in among the waterside reeds in northern France could be any fragment of the throwaway consumerism piling up across the planet, flowing into rivers, choking animals, even seeping into our bloodstreams.

But this otherwise unremarkable litter caught in the foliage not far from the mouth of the river Seine has both a name -- EF56308 -- and a history.

It was tossed into the water on September 26, 2018, in Rouen, 70 kilometres upstream.

Romain Tramoy should know. He threw it.

Tramoy, a specialist in sediments, tours the riverbanks making an inventory of the plastic that now splashes garish colours in landscapes once beloved of impressionist painters.

Sometimes he marks the plastics with pink or fluorescent yellow paint so he can perhaps find them again one day, somewhere else on their journey towards the sea.

"No waste goes to the sea in a linear way," he told AFP, along a riverside strewn with litter.

They can hang around "for years", flowing from one bank to another, where they snare in the foliage.

The scientist, who works at the Water Environment and Urban Systems Laboratory, has spent years studying the life of plastics in the Seine, trying to trace the origins of the trash, how these items can make their way to the sea and how much there is.

The Seine River begins its life on the Langres plateau in eastern France before flowing to Paris, where it waters the feet of the Eiffel Tower before wending its way to the city of Rouen and ultimately spilling out into the English Channel.

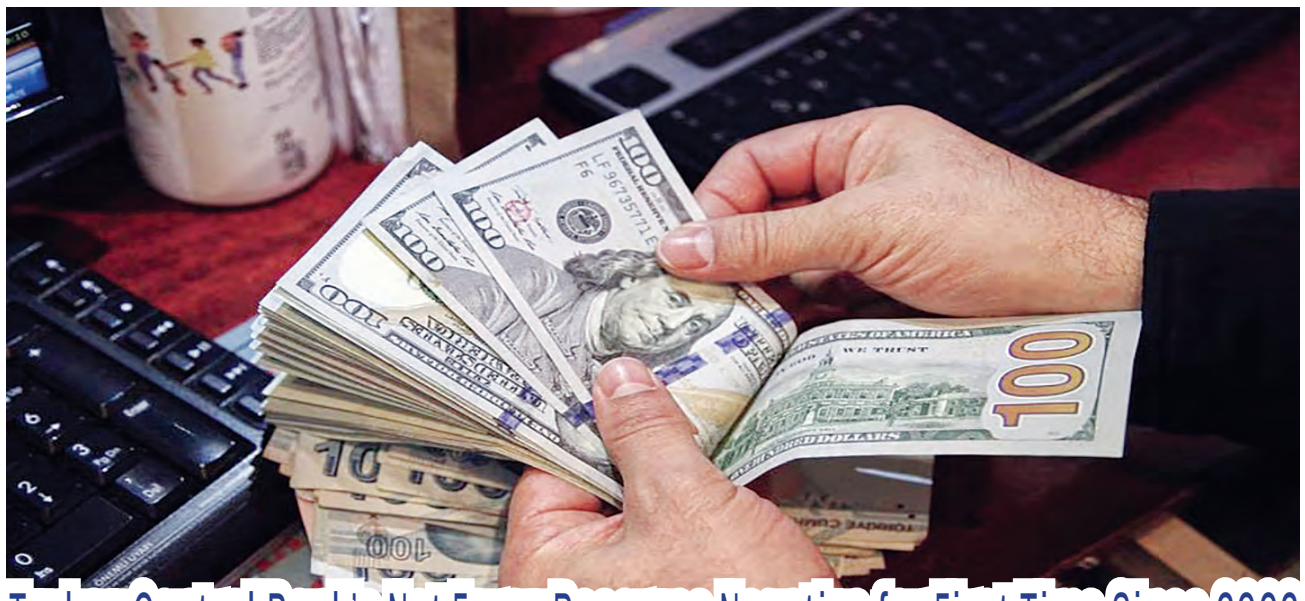
Saudi Aramco to Develop 400 mcf Per Day Iraqi Gas Field

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Saudi oil giant Aramco will develop a gas field in Iraq that could produce more than 400 million cubic feet of gas per day, Iraqi Oil Minister Hayan Abdel-Ghani said.

Aramco will invest and develop Akkas gas field in the western Iraqi Anbar province, the Iraqi oil ministry said in a statement citing Abdel-Ghani.

The statement added that there was also an initial agreement with Saudi Arabia to invest in the Nebras project, "one of the most promising strategic projects in the petrochemical industries in Iraq and the region".

Abdel-Ghani made the announcement on the sidelines of the Saudi-Iraqi Coordination Council currently held in the kingdom.



Turkey Central Bank's Net Forex Reserves Negative for First Time Since 2002

ANKARA (Dispatches) - The Turkish central bank's net forex reserves dropped into negative territory for the first time since 2002, standing at $-151.3 million on May 19, official data showed on Thursday, as it sought to counter forex demand ahead of Sunday's runoff vote.

President Tayyip Erdogan led rival Kemal Kilicdaroglu comfortably in the presidential vote on May 14 but he fell just shy of the 50% needed to win outright. The outcome will be decided in a May 28 runoff.

Forex demand in Turkey surged to record levels ahead of May 14 on companies' and individuals' expectations that the lira, which lost 44% in 2021 and 30% in 2022, will plunge after the vote.

The central bank's forex reserves have sagged in recent years due to costly market interventions and other efforts to cool forex demand.

The bank's net reserves dropped by $2.48 billion in the week to May 19, to their lowest level since February 2002. They have dropped $27.7 billion since the end of 2022.

The exchange rate used by Reuters on Thursday was 19.7607. The net forex reserves are pushed deeper into negative territory once outstanding swaps, which stood at $33.50 billion on Wednesday, are deducted.

In the first five weeks of 2002, net reserves were in negative territory, according to official data that goes back to the beginning of that year.

Meanwhile the Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) on Thursday kept its one-week repo rate, also known as policy rate, unchanged in compliance with market expectations in its last meeting ahead of the presidential runoff.

The bank kept its policy rate stable at 8.5% after holding it steady in the month before as well. It last cut it by 50 basis points in February to support economic activity after massive earthquakes hit the country's south.

The bank said despite signals for stronger economic activity, recession concerns in advanced economies related to rate hikes and geopolitical risks threaten financial stability.

"Before the disaster of the century, leading indicators have been pointing to a stronger domestic demand compared to foreign demand as well as an increase in the growth trend in the first quarter of 2023," it said, referring to the devastating earthquakes in Turkey earlier this year.

"Recent data shows that economic activity in the earthquake zone has been recovering faster than expected, and it is becoming evident that the earthquakes will not have a permanent impact on the performance of the Turkish economy in the medium term." The bank also reiterated the necessity of maintaining supportive financial conditions in response to the earthquakes. It emphasized the use of alternative policy tools and aligning all policy measures with the objectives of "liraisation."

The lira stood unchanged at 19.9235 against the dollar after the central bank decision, a drop from 19.93, which it touched earlier on Thursday.

The central bank's policy of stabilizing the lira, meanwhile, sent its net foreign reserves into negative territory for the first time since 2002, while the bank has also sold $9 billion in gold since March to meet pre-election demand.

German Economy Enters Recession

BERLIN (Dispatches) - The German economy entered a technical recession in the first quarter of this year, as households tightened spending.

Data from the German statistics office on Thursday showed a downward revision to GDP (gross domestic product) from zero to -0.3% for the first three months of the year.

This comes after Germany recorded a 0.5% contraction in the last quarter of 2022. Two consecutive quarters of negative growth define a technical recession.

Europe's largest economy has been under significant pressure, particularly in the wake of Russia's invasion of Ukraine and the subsequent decision of European leaders to cut ties with Moscow.

According to the statistics office, German households spent a lot less in the first quarter, with final consumption expenditure falling 1.2% over that period, as consumers were reluctant to spend their cash on clothing, furnishing, cars and so on.

"Germany did fall into recession at the end of last year, after all, as the shock in energy prices weighed on consumers' spending," Claus Vistesen, chief euro zone economist at Pantheon Macroeconomics, said in note to clients.

He added that it is unlikely that the German GDP will continue to fall in the coming quarters, "but we see no strong recovery either."

Franziska Palmas, senior Europe economist at Capital Economics, said: "We expect further weakness from here."

The latest economic development takes place against a backdrop of high inflation and high interest rates across the region. The European Central Bank is expected to raise rates again at its next meeting on June 15. The central bank has lifted its rates by 375 basis points since July.

German Central Bank Governor Joachim Nagel said earlier this week that the ECB has "several" more rate increases ahead. He is one of the most hawkish members of the central bank.

Pakistan Growth Slows Sharply as Economic Challenges Mount

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Pakistan's economic growth slowed sharply to one of the lowest levels in its history as its woes intensify amid record inflation and interest rates, along with a stalled International Monetary Fund bailout.

The National Accounts Committee reported gross domestic product provisionally expanded 0.29 per cent for the fiscal year ending June 30, in a statement released on Thursday in Islamabad. An initial 5 per cent GDP target set last June, was revised down to 2.3 per cent in September after devastating floods last summer.

This is only the fifth time in Pakistan's history the growth rate has been less than 1 per cent, according to Pakistan Bureau of Statistics data going back to 1952. The last time this happened was in fiscal 2020 when the pandemic hit global economies hard.

The slowdown is largely due to a reduction of industrial output caused by government restrictions on the imports of many raw materials, since it doesn't have the funds to make those purchases. Agricultural output has also contracted due to last year's floods that submerged one third of the country and displaced millions of people.

"This is more managed decline, or decline by design," said Mohammed Sohail, CEO of Topline Securities, adding this has helped the government control the current account deficit and maintain foreign exchange reserves at over $4 billion, despite debt repayments.

The World Bank and the Asian Development Bank have both cut their growth forecasts for Pakistan. Last month, the ADB said it expects the economy to slow significantly to 0.6 per cent, down from 6 per cent. The World Bank's latest assessment forecasts 0.4 per cent for the current fiscal year, saying it's likely to "remain below potential in the medium-term."

"The first-half of the financial year will be challenging as a new IMF deal is expected to take three to four months and then there will be some political stability after elections, so things will start improving after December," said Topline's Sohail.

Brexit to Blame for a Third of Britain's Food Bill Rise

LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain's departure from the European Union has accounted for about a third of the increase in food bills for households since 2019, equivalent to about 250 pounds ($316), researchers from the London School of Economics and other universities said.

Britain has been battling inflation for over a year, partly driven by its highest rate of food price growth since 1977, with food prices up more than 19% over the last year.

Although London and Brussels have an agreement allowing largely tariff-free trade in goods, barriers to exports and imports in the form of paperwork, known as non-tariff barriers, have caused delays and higher costs.

The Centre for Economic Performance (CEP) study compared price changes for food products imported from the European Union with prices of food from further afield.

Before Brexit these products had similar price trends but after Brexit, there was a relative increase for products more exposed to imports from the EU, it said, and that has continued into 2023.

The study found that between January 2022 and March 2023, the price of food products that were exposed to Brexit increased by approximately 3.5 percentage points more than those that were not.

When considering the impact on food prices since December 2019, just before Britain formally left the EU, they estimated the cost of Brexit to UK households at 6.95 billion pounds ($8.77 billion), or 250 pounds per household.

Between December 2019 and March 2023, it said UK food prices rose by almost 25 percentage points.

"Our analysis suggests that, in the absence of Brexit, this figure would be 8 percentage points (30%) lower," the CEP said.

Products with high non-tariff barriers, such as meat and cheese imported from the EU, saw price increases about 10 percentage points higher than similar products that were not exposed to Brexit since January 2021, when Britain's trade and cooperation (TCA) agreement with the EU started.

Last week Prime Minister Rishi Sunak's spokesperson said Britain's departure from the European Union had not been a failure, rebuffing criticism from prominent eurosceptic politicians about how Brexit had been implemented.

Overall British consumer price inflation hit a more-than 40-year high of 11.1% in October, according to official data. It had slowed to 8.7% in April.

EU Remains Cuba's Top Trade Partner

HAVANA (Dispatches) - The European Union's top diplomat said in Havana on Thursday that the 27-member bloc remains Cuba's top trade partner, and one committed to "mutual respect" despite U.S. sanctions and the communist-run island's increasing overtures towards Russia.

EU foreign policy chief Josep Borrell, during his first public appearance on a four-day trip to Cuba, told a group of local entrepreneurs the European Union was also the second-largest source of tourists to Cuba, behind Canada.

"Despite all the limitations [and] the restrictive measures of the U.S. blockade, which does not make things easy, we are [Cuba's] principal trade partner," Borrell said.

The United States imposed a trade embargo on Cuba shortly after Fidel Castro's 1959 revolution, a relic of the Cold War which continues to complicate financial and banking transactions with the Caribbean island nation.

Such sanctions, Cuba says, have contributed to its recent drive to increase commercial and trade ties with Russia, which has also faced sanctions from both the United States and the European Union following its invasion of Ukraine.

Cuba has said Russia is not responsible for the Ukraine conflict, blaming the United States instead.

The EU's Borrell, who spoke with entrepreneurs and fellow European diplomats Thursday, said "it is clear that we are much more important [in terms of trade] than other partners such as Russia and China."

He said the EU accounted for about one-third of foreign trade on the island, "versus 8% by China or 8% by Russia."

Borrell announced during his talk with entrepreneurs a 14 million euro fund to help promote small business in Cuba, a sign of the EU's "desire to accompany Cuba in its process of ... economic and social reforms in a relationship of mutual respect," he said.

The European Union, a long-time trade partner with Cuba, has previously expressed concern over human rights on the island following anti-government protests in July of 2021, the largest such demonstrations in decades.

Borrell said on Thursday that he hoped to meet with Cuban officials to discuss human rights before the end of 2023.

U.S. Dollar Dominance to Persist For Decades Despite Challenges

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The U.S. dollar's dominance in international trade and finance will persist for decades despite new challenges and even when a more multipolar currency system emerges it will be led by the greenback, Moody's Investor Service said.

While the multi-decade fall in the dollar's share of central bank reserves, simmering geopolitical tensions and growing brinkmanship in U.S. politics have boosted speculation about an end to the dollar's dominance, at present there are no viable alternatives, Moody's said in a note.

"The greatest near-term danger to the dollar's position stems from the risk of confidence-sapping policy mistakes by the U.S. authorities themselves, like a U.S. default on its debt for example," Moody's analysts wrote.

White House and Republican negotiators made some progress in late-night talks about raising the government's $31.4 trillion debt ceiling, top congressional Republican Kevin McCarthy told reporters on Thursday.

Negotiations are going to the last possible moment as the Treasury Department has warned the government could run short of funds to cover all its expenses as soon as June 1, which without a deal could trigger an economically catastrophic default.

The dollar's share of official FX reserves fell to a 20-year low of 58% in the fourth quarter of 2022, down from about 78% at the turn of the century, according to International Monetary Fund data.

While Moody's expects the dollar's share of reserves to fall further, its current rivals, the euro and renminbi, will struggle to rapidly match its core traits, including the size and openness of the of the U.S. economy and the safety and depth of the U.S. treasury market, the analysts said.

On Thursday, the dollar index , which measures the strength of the U.S. currency against six rivals, was up 0.4% at a two-month high of 104.23. For the year, the index is up 0.7%.

Mineral Reserves Discovered In Iran in 2013-2022 $28.7b

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Director of exploration of Iranian Mines and Mining Industries Development and Renovation (IMIDRO) said here on Saturday that the value of mines discovered in Iran from 2013 up to the end of 2022 has amounted $28.7 billion.

Ahmad Fattahi said on Saturday that mining exploration activities had amounted to 1.773 million meters in the 10 year to the end of 2022.

Fattahi added that the total proven mineral reserves discovered between 2013 and 2022 include 977 million metric tons (mt) of iron ore, 673 million mt of coal, 14 million mt of copper, 17 million mt of bauxite, 363 million mt of salt, 7 million mt of lead and zinc, and 182 mt of gold.

Russian Gold Shipments to the UAE, China and Turkey

LONDON (dispatches) - The United Arab Emirates has become a key trade hub for Russian gold since Western sanctions over Ukraine cut Russia's more traditional export routes, Russian customs records show.

The records, which contain details of nearly a thousand gold shipments between Feb. 24, 2022 and March 3 this year, reveal the names of over 100 non-Russian companies that have handled Russian gold since Western markets banned imports from Moscow.

The shipments in the records, supplied to Reuters by a commercial provider, may not cover all exports in the period.

In many cases, the records show only shippers or traders involved in the transaction, not the end buyer, which could be a refiner, jeweller or investor.

Following are details of some of the companies that have been involved:

LONDON

According to the customs records, a handful of Russian shipments arrived in London after the Ukraine war started, but before Western import bans kicked in.

U.S. bank JPMorgan was sent 72.4 kg of gold worth $4.5 million in shipments in March and April last year while Swedish security firm Loomis was sent of 97.4 kg worth $5.9 million during March, May and June.

Both companies operate precious metals vaults in London.

The customs records for the shipments to JPMorgan and some of those to Loomis named French bank Societe Generale as the recipient.

A source close to Societe Generale said while the bank cannot comment on specific client matters, any transactions of such a nature were debt settlements arranged prior to the war in Ukraine and would contain gold bars made before March 7, 2022, when the London Bullion Market Association banned Russian gold.

A spokesperson for JPMorgan declined to comment.

Loomis said it does not conduct business with any sanctioned parties or sanctioned goods and does not buy or take ownership of goods, only transports them for clients.

The firm declined to comment on specific shipments but said it seemed the customs records referenced by Reuters contained incorrect information, without specifying what.

UAE

The records show the biggest handler of Russian gold exports to the UAE was Temis Luxury Middle East, a Dubai subsidiary of French logistics provider Temis Luxury, which participated in the import of 15.6 tonnes valued at $863 million between Feb. 24, 2022 and March 3 this year.

It was followed by Transguard, which is part of the Emirates Group, the airline-to-hotels conglomerate owned by the Persian Gulf state's wealth fund, with 14.6 tonnes worth $820 million.

Temis Luxury said it fully complied with the laws and regulations of the UAE for freight forwarder activity.

Emirates said Transguard had not bought any Russian gold and had now stopped transporting Russian bullion.

The next largest handlers of gold shipped to the UAE in the year to March 3, 2023 were Shams Gold Trading with 8 tonnes, Privilege Group DMCC with 7.5 tonnes, Al Aseel Jewellery LLC with 5.3 tons and Paloma Precious DMCC with 5.1 tons, the customs documents showed.

Privilege did not respond to an email seeking comment, a lawyer representing Paloma said it had not committed any wrongdoing and Reuters was unable to reach Shams or Al Aseel for comment.

Another 17 non-Russian companies were each involved in transporting more than a tonne of Russian bullion to the UAE between Feb. 24, 2022 and March 3, 2023.

The other companies that helped shipped Russian gold to the UAE each handled fewer than 5 tonnes, in most cases far less.

Some large importers were, like Temis, subsidiaries of European firms.

Open Mineral, a metals trader in Switzerland set up by former traders at global commodities house Glencore, shipped 3 tons of Russian gold worth $167 million to the UAE, some before Swiss sanctions came in, and some afterwards.

All the deals after Swiss sanctions came into force involved Open Mineral's subsidiary in Abu Dhabi, not the Swiss company.

"Open Mineral was in full compliance with the relevant sanctions' regime in place at the time of these trades," the company said.

Almost all the Russian gold shipments to Hong Kong and mainland China were handled by Vpower Finance Security Hong Kong Ltd, a Chinese logistics company. It was involved in the shipment of 20.5 tons of gold worth $1.2 billion between May 2022 and March, the records showed.

Vpower Finance Security did not respond to requests for comment.

Five other non-Russian companies handled more than a ton of gold imports from Russia. Most of these shipments also involved Vpower.

TURKEY

No individual non-Russian company shipped more than a few tonnes of gold to Turkey. Eight took part in the import of more than one tonne of Russian gold in the year to March 3, 2023.

LBMA

At least two of the companies named in the customs records are members of the London Bullion Market Association. Vpower Finance Security is a full member and Transguard an affiliate member.

The LBMA said members and accredited refiners must comply with its rules, which include complying with U.S., UK and EU sanctions against Russia. It said it would investigate any allegations that LBMA members handled Russian gold and could rescind the membership of any companies that had done so.

Any Iran Achievement...

FROM PAGE 1

Reacting to these statements, Iran slammed the reaction of some Western countries to its successful launch of a new medium-range precision-guided ballistic missile, saying they are opposed to the enhancement of the Islamic Republic's "defensive power."

Iran has strongly rejected the US allegations that it has violated the UN resolution, insisting that its missile tests and rocket launches are solely for defense purposes and not designed to carry nuclear warheads.

Iran has always said that the nuclear deal does not affect its right to build and have a strong national defense, especially after facing international sanctions preventing it from buying weapons to defend itself against the eight-year war that Iraq started in 1980.

In a tweet on Friday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani referred to the history of the Western countries' arming of Saddam Hussein's regime during the eight-year imposed war on Iran in the 1980s.

"The same Western governments, especially the US and France, that played a big role in provoking and arming Saddam's Baathist regime to attack Iran and showering Iranian cities and people with missiles, those are the main suppliers of weapons to the region, are now worried about Iran's defensive power," the spokesman wrote.

Of course this is not the first and will not also be the last time that the Western states react angrily to Iran's achievement and Tehran will pay no heed to such bullies and accusations and continue its defensive programs because Tehran is well aware that the world has turned into a jungle by the world hegemonic states and only might will be right in this jungle and for this reason Tehran is working to strengthen its military especially in defense and improving the missile technology, and increasing the range of missile is one way for becoming might and it will push the West back and they do not dare to take any offensive action against Iran because they know that the slogan of the Islamic Republic of Iran is that the era of hit-and-run has ended and if anyone tries to hit Iran, he should wait for a strong retaliatory hit and for this reason the West and above all the U.S. has just resorted to verbal bully and financial sanctions and this is just because of Iran's military power especially its defensive sector and its missile and drone progresses which have safeguarded the security of the country from any possible foreign attack.

So, every day we wait for announcement of a new achievement in any field in the country and Iran's progresses are not limited only to its military section and the country is marching ahead with full speed for progress in all fields especially in the industrial and Nano technology and each of those achievements will turn into a thorn in the eyes of the enemies especially the West.

Only Half of Germans See Gov't Coalition Surviving

BERLIN (dispatches) - Only half of Germans believe the ruling government coalition will hold until the end of its legislative period, a survey showed on Thursday, as arguments among the parties over climate policy and budget intensify.

A dispute over transforming Germany's heating system has escalated within the ruling coalition of the Social Democrats, environmental Greens and pro-business FDP party this week.

The FDP on Tuesday blocked introducing to the parliament a bill brought by the Greens-led economy ministry that would ban most new oil and gas heating systems from 2024, calling for substantial changes to the draft law.

The Greens party accused the FDP of a "blockade policy", warning of a possible government crisis.

Iran to Definitely Produce Oil, Gas for Next 100 Years

TEHRAN (MNA) – The National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) managing director on Friday said the country, thanks to its present-day reserves, can produce oil and gas for the next 100 years.

Mohsen Khojastehmehr made the remarks in his speech during a ceremony to commemorate the 115th anniversary of Iran's first oil exploration in Masjed Soleyman, the southwestern province of Khuzestan, the National Iranian South Oil Company (NISOC) reported.

NIOC has a 100-year vision for exploration, he said, underlining, "We are determined to carry out maximum exploration operations in order to discover and maintain the country's reserves."

According to SHANA, the news service of the oil ministry of Iran, Khojastehmehr said one of the reasons behind the enemy's decision to impose sanctions on Iran is the country's rich oil and gas deposits and its experts' plan to prevent selling raw materials and complete the value chain.

Some part of the value chain should be formed in Masjed Soleyman, emphasized the NIOC CEO, saying the second stage of Masjed Soleyman field's development plan is on the agenda but needs a thorough study.

Iran, Indonesia Establish Halal Product Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) – The governments of Indonesia and Iran have established cooperation in halal product assurance by signing a memorandum of understanding.

The MoU was signed by the Indonesian Deputy Minister of Religious Affairs Zainut Tauhid Sa'adi and the Iranian Deputy Minister of Foreign Affairs for Economic Diplomacy Mehdi Safari, Indonesian news agency Antara reported.

"On behalf of the Indonesian Ministry of Religious Affairs, I warmly welcome the signing of the MoU on halal product assurance cooperation between Indonesia and Iran," Sa'adi said in a statement released.

The MoU was signed during an official visit by Iran's President Ebrahim Raisi, who was received by Indonesian President Joko Widodo (Jokowi) at Bogor Palace on Tuesday.

According to Sa'adi, his ministry is supporting strengthened cooperation in halal products at the global level since Indonesia is aiming to become the No. 1 producer of halal products in the world.

"To realize this goal, cooperation and product guarantee synergy are needed among all stakeholders at the global level," he said. "We hope that this MoU can strengthen the intended synergy so that Indonesia and Iran can become important players in the industry and the global market for halal products."

Sa'adi said he hopes cooperation would increase trade transactions for halal products and support efforts to provide economic benefits and strengthen prosperity for both countries.

Muhammad Aqil Irham, the head of the Halal Product Assurance Agency (BPJPH), said Iran is the sixth country to have signed an MoU on halal product assurance with Indonesia.

Zelensky Making Worthless...

FROM PAGE 1

Pointing to Iran's readiness to discuss the issue with Kiev, Kan'ani said, "The Ukrainian side's avoidance of expert talks with the Iranian side in order to investigate the claims confirms their baselessness and the existence of specific political goals and motives behind such accusations against the Islamic Republic of Iran."

Ukraine and Western countries have accused Iran of providing Russia with military drones for use in the war. Both Iran and Russia have repeatedly denied claims that Tehran has provided Moscow with drones to be used in the Ukraine war.

The anti-Iran claims first emerged in July last year, with US National Security Advisor Jake Sullivan alleging that Washington had received "information" indicating that the Islamic Republic was preparing to provide Russia with "up to several hundred drones, including weapons-capable UAVs on an expedited timeline" for use in the war in Ukraine.

Armenia Says...

FROM PAGE 1

"We are closest with Iran," he said when asked which countries the EEU is closest to reaching an agreement with on a free trade zone.

EEC (Eurasian Economic Commission) Trade Minister Andrey Slepnev said earlier that the agreement on a free trade zone between the EEU and Iran could be signed as early as this year.

"Russia is negotiating free trade zone agreements with a number of Muslim countries," Overchuk said.

"Within the framework of the Eurasian Economic Union, we have been negotiating the creation of a free trade zone with a number of Islamic states, including Egypt, Iran, the UAE. We have already started negotiations with them, and we are about to begin talks with Indonesia," he told the plenary session of the 14th international economic forum, Russia-Islamic World: KazanForum on Friday.

"We see our bilateral trade growing, and it may indicate that our countries are becoming closer to each other. Our task for today is to reduce trade barriers and simplify contacts, primarily in the economic sphere," Overchuk said.

IRGC Navy Chief...

FROM PAGE 1

He also highlighted the role of the country's media in countering the enemy's propaganda.

"We resolutely secure the Persian Gulf, and the media must participate in this security and reflect the capabilities of the IRGC Navy and the Army so that the world understands that the security of the Persian Gulf does not need foreigners," Tangsiri said.

"We stand firmly against the enemy and will defend the honor and dignity of the Iranian nation," he added.

The Persian Gulf — which spans some 251,000 square kilometers — is bounded by the Arvand River in the north, which forms the frontier between Iran and Iraq, and the Strait of Hormuz in the south, which links the Persian Gulf to the Sea of Oman and the Indian Ocean.

The inland sea is an international trade route connecting the Middle East to Africa, India, and China.

Iran has made it clear that it views US military vessels lurking in the waters of the Persian Gulf as a threat to its national security and a source of tensions and instability in the region.

The Islamic Republic has repeatedly vowed to give a decisive response to any hostile move by Washington that would disrupt the security of the strategic waterway.

Iran, Russia, Turkey, Syria...

FROM PAGE 1

The quadrilateral meeting of the foreign ministers of Iran, Russia, Syria, and Turkey was held in Moscow on May 10.

At the end of the meeting, the foreign ministers issued a joint statement, stressing their commitment to the territorial integrity of Syria and preparing a roadmap for developing relations between Damascus and Ankara.

They also said that they had a focused and frank discussion of issues related to resuming the interstate relations between Syria and Turkey in various aspects.

IRAN NEWS

Sainz Sets Early Pace In Monaco Practice

MONACO (Dispatches) - Carlos Sainz topped the times for Ferrari in the opening practice at the Monaco Grand Prix, the Spaniard outpacing compatriot Fernando Alonso of Aston Martin in an intriguing session.

Sainz clocked a best lap time in one minute 13.372 seconds beating two-time champion Alonso by more than three-tenths with both running on medium tyres. Seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton was third in his heavily-revised Mercedes, running a major upgrade package, ahead of Sergio Perez in the leading Red Bull and local hero Charles Leclerc in the second Ferrari.

LICENCE HOLDER: SOKHAN GOSTAR INSTITUTE

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

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

Buitrago Wins Key Giro 19th Stage

ROME (Dispatches) - Colombian Santiago Buitrago climbed to victory in the 19th 'Queen' stage of the Giro d'Italia with Britain's Geraint Thomas holding the leader's pink jersey.

The 23-year-old Bahrain rider, winner of a stage in last year's Giro, crossed the line alone 51sec ahead of Canadian Derek Gee of Israel Premier Tech, who was second for the fourth time in this year's race.

Thomas accelerated late but could not hold off a counter-attack from Primoz Roglic.

Heat Still Lead East Finals, But Celtics Roaring Back

MIAMI (Dispatches) - Maybe Kevin Garnett was right. Maybe, as he screamed in celebration of Boston's 2008 NBA championship, anything truly is possible.

The Celtics are halfway to history, and that alone has gotten them entry into a very small club. Of the first 150 teams that trailed a best-of-seven series 3-0 in NBA history, just 14 — 9.3% — found a way to extend the matchup to Game 6. None of them have won the series, and most are usually eliminated by now.

Not the Celtics. They have cut the deficit in the Eastern Conference finals against the Miami Heat to 3-2, simultaneously trailing the series yet seeming to have all the momentum going into Game 6 in Miami.

"Obviously, we didn't imagine being in this position, being down 3-0, but when adversity hits, you get to see like what a team is really made of," Celtics forward Jaylen Brown said. "I mean, it couldn't get no worse than being down 3-0, but we didn't look around, we didn't go in separate directions. We stayed together. We doubled down on what we're good at on defense, and now I think it's a series."

Only three teams have gone from down 3-0 to tied 3-3; the Celtics could be the fourth with a win on Saturday. No NBA team has ever fully escaped the 3-0 hole, but a win on Saturday would give Boston a chance to change that in Game 7 — which would be Monday on its home floor.

"One of our assistants put it in great perspective: The seasons are like nine months long, and we just had a bad week," Celtics coach Joe Mazzulla said. "Sometimes you have a bad week at work. We obviously didn't pick the best time to have a bad week, but we did, and we're sticking together and fighting like hell to keep it alive."

Meanwhile, the Denver Nuggets are waiting for an opponent. If Boston wins the series, the Nuggets will visit the Celtics for Game 1 of the NBA Finals. If Miami wins the East, the Heat are headed to Denver for Game 1. Either way, the title series starts June 1, somewhere.

"We have to shore up who we are and address the areas that we have not been maybe good enough or areas that we can clean up," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said Friday, after the team's first real practice since sweeping the Los Angeles Lakers for the Western Conference title. "But it's really hard to keep your rhythm when you're not playing NBA games."

The Heat had a nine-point lead in the third quarter of Game 4, in position to perhaps win in a sweep. The lead was gone 2-1/2 minutes later and the Celtics haven't trailed since. An 18-0 run in Game 4 put Boston on top of that game for good, a 12-0 run by the Celtics later in that game ended all doubt, and then they started Game 5 with a 20-5 burst.

Add that all up, and from the start of the third-quarter run in Game 4 to the end of the start-of-game spurt in Game 5, the Celtics outscored the Heat 84-43 in a span of 27 minutes.

"The last two games are not who we are. It just happened to be that way," Heat forward Jimmy Butler said. "We stopped playing defense halfway because we didn't make shots that we want to make. But that's easily correctable. You just have to come out and play harder from the jump. Like I always say, it's going to be all smiles and we are going to keep it very, very, very consistent, knowing that we are going to win next game."

At least the confidence isn't ailing. Everything else is.

Dybala an Injury Doubt For Roma's Europa League Final

ROME (Dispatches) - Forward Paulo Dybala could miss AS Roma's Europa League final against six-time champions Sevilla, manager Jose Mourinho said.

The 29-year-old Argentine, who has scored 16 goals and has eight assists across all competitions this season, is yet to recover full fitness after picking up an ankle injury at the end of last month.

"I don't think he can play. Honestly, I hope he can make it for the bench. It's the last game of the season even if after that we have Spezia," Mourinho told reporters ahead of next Wednesday's final in Budapest.

"But for Paulo, it would be the last game. I'd be happy if Paulo could go on the bench and play 15 or 20 minutes. Dybala is still with the doctors."

Roma will travel to 11th-placed Fiorentina on Saturday before taking on the Spanish side in the Europa League final.

The Portuguese coach said midfielder Lorenzo Pellegrini would return for the final after missing two games with an injury, but he is out for the Fiorentina clash.

Verstappen Back On Top in Monaco

MONACO (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen resumed normal service when he topped the times for Red Bull and then demanded more performance from his team ahead of Saturday's crucial qualifying session at the Monaco Grand Prix.

The defending double world champion struggled with his car in the opening practice, as he complained of "bottoming out" on his way to sixth, but he bounced back in the afternoon to go fastest ahead of Charles Leclerc's Ferrari.

"The second practice was much better," said Verstappen, who leads team-mate Sergio Perez by 14 points in this year's title race. "The car felt much more competitive.

"Compared to Ferrari, we are still a bit short in terms of how the car behaves on the kerbs and over the bumps and that's something we have to work on for tomorrow because they are very close.

"The Aston Martins are also close and we need something more to stay ahead. The car is better so then you can push more and go closer to the guardrails."

Verstappen was quickest in a best lap of one minute 12.462 seconds, 0.065 clear of the Monegasque local hero who is bidding for a third successive 'home' pole position.

Carlos Sainz, who was fastest in the first session, was third in the second Ferrari, despite a late crash into the barriers in the Swimming Pool comples, ahead of Aston Martin's two-time champion Fernando Alonso, Lando Norris of McLaren and seven-time champion Lewis Hamilton of Mercedes.

Last year's winner Sergio Perez was seventh in the second Red Bull ahead of a resurgent Valtteri Bottas of Alfa Romeo and the two Alpines of French duo Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon.

The session was run in near-perfect conditions, a warm afternoon sun touching 27 degrees as it shone from a wide blue sky over the Mediterranean principality. The track temperature was 45 degrees.

Hamilton was very satisfied with his day's action. "I really enjoyed that," he said. "I had fun and enjoyed driving that car so I must say thank-you to everyone at the factory for all their hard work.

Klopp Optimistic for Future Despite Disappointing Season

LIVERPOOL (Dispatches) - Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp says he has "lots of reasons" for optimism despite the crushing disappointment of missing out on Champions League qualification.

Manchester United's 4-1 win against Chelsea on Thursday sealed their place in Europe's elite club competition next season alongside champions Manchester City, Arsenal and Newcastle.

Writing on social media after United's victory consigned Liverpool to Europa League football, forward Mohamed Salah said he was "devastated" and there was no excuse for not making the top four.

Klopp, whose team are guaranteed to finish fifth, told his pre-match press conference on Friday he had expected United and Newcastle to get the points they needed this week after Liverpool's 1-1 draw against Aston Villa.

It means Liverpool, who narrowly missed out on a historic quadruple last year, have failed to qualify for the competition after featuring for six straight seasons.

"For a long time it was clear this will not be a historically good season," said Klopp.

"I think I said everything about it, that we are absolutely not happy with it, that we made mistakes, that we couldn't deliver, ultimately we weren't consistent enough."

But he said Liverpool's late-season form, including a seven-match winning run in the league, had been impressive.

"If we could have done that over the whole season we would be in a different place," said the German.

"Of course there are reasons for optimistic views because of the things we showed in the last few weeks. That's definitely the case.

"We have other reasons for an optimistic view because of the atmosphere our people created in the last home game.... All these kinds of things are absolutely the basis for a fantastic future so we don't have to make it bigger than it is. It's a football season.

"We didn't deliver what everybody wanted and everybody expected, rightly so, but we are still really united and that's the good thing about it."

Klopp acknowledged Liverpool would take a financial hit as a result of their failure to qualify for the Champions League but said he was still looking forward to next season.

Alcaraz Wants To Play Dream Doubles With Nadal

PARIS (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz wants to play alongside Rafael Nadal in a formidable and "dream" doubles team at the 2024 Olympics.

Alcaraz has yet to feature at the Olympics while Nadal won a gold medal in singles in Beijing in 2008 and doubles gold in Rio eight years later.

For world number one Alcaraz, playing with Nadal at the Paris Games would be a perfect farewell as the veteran winds down his career.

"For me, it could be a dream playing doubles with him in the Olympics," said 20-year-old Alcaraz on Friday.

"Let's see how he's doing and how he's going this year. Hopefully he's going great."

Nadal, a 22-time major winner, is absent from the French Open which starts on Sunday with a hip injury. The soon-to-be 37-year-old has already said that 2024 will likely be his last year in the sport.

Alcaraz is now one of the favourites for the Paris title which his compatriot has swept up 14 times.

"I felt bad when I heard that Rafa was not able to play here in Roland Garros and probably the rest of the year," said Alcaraz.

"As a fan of tennis, I always watched Rafa playing. I always want to watch the best players in the world playing the tournaments."

"It was tough to understand how it's going to be without Rafa this year. Hopefully we'll see him next year and that he's 100 percent."

Spain Urged to Follow Premier League Example After Vinicius Abuse

LONDON (Dispatches) - Pep Guardiola has urged Spanish football to follow the Premier League's example in the fight against racism after the abuse suffered by Real Madrid star Vinicius Junior.

Brazil winger Vinicius said Spain now "belongs to racists" after he was abused by fans during Real's game at Valencia in La Liga last week.

It is not the first time Vinicius has been the victim of racism and the latest incident has triggered widespread criticism of Spanish football culture and the way their authorities handle the issue.

Manchester City boss Guardiola believes the Premier League has set an example to the rest of the football world with their "strict" reaction to any outbreaks of racist abuse.

Asked if Spain could learn from the way English football has tackled racism since the dark days of the 1980s, Guardiola said: "They should. Here they are so strict. They know what they have to do."

While the Spanish game has suffered a high number of racist incidents in recent years, Guardiola acknowledges the problem is not just limited to his homeland.

"Of course racism is a problem everywhere, not just in one specific place. Everywhere we have people thinking we are better than our neighbours, we are better than the other ones, for all generations everywhere," he said.

"Not just for gender but for colour, for attitudes. We believe that our language is better than the other one, our country is better than the other one.