

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Drops 73,378 Points to 2.215 Million on Saturday, As Reported, Over 9.465b Securities Worth 72.177 Trillion Rials (About \$172m) Were Traded

IRAN NEWS

Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani Said the Export of Products Developed by His Ministry Was Tripled in the Previous Iranian Calendar Year, Which Ended on March 20

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\$2.7b of Iran Frozen Assets Released From Iraq

TEHRAN (MNA) – Head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Al-e Es'haq says that \$2.7 billion of Iran's frozen assets were released from Iraq.

Al-e Es'haq made the remarks in an interview with Tasnim News Agency, saying that this can significantly contribute to the stability of the foreign currency market in Iran.

ISNA News Agency last week reported that \$24 billion of Iran's frozen assets will be released from Iraq and South Korea in the near future.

Following the visit of the Sultan of Oman to Iran and the visit of the US president's aide to Oman, it was decided to release the frozen assets in the form of an understanding.

Moreover, following the recent meeting between the Governor of the Central Bank of Iran Mohammad Reza Farzin and the head of the International Monetary Fund Kristalina Georgieva in Washington, it was decided that Iran will be able to access more than \$6.7 billion of its special drawing rights.

Iran-U.S. Trade Value Hits \$17.8m in 4 Months

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The U.S. Bureau of Statistics said the country's export of non-oil products to Iran exceeded \$17.5 million in the first four months of 2023 (January to April), registering a 29 percent growth compared to last year's corresponding period.

In its latest report, the Bureau put the trade exchanges between Iran and the United States from January to April 2023 at \$17.8 million, showing a two percent decline compared to same period of last year.

Iran and the U.S. had exchanged over \$18.2 million worth of non-oil products from January to April 2022, the report added.

The U.S. exports value to Iran has witnessed a 29 percent hike in this period as the United States had exported \$13.5 million worth of products to Iran from January to April 2022.

However, the U.S. imported \$0.3 million worth of products from Iran in the first four months of the current year, showing a 93 percent decline compared to the same period of last year.

The United States had imported \$4.7 million worth of non-oil products from Iran from January to April 2022.

No Undeclared Nuclear Materials in Iran



TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Permanent Mission to the United Nations says all of the country's nuclear materials and activities have been fully declared to and verified by the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), adding the agency's claim over undeclared materials is solely based on false and fabricated information of the Zionist regime.

The Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) on Saturday quoted Iran's Permanent Mission to the UN as saying that the Islamic Republic is determined to live up to its commitments under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement, having made every effort to enable the IAEA to carry out its verification activities in Iran.

Regarding the issue of the so-called "three places", it added, "the origin of this issue goes back to the fabricated information provided to the Agency by a malicious third party, namely the Israeli regime which itself has even refused to accept any commitments under the documents pertaining to the weapons of mass destruction, including the Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT), and contrary to numerous IAEA and UN resolutions, has repeatedly threatened to attack Iran's nuclear sites and facilities."

The mission went on to say that, "The mere finding of natural uranium particles in environmental samples in a location, cannot be regarded as the existence of nuclear materials in that place."

Iran has intensified its efforts to discover the origin of such particles aimed at further cooperation with the IAEA and has explained about its assumptions in that regard, said the mission.

Referring to the fact that Iran has not yet been able to find any technical reason for the presence of uranium particles, it added that Tehran assumes that external elements, such as sabotage and hostile actions, were involved in the issued of the contamination.

The Islamic Republic of Iran strongly expects the IAEA to report on its verification activities in Iran based on the principles of impartiality, professionalism and reality, reiterated the Iranian mission.

The statement reiterated that the Islamic Republic of Iran is determined, as has also shown so far, to comply with its obligations under the Comprehensive Safeguards Agreement (INFCIRC/214) and it has done its utmost to enable the Agency to continue its verification activities in Iran, which is unique in the Agency's verification system.

It added on the issue related to the so-called three locations, it should be highlighted that the origin of the issue goes back to the fabricated information provided to the Agency by an ill-intended third party, namely the Israeli regime, which does not accept to have a single commitment under any WMD instruments, including in particular the NPT, and repeatedly threatens to attack Iran's nuclear facilities devoted to peaceful purposes, contrary to the numerous IAEA and UNGA resolutions.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

World Should Take Action Against Zionists' Crimes

For years Palestinians have been suffering from the Zionist regime's crimes but international bodies and even most nations have remained passive or indifferent to those crimes and this has emboldened Israel to continue its crimes under any pretext and now it is reported that the fake regime has some vicious plans to dictate itself on Palestinians.

According to reports, Palestinian media outlets have warned against the Israeli regime's plot to "divide" time and space at the al-Aqsa Mosque compound in the occupied Old City of al-Quds between Muslims and Jews amid Tel Aviv's push to expand its occupation and brutal abuse.

The regime's Knesset member Amit Halevi of the right-wing Likud Party has devised a plot aimed at dividing the holy mosque between the vast majority of Muslims who reside in al-Quds, and extremist Zionist settlers that claim the right to "pray" at the compound, the Arabic-language al-Ayyam daily newspaper reported on Thursday.

The Ramallah-based daily further unveiled that Halevi has also called for allocating the southern part of the compound to Muslims, while reserving the central and northern parts that includes the holy Dome of the Rock for the radical Zionists.

The Zionist politician has also boasted that his scheme is aimed at taking away the Jordanian government's custodianship of the al-Aqsa Mosque.

The Ramallah-based Al-Hayat al-Jadida daily also cited the Palestinian Ministry of al-Quds Affairs as lashing out at such a plot as being highly provocative, insisting that it will further stoke tensions on the ground and culminate into a major unrest.

Furthermore, Sheikh Muhammad Ahmad Hussein, the incumbent Grand Mufti of al-Quds, has also censured attempts by authorities of the Israeli regime to Judaize and divide al-Aqsa Mosque, allow extremist settlers to pray in the sacrosanct site and alter its historical and legal status.

He further underlined that such plots by Tel Aviv officials will ignite a major conflict that will potentially affect the entire world. Sheikh Hussein also blamed the regime's authorities for the harmful consequences of further escalation of tensions in the occupied West Bank.

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Enemies Engaged in Hybrid War to Harm Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's adversaries are working to undermine the Islamic establishment by waging a hybrid war, says the commander of the Army's Air Defense Force. "Our enemies are well aware of the creativity and intelligence of young Iranians. They seek to harm the country and the Islamic establishment through a hybrid war," Brigadier General Alireza Sabahi-Fard said.

The commander said the competent young Iranians have made remarkable progress in all sectors, including at various military levels.

Iran's Army, particularly its powerful Air Defense Force, is equipped with the "most advanced weapons and equipment" designed and manufactured by the young elite Iranians, he stated.

Sabahi-Fard said the state-of-the-art equipment at the Army's disposal has contributed to the country's deterrence power.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made grand headways in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient in the arms sphere.

He said that Iran maintains its military power and poses no threat to the regional countries, adding that the Islamic Republic's defense doctrine is entirely based on deterrence.

In May, Sabahi-Fard said the Army is in possession of the world's top radar and missile systems.

Iran to Become Grain Transit Hub

TEHRAN (MNA) – The head of the agricultural commission at the Russian State Duma said that according to the agreement between the two countries, Iran will become a grain transit hub after the North-South corridor becomes operational.

Vladimir Kashin, Chairman of the Committee on Agriculture at the Russian State Duma made the remarks in a meeting with two lawmakers from the Iranian parliament held at the Duma of Russia Federation which focused on the development of bilateral parliamentary relations.

"Moscow-Tehran relations are growing at the will and guidance of the leaders of the two countries, which parliaments can help to materialize efforts at the highest levels," the senior Russian lawmaker said.

Highlighting that Russia and Iran are both under international sanctions, Kashin added "Bilateral parliamentary cooperation can help boost relations and fulfill the agreements signed between the officials of the two countries."

Referring to the growing trend of Iran's cooperation with the member states of the Eurasian Economic Union, Kashin expressed hope that by completing the process of Iran's free trade with the members of the union, Tehran's trade relations with Moscow and other member states of the union will witness a sharp increase.

The Russian parliamentary official further pointed to the Iran-Russia agreements in the agricultural field and said, "We have agreed to reduce the commodities checking time as well as the expenses (duties). Therefore, Iranian goods and products can be imported to Russia more quickly, on the one side, and the transfer of Russian goods to Iran will also accelerate on the other side."

Rahmatullah Nowrozi, deputy chairman of the Agriculture Commission and Vali Esmaili, deputy chairman of the Social Commission at the Iranian parliament were representing Iran at the meeting, where they voiced the Iranian side's readiness to expand relations with Russian Federation by trying to remove barriers in the way of those ties.

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Iran, Syria FMs Stress Need to Implement Recent Agreements

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The foreign ministers of Iran and Syria have stressed the need to implement bilateral agreements reached during President Ebrahim Raisi's "successful" visit to Syria.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Raisi visited Syria last month on an official invitation from President Bashar al-Assad.

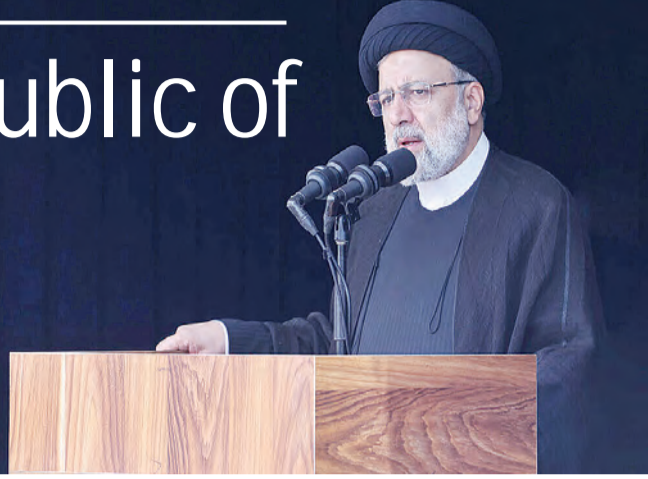
During his visit, Tehran and Damascus signed an agreement on "long-term strategic comprehensive cooperation" between the two nations. They

also signed 14 other documents to boost cooperation in various areas.

In a phone conversation, Hossein Amirabdollahian and his Syrian counterpart, Faisal Mekdad, pointed to the positive outcomes of the visit and expressed their resolve to implement the recently-inked deals.

Amirabdollahian also congratulated Damascus on its recent achievements, pointing to the restoration of relations between Syria and other Arab countries, describing the development as "positive" and "constructive".

Iran's Azarbaijan, Republic of Azerbaijan Enjoy Inextricable Bond



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi has commended the inextricable bond between the Azari people of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan.

No plots or shenanigans could ever drive a wedge between the two peoples as well as among the entire Azeri folks across the world, the Iranian president stated.

Raisi was on a visit to the northwestern province of East Azarbaijan.

Ties have been tense between Tehran and Baku over an attack on the Eurasian country's embassy in the Iranian capital earlier in the year and Baku's improvement of relations with Israel.

"The people of Azerbaijan, not only the Azarbaijan of Iran but even the Azerbaijan that is in our neighborhood, showed that their love, devotion and attachment is inextricably resistant to conspiracies and seditions," Raisi said.

"The message of the people of Azerbaijan is the message of unity, cohesion and resistance against enemies and building the country by the capable hands of the beloved youth."

Azerbaijan's relations with Iran were strained in January following an attack on its embassy in Tehran.

Azerbaijan closed its diplomatic mission following the incident and evacuated staff over what it called a "terrorist act," with President Ilham Aliyev blaming it on the "Iranian establishment." An initial investigation pointed to "personal and family-related problems" as the assailant's motive.

The conflict between Azerbaijan and Armenia as well as Baku's improving relations with the Israeli regime are among other bones of contention between Iran and Azerbaijan.

Meanwhile President said to control inflation, production must be shored up as the only way to get out of the economic problems.

Raisi referred to the foreign openings for facilitating the production surge in the country, including Iran's joining the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Eurasian Union, Economic Cooperation Organization (ECO), and the future membership in BRICS.

He said the enemies of Iran tried to stop Iran's progress through sanctions, but the country is present in the global markets, noting that many countries are looking for Iranian-made goods.

Considering the future of Iran's trade relations with Central Asia, Caucasus, and Turkey, promised and said: "We were invited to hold an exhibition of Iranian products in Ashgabat, which has the highest standard and quality, an issue which depends on paying attention to the production surge."

He stressed healthy competition in the economic fields calling on banks to invest their capital in production and open the space for the private sector to grow in the country.

Seven Dead, 59 Wounded In Iran After Flooding

TEHRAN (IRNA) - In the wake of the storm and flooding in Iran over the past two days, some seven individuals lost their lives and 59 others were injured, the country's head of the Emergency Organization has said.

Ja'far Miadfar said that the storm and flooding in the last two days left 27 injured in the capital city of Tehran, two hurt in Ahar city, and in provinces of Isfahan, Mazandaran and Alborz 15, 5, and 10 injured respectively.

The official also noted that seven Iranians lost their lives as a result of heavy rains on Wednesday and Thursday.

Moreover, a strong wind storm hurt 27 people, 18 out of the number were taken to health centers and nine others received outpatient treatment, he said.

In Isfahan province, three citizens lost their lives due to flooding, and nine others were hurt, he noted, adding that two people were injured as a result of a rock fall in Kandovan road, Mazandaran province.

The Crisis Management Organization of Iran issued warnings concerning 21 provinces in the country until Sunday, urging the Iranian people to refrain from traveling through mountains and camping near rivers.

Neighbors, Muslims, Asians Have Priority In Iran's Foreign Policy

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian said the current administration gives priority to neighboring, Islamic and Asian countries in its foreign policy.

The top Iranian diplomat held a meeting with the members of the Supreme Council of Community of the Qom Seminary Educators in Qom on Friday.

The foreign minister briefed the clergymen on the course of Iran's foreign policy and relations in the past two years.

He noted that the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi has focused on balanced foreign relations in its foreign policy in order to enhance relations with the countries in various parts of the world.

The neighboring, Islamic and Asian countries have been given priority in Iran's foreign policy agenda, Amirabdollahian stated, pointing to a series of achievements of such approach.

The minister also noted that the Foreign Ministry has made efforts to strengthen economic and trade ties with the foreigners, contribute to the domestic economy and livelihood of people, and pay special attention to the Iranian expatriates.

Iranian NASA Scientist Firouz Naderi Passes Away



TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian Professor, Firouz Naderi, who exercised leadership at the US National Aeronautics and Space Administration for over three decades and received the NASA outstanding leadership medal, has passed away at the age of 77.

Born in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz in 1946, Professor Naderi had been residing in the United States since he was about 18, Young Journalists Club, a subsidiary of the Islamic Republic of Iran Broadcasting, reported on Saturday morning.

Management of Spirit and Opportunity projects is on the list of records of the decorated Iranian-American engineer while an asteroid was named after him in the solar system seven years ago.

"It will be going around the Sun for billions of years after I am gone," the figure reacted when he learned that an asteroid had been named after him.

It was last week that Naderi, the former director of NASA's Jet Propulsion Laboratory (JPL), released a photo of himself on a hospital bed showing him paralyzed from neck to down after an accident.

No Need for Trans-Regional Forces to Ensure Persian Gulf Security



BANDAR ABBAS (Dispatches) - Commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri said that there is no need for trans-regional forces to ensure the security of the Persian Gulf given that Iran and neighboring countries are cooperating to guarantee the security of the strategic waterway.

Rear Admiral Tangsiri said that The Persian Gulf belongs to the countries of this region and they can establish its security themselves.

Visiting the Nazea'at region, the IRGC Navy commander added that the Islamic Republic of Iran has always welcomed and continues to welcome the strategic principle of the alliance and community of the countries of the Persian Gulf, and the policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always been de-escalation and has always proven this in practice.

He reiterated the good performance of the IRGC Navy's inherent mission in stabilizing the security of the Persian Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz by the brave men of the IRGC Navy.

The Nazeaat Region is a collection of four islands, Abu Musa and the Greater and Lesser Tunbs and Siri in the Persian Gulf near the Strait of Hormuz.

These islands are considered as the defense fortress of the Strait of Hormuz.

Tehran, Dushanbe Discuss Boosting Judicial Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - Prosecutors General of Tajikistan and Iran discussed and exchanged opinions on the fields of expanding judicial cooperation.

Mohammad Jaafar Montazeri, the Attorney General of Iran, who arrived in Dushanbe on Thursday heading the high-ranking judicial commission, met with Yusef Rahman, the Attorney General of Tajikistan, and discussed and exchanged opinions expanding bilateral judicial cooperation.

During the meeting, Yusuf Rahman and Montazeri discussed the issues of cooperation between the prosecutor's offices of the two countries in the field of joint fight against crime, legal assistance in criminal cases, extradition, and transfer of convicts.

Considering the situation in Afghanistan, the two sides also emphasized the need for a rapid exchange of information in the field of dealing with international terrorism and extremism.

The memorandum of understanding on cooperation between the Prosecutor General's Offices of Tajikistan and Iran was signed during Yusef Rahman's visit to Iran in February 2021 and is valid for five years.

Prevention, detection, investigation, and prosecution of criminals, cooperation in fighting crimes, exchange of experiences and information regarding issues of common interest and criminal procedures, consultation for legal cooperation, preparation and review of special requests for extradition and mutual legal assistance in criminal and related matters.

Regarding administrative crimes, the exchange of information about the legal systems and internal laws of each other's countries is one of the most important provisions of this note.

MP Confirms Iran-U.S. Talks, Rejects Near Deal

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian member of parliament has confirmed media reports of secret Iran-US talks in New York, ruling out any bilateral agreement in the near future.

Mojtaba Tavangar, wrote in a tweet on Saturday, "To have Iran's frozen assets unblocked, the US seeks to get nuclear concessions from Iran, and this runs counter to the law and national interests of Iran."

The Middle East Eye news outlet has earlier reported that Robert Malley, the US special envoy on Iran, has engaged in several face-to-face meetings with Amir Saeed Iravani, Iran's ambassador to the United Nations.

Quoting "two sources with direct knowledge of the talks", the Middle East Eye added, "Iran and the United States are nearing a temporary deal that would swap some sanctions relief for reducing

Iranian uranium enrichment activities."

The Iranian MP said, "Despite the negotiations in New York, due to the US obstructionism, no agreement is possible in the foreseeable future."

According to the Middle East Eye, "Under the terms of the deal, Iran would commit to ceasing its 60 percent-and-beyond uranium enrichment activities and would continue its cooperation with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) for the monitoring and verification of its nuclear program."

The Iranian Member of Parliament, Tavangar, also said the US is still trying to "drag Iran into official direct talks."

He reiterated that the US efforts to get concessions from Iran in the nuclear field is against the law and Iran's national interests.

Afghans Avoiding Accountability About Iran's Share of Helmand River

TEHRAN (IFP) - The chairman of the Sustainable Development, Environment and Water Commission of Iran Chamber of Commerce has said that Iran should engage more seriously on the issue of water crises with Afghanistan.

Evaluating the recent water crises between Iran and Afghanistan, Farshid Shokrhodaie told ILNA that currently, all the countries of the Middle East are facing challenges in the field of border waters for example, Turkey has challenges with Iraq and Iraq has challenges with Iran and Syria.

He added that but our problem with Afghanistan has become more acute because we don't know who we should negotiate with.

"While the satellite images show that there is enough water in this basin, Iranian experts were not allowed to visit, so this issue should be pursued at higher levels and the high officials of the two countries should negotiate more and find a solution," he noted.

Now our main problem with Afghanistan is in the area of authority and accountability, he said, adding that Afghans are avoiding accountability and it seems that our country should enter more seriously.

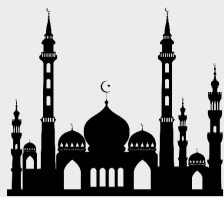
Dena Destroyer Raised Iran's Flag of Power in World

MASHHAD (IRNA) - Iranian Navy Commander Rear Admiral Shahram Irani says the home-grown Dena destroyer has raised the flag of the Islamic Republic's military might in the world in its round-the-globe voyage.

"All domestic capacities were used to carry out the great mission of the Dena destroyer, and the flag of the system, the revolution and the Islamic Republic was raised on the world stage," Irani said in a speech before Friday prayer sermons in Mashhad.

He said Dena's successful mission was a gift by Iranian youth to the people of the region.

"It is a source of honor for the Islamic Republic that the security and safety of navigation in the depth of international waters and the geopolitical and strategic depth of the system in the sea borders were expanded thousands of kilometers," he added. The navy chief further said the successful mission shocked the enemies and conveyed the Iranian people's message that "sanctions, threats, and conspiracies will never prevent us from moving forward".



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:48

61. When it is said to them: "Come to what Allah hath revealed, and to the Messenger: Thou seest the Hypocrites avert their faces from thee in disgust.
62. How then, when they are seized by misfortune, because of the deeds which they hands have sent forth? Then their come to thee, swearing by Allah. "We meant no more than good-will and conciliation!"
Surah 4. Women (61 - 62)

Oil Projects Worth \$14.5b to Go Operational by Yearend

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji said that 64 new and semi-completed oil industry projects with a total investment of \$14.5 billion are going to be completed and go operational throughout the country by the end of the current Iranian calendar year (March 19, 2024).

"Despite the harsh conditions and problems created by the sanctions, including the difficulties related to financing or the provision of some sensitive and complex equipment, the Oil Ministry has not neglected investment in this strategic industry which is the driving force of the national economy," the minister told Shana on Saturday.

Owji said the executive operations for 15 new projects worth \$14.3 billion will also begin in the current year.

"Investment in the oil industry must be pursued without interruption, and as I have said many times before, the oil industry needs large investments, and we must not forget that the return of these investments in the oil industry for the national economy is much higher than other economic sectors," he noted.

Referring to the 15.4 percent economic growth of the oil sector in the fall of the previous Iranian calendar year, which has practically shouldered an important part of the country's economic growth, the official said: "An important part of the positive economic growth last year was due to the growth of the oil sector, the lack of investment in this sector will definitely lead to the slowdown of economic growth and create important challenges, and for this reason, all the responsible institutions in the country should facilitate investment in this sector."

Back in January, the head of the National Iranian Oil Company (NIOC) said his



company was planning to increase the country's oil production capacity to 5.7 million barrels per day (bpd) from the current 3.8 million bpd in eight years.

In this regard, Iran's Resistance Economy Headquarters approved 16 special projects for the development of the oil and gas industry's value chain in late January.

Meanwhile Owji said his ministry is seeking to increase the country's share in energy trade with neighboring states.

Iran's share in importing, transiting, and swapping gas in the region is growing, said the minister, continuing, "The 13th (incumbent) administration has paid the debt Iran owed to Turkmenistan for importing gas in the previous governments."

Asked why Iran, as the world's second-largest holder of gas reserves, imports gas, Owji said, "Russia is the largest holder of gas reserves in the world and statistics show it has outlined plans for its transit and swap share. Iran is also trying to do so and has so far achieved desired results."

Elaborating on the 13th administration's performance, he said, "During the past 20 months, oil, gas, refining, and petrochemical sectors have witnessed [good] developments, including moving toward [construction] of refineries beyond borders for the first time after the Islamic Revolution. We use the extraterritorial capacities to process oil, prevent the selling of raw materials, and create higher added value."

Iran Economy Grows Five Times That of U.S.

TEHRAN (Tasnim)

The World Bank in its latest report said that Iran's economy grew five times that of the United States from October to December 2022.

In a review of the economic growth in the world in the 4th quarter of 2022, the World Bank announced that Iran's economy stood at 15th rank, registering a 4.7 percent growth.

In a part of its report entitled "World Economic Perspective", the World Bank has published the statistics related to the economic growth of 72 countries in the 4th quarter of 2022 (from July to September).

The bank put Iran's economic growth from October to December at 4.7 percent, showing a considerable hike compared to other countries.

According to the report, the Republic of Armenia registered the maximum economic growth in this period.

3m Tons of Commodities Traded on IME Last Week

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran mercantile Exchange (IME) witnessed trade of 3,021,946 tons of commodities with a total trading value of more than \$487m on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,723,436 tons of commodities worth nearly \$351m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,278,329 tons of cement, 1,093,000 tons of iron ore, 238,886 tons of steel, 101,600 tons of sponge iron, 6,525 tons of aluminum, 5,100 tons of copper, 1,850 tons of coke, 1,040 tons of zinc and 190 tons of molybdenum concentrate.

Furthermore, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 250,095 tons of commodities valued at more than \$128m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 94,487 tons of polymeric products, 57,554 tons of bitumen, 38,700 tons of chemicals, 30,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 15,000 tons of lube cut, 10,950 tons of sulfur, 4,249 tons of base oil, 754 tons of petroleum products and 290 tons of feedstocks.

The IME also traded within the same week 48,415 tons of commodities on its side market.

India, Russia Good Markets For Iran Medical Equipment

TEHRAN (MNA) - The head of Food and Drug Organization of Iran said Friday that there are good grounds being laid for the export of Iranian medical equipment to India and Russia.

Seyyed Haider Mohammadi, head of Food and Drug Organization of Iran, made the comments on a visit to an equipment manufacturing company in Tabriz, in East Azarbaijan Province, where he highlighted the special attention of the Food and Drug Organization to facilitating the export of drugs and medical equipment.

Mohammadi said that the Presidential office has established an administrative unit in charge of facilitating exports.

He added that there is a special interest within the Food and Drug Administration to step up exports of Iranian-made equipment.

The official further said that good grounds have been laid for the exports of Iranian medical equipment to India and Russia, and for this purpose, Iranian embassies in different countries have necessary cooperation.

Monthly PMI Indicates Iranian Economy Is Back on Track

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran Chamber of Commerce has released the country's new PMI data for the fiscal month of Ordibehesht (April 21 - May 21) which suggests that the Iranian economy is thriving again after major sub-indexes fell in the past month.

According to the new PMI reading, Iran's monthly PMI stood at 57.30, the highest in the 44-month survey.

The increase was largely due to the Iranian economy recovering from two-week holidays in the beginning of the Persian New Year.

All the main sub-indexes were reported above the threshold (above 50) in the new PMI reading.

The Statistics and Economic Analysis Center of Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture, the sponsor and coordinator of the survey, announces the whole economy PMI data in a report every month.

The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100, such that over 50 shows an expansion of the economy when compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 indicates contraction and a reading of 50 implies no change.

PMI is an index of the prevailing direction of economic trends, aiming to provide information about business conditions to company directors, analysts and purchasing managers.

The "business activities" sub-index (60.96) increased as it does in the month of Ordibehesht each year to register its second biggest in the 44-month survey.

The "new orders" sub-index (57.15) also registered one of its biggest in the month under review.

The "raw material inventory" sub-index also registered its biggest in the 44-month survey to settle at 58.08.

The "exports of goods and services" sub-index (51.86) was another sub-index to recover from a major fall in the past calendar month. It was registered above the threshold in all the main three branches of activity - industry, services, and agriculture.

With the improvement of activities and orders, the "sales of goods and services" sub-index (64.09), which had posted one of its lowest last month, registered its highest in this calendar month.

Iran Non-Oil Exports to China Hit \$2.4b in 2 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$2.418 billion to China during the first two months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-May 21), the spokesman of the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

Mohammad Rezvani-Far said that China was the top export destination of Iranian non-oil goods in the mentioned two-month period. The official further announced that exporting non-oil goods worth \$2.396 billion to Iran, China was also Iran's first source of import in the first two months of this year.

According to the data released by China's customs administration, the value of trade between Iran and China reached \$5.23 billion in the first four months of 2023. Based on the released data, the four-month trade between the two countries increased by four percent as the figure was \$5.02 billion in the first four months of 2022.

As reported, Iran's exports to China in the mentioned four months faced a 39 percent decrease compared to the same period last year and reached \$1.52 billion. In the same period last year, China imported \$2.49 billion of goods from Iran. During this period, China's exports to Iran, however, increased by 46 percent and reached \$3.71 billion. China exported \$2.53 billion worth of commodities to Iran during January -April last year.

According to the data previously released by China's customs administration, the value of trade between Iran and China increased by seven percent in 2022 compared to the previous year. Based on China's customs data, the Islamic Republic and China traded \$15.795 billion worth of commodities in 2022, \$1.035 billion more than the figure for 2021, IRNA reported.

As reported, China's exports to Iran grew by 14 percent in the period under review compared to the preceding year to reach \$9.44 billion. The Asian country exported \$8.258 billion worth of goods to Iran in 2021.

The value of Iran's non-oil exports to China, however, registered a two-percent decrease in 2022, reaching \$6.355 billion. Iran exported \$6.502 billion worth of goods to China in 2021.

Iranian, Qatari Ministers Meet in Geneva, Confer on Labor Affairs

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian minister of labor and his Qatari counterpart in a meeting in Geneva emphasized expansion of cooperation in the fields of labor, employment, and exchange of skill training experiences.

On the sideline of the 111th session of the International Labor Conference in Geneva on Friday, Iran's Minister of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare Soltan Mortazavi held a meeting with Minister of Labor of Qatar Ali bin Samikh Al Marri, who is also the president of the conference.

During the meeting, the two sides discussed ways to enhance joint cooperation between Qatar and the



Islamic Republic of Iran, especially in labor sector.

Mortazavi said in the meeting that enhancing relations with Qatar is strategic for the Islamic Republic of Iran, saying that the two countries have taken valuable measures in exchanging experiences and cooperating in international forums, which can be developed at the regional level too.

Emphasizing the importance of expanding relations with Iran, Al-Marri said that his country would not forget Iran's support during the sanctions on Qatar.

Ha added that the level of cooperation in labor and employment, as well as other areas, will be improved on his visit to Tehran.

Chinese Trade Delegation To Visit Iran

TEHRAN (IP) - Tehran's Chamber of Commerce reported that a Chinese business delegation will visit Iran.

A Chinese delegation, consisting of 45 businessmen, is to come to Tehran in order to be familiar with the capacities of Iranian manufacturing companies and to improve the level of commercial-economic cooperation between the two countries.

The Deputy Head of Tehran's Chamber of Commerce for International Affairs Hesamoldin Hallaj said the business

delegation will come to Iran at the official invitation of the Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture.

A business conference is scheduled to be held on the coming today, June 11, with the presence of two sides' officials.

Entrepreneurs and businessmen in such fields as auto parts, agriculture and food industries, health and cosmetic products, clothing and textiles, industrial parts, and furniture from the delegation, who are scheduled to negotiate with the businessmen in Tehran province.

In the past years, Iran and China have expanded their relations in three macro-levels: political-economic, security-defense, and geopolitical-strategic; they have signed the 25-year strategic comprehensive document as an important step towards completing the process.

One UN Peacekeeper Killed, Four Wounded in Mali

MOPTI (Dispatches) - At least one United Nations peacekeeper was killed and four others seriously injured when their patrol was attacked in northern Mali on Friday, the peacekeeping mission MINUSMA said.

The incident took place near the town of Ber, in the region of Tombouctou – an area that has become a hotbed of jihadist activity over the past decade. MINUSMA said on Twitter the patrol first encountered an improvised explosive device and was then hit with a direct fire attack. It did not name perpetrators but said it was a “complex attack” and that updates on casualties would follow. Islamist militants, some with links to al Qaeda and Islamic State, have been waging an insurgency in northern Mali since they hijacked a Tuareg rebellion in 2012.



South Korea Summons China Envoy

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea's foreign ministry has summoned China's ambassador to protest comments he made accusing Seoul of tilting towards the United States and away from China, as competition between Washington and Beijing for global influence intensifies.

South Korean First Vice Foreign Minister Chang Ho-jin on Friday warned Chinese Ambassador Xing Haiming over his “senseless and provocative” remarks made during a meeting with a South Korean opposition leader a day earlier. The ministry accused Xing of violating diplomatic protocols and interfering with South Korean domestic politics but did not specify the parts of Xing's comments it saw as inappropriate. The ministry also did not share what Xing said in reply to Chang.



Russia Reports Heavy Fighting In Southern Ukraine



KYIV (Dispatches) - Russia reported heavy fighting along the front in southern Ukraine, where bloggers described the first sightings of German and U.S. armor, signalling that Ukraine's long-anticipated counterattack was under way.

With virtually no independent reporting from the front lines and Kyiv saying little, it was impossible to assess whether Ukraine was penetrating Russian defenses in its bid to drive out occupying forces.

“We can state for sure that this offensive has begun,” Russian President Vladimir Putin said in Sochi. “Ukrainian troops did not achieve their goals in any sector.”

The counteroffensive is ultimately expected to involve thousands of Ukrainian troops trained and equipped by the West. Russia, which has had months to prepare its defensive lines, says it has repelled attacks since the start of the week. Kyiv has said its main effort has yet to begin.

Moscow and pro-war Russian bloggers reported intense battles on Friday on the Zaporizhzhia front near the city of Orikhiv, around the mid-point of the “land bridge” linking Russia to the Crimea peninsula, seen as one of Ukraine's likeliest targets.

Ben Barry, senior fellow for land warfare at the International Institute for Strategic Studies, said reports from the Russian bloggers of German-made Leopard tanks and U.S. Bradley armoured vehicles near Tokmak south of Orikhiv, if confirmed, would provide the first evidence that Ukraine's new brigades of Western-armed troops had joined the battle.

In all, Kyiv has 12 brigades totalling 50,000-60,000 troops ready to unleash in the counteroffensive. Nine of the brigades have been armed and trained by the West.

“They've got a choice of how many they commit initially and how many they keep in reserve in case the battlefield dynamics change,” Barry said, adding that Ukraine's initial priority would be trying to keep the Russians off balance and gain tactical surprise through deception and camouflage.

The Russian defense ministry said: “The armed forces of Ukraine continued attempts to conduct offensive operations in the southern Donetsk and Zaporizhzhia directions.”

It said its troops had repelled two Ukrainian assaults south of Orikhiv and four near Velyka Novosilka further east, where it said Ukraine's attack force included two battalions of troops supported by tanks. Several battalions of up to 1,000 troops comprise a brigade.

Kyiv has said almost nothing about the southern front, where it is widely expected to attempt its main push towards the coast. Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar said only that battles were continuing for Velyka Novosilka and Russian troops were mounting “active defence” at Orikhiv.

In the east, Ukraine has reported gains of territory around Bakhmut, which Russian forces captured last month after nearly a year of the deadliest ground combat in Europe since World War Two. Ukraine generally bars journalists from reaching its side of front lines during offensive operations.

Trump Lawyers Quit In Documents Case

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Two lawyers defending Donald Trump quit the case, one day after the former U.S. president was indicted on federal charges of illegally retaining classified documents, obstruction and other crimes.

The Wall Street Journal at the same time reported that Trump's former military valet, Walt Nauta, had been charged alongside Trump. Nauta went to work at Trump's Mar-a-Lago resort after working in the Trump White House.

Nauta's lawyer, Stanley Woodward, declined to comment when contacted by Reuters. The surprise announcement by Trump's lawyers John Rowley and Jim Trusty could prompt further legal complications ahead of Trump's scheduled appearance in federal court in Miami on Tuesday in the documents case. “This morning we tendered our resignations as counsel to President Trump,” the two lawyers said in a statement. “It has been an honor to have spent the last year defending him, and we know he will be vindicated.”

Trump said on social media that he was being represented by white collar defense lawyer Todd Blanche. The indictment of a former U.S. president on federal charges is unprecedented in American history and emerges at a time

when Trump is the front-runner for the Republican presidential nomination next year.

Trump faces seven criminal counts related to his treatment of sensitive government materials he took with him when he left the White House in January 2021, according to a source familiar with the matter. He is due to appear in the Florida court on Tuesday, a day before his 77th birthday.

The cases do not prevent Trump from campaigning or taking office if he were to win the November 2024 presidential election. Legal experts say there would be no basis to block his swearing-in even if he were convicted and sent to prison. Investigators seized roughly 13,000 documents from Trump's Mar-a-Lago estate in Palm Beach, Florida, nearly a year ago. One hundred were marked as classified, even though one of Trump's lawyers had previously said all records with classified markings had been returned to the government.

“I AM AN INNOCENT MAN!” Trump wrote on his Truth Social platform on Thursday after announcing he had been indicted.



China Warns Europe Against Official Ties With Taiwan

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China urged Europe not to have any official exchanges with Taiwan or support “independence forces” ahead of a planned trip to the continent next week by Taiwan Foreign Minister Joseph Wu.

Czech Foreign Minister Jan Lipavsky confirmed Wu was due to visit Prague next week, saying on Friday state officials were not expected to shift from their existing policy towards Taiwan.

Taiwan, which is claimed by China, has no formal diplomatic ties with any European country except the Vatican. Beijing regularly denounces any form of contact between Taiwanese and foreign officials, viewing it as encouraging global recognition of Taiwan's separate status from China.

On Wu's Europe trip, which Taiwan's government has not officially confirmed, he is expected to speak at a think-tank event in Prague immediately after Czech President Petr Pavel, Reuters reported on Thursday.

Asked about the visit on Friday, Czech Minister Lipavsky said he had “been informed” about Wu coming to Prague.

“Of course, the Czech government has a fairly clear policy on how we maintain relations with Taiwan, so I don't expect us to veer from this in any way,” he said, adding he would be travelling during the visit.

The Czech Republic has no diplomatic ties with Taiwan but has built up economic and cultural relations.

Beijing views Taiwan as being part of “one China” and demands other countries recognise its sovereignty claims, which Taiwan's democratically-elected government rejects.

Speaking at a regular news briefing in Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesperson Wang Wenbin said Taiwan didn't have a foreign minister, only a “head of the region's local foreign affairs department”.

The “one China” principle is a prerequisite and the political basis for China to develop “friendly” relations with all countries in the world, Wang said.

EU Members Sign Deal to Overhaul Asylum Procedures

LONDON (Dispatches) - European Union ministers have agreed on a deal to overhaul the bloc's asylum procedures, which has eluded the bloc for nearly 10 years, after 12 hours of negotiations to obtain the go-ahead from front-line members Italy and Greece.

Home affairs ministers from the 27-member bloc reached an agreement, which aims to end years of division dating back to 2015 when more than a million people, most of whom were fleeing war in Syria, reached the EU.

“This is a great, great achievement, showing that it's possible to work together on migration. We are so much stronger when we work together,” the EU's home affairs commissioner, Ylva Johansson, said.

The new asylum and migration management regulation (AMMR) is set to replace the current Dublin regulation and change how asylum seekers are processed at the EU's borders and how they are relocated across Europe.

The Dublin regulation, an agreement originally signed in 1990 and revised three times, set out rules determining which member state was responsible for the examination of an asylum application.

Brussels-based news outlet Politico EU reported that a coalition of about 10 states led by Italy had blocked the agreement until late on Thursday,

preventing the bloc from going ahead with the reform without the consent of a country receiving some of the highest numbers of asylum seekers in the EU.

Last-minute changes, including a cut in the number of people each state would be responsible for and laxer rules to send people back to countries outside of the EU, paved the way for the deal to be finalised ahead of a 2024 EU election.

According to the newly agreed terms, each country would be responsible for a set number of people but would not necessarily have to take them in.

Countries unwilling to receive irregular migrants and refugees would be able to help their hosting peers through equipment, personnel or cash – about 20,000 euros (\$21,500) per person.

Italy, Greece and Malta had initially issued demands for mandatory relocation of migrants from front-line countries.

The reform also introduces a new expedited border procedure for those deemed unlikely to obtain asylum to prevent them from remaining inside the bloc for years.

Poland and Hungary opposed the deal, saying the bloc's national leaders should return to the matter when they meet later in June, but were outvoted by the majority.

Hungarian government spokesman Zoltan Kovacs on Friday quoted Prime Minister Viktor Orban as saying the agreement was “unacceptable”.



Mediators Announce Sudan Truce With Warning to Rival Generals

KHARTOUM (Dispatches)

- Sudan's warring generals have agreed to a 24-hour ceasefire, U.S. and Saudi mediators said, acknowledging that previous attempts to pause a conflict now nearing its third month had proved abortive.

Multiple truces have been agreed and broken since fighting erupted on April 15, and Washington had slapped sanctions on both rival generals after the last attempt collapsed at the end of May, blaming them for the “appalling” bloodshed.

“Representatives of the Sudanese Armed Forces and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) agreed to a 24-hour nationwide ceasefire beginning on June 10 at 6:00 am (0400 GMT),” said a joint statement from the mediators released by the Saudi foreign ministry on Friday.

“Should the parties fail to observe the 24-hour ceasefire, facilitators will be compelled to consider adjourning” talks in the Saudi city of Jeddah which have been suspended since late last month, the mediators said.

The fighting has gripped the capital Khartoum and the western region of Darfur, killing upwards of 1,800 people, according to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project.

Nearly two million people have been displaced, including 476,000 who have sought refuge in neighbouring countries, the United Nations says.

The Saudi and U.S. mediators said they “share the frustration of the Sudanese people about the uneven implementation of previous ceasefires”.

The army, led by Abdel Fattah al-Burhan, said it has “agreed to the proposal”, adding in a statement it “declares its commitment to the ceasefire”.

The paramilitary RSF, commanded by Burhan's former deputy Mohamed Hamdan Daglo, has yet to make an official statement on the latest truce.

“If observed, the 24-hour ceasefire will provide an important opportunity... for the parties to undertake confidence-building measures which could permit resumption of the Jeddah talks,” the US-Saudi statement said.

Friday's announcement came a day after US Secretary of State Antony Blinken wrapped up a three-day visit to Saudi Arabia, where he held discussions on Sudan with top Saudi officials.

On Thursday, Sudanese authorities loyal to Burhan declared UN envoy Volker Perthes “persona non grata”, accusing him of taking sides.

World Warming at Record 0.2C Per Decade



PARIS (Dispatches) - Record-high greenhouse gas emissions and diminishing air pollution have caused an unparalleled acceleration in global warming, 50 top scientists warned in a sweeping climate science update.

From 2013 to 2022, "human-induced warming has been increasing at an unprecedented rate of over 0.2 degrees Celsius per decade," they reported in a peer-reviewed study aimed at policymakers.

Average annual emissions over the same period hit an all-time high of 54 billion tons of CO2 or its equivalent in other gases -- about 1,700 tons every second.

World leaders will be confronted with the new data at the critical COP28 climate summit later this year in Dubai, where a "Global Stocktake" at the UN talks will assess progress toward the 2015 Paris Agreement's temperature goals.

The findings would appear to close the door on capping global warming under the Paris treaty's more ambitious 1.5C target, long identified as a guard rail for a relatively climate-safe world, albeit one still roiled by severe impacts.

"Even though we are not yet at 1.5C warming, the carbon budget" -- the amount of greenhouse gases humanity can emit without exceeding that limit -- "will likely be exhausted in only a few years," said lead author Piers Forster, a physics professor at the University of Leeds.

That budget has shrunk by half since the UN's climate science advisory body, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC), gathered data for its most recent benchmark report in 2021, according to the Forster and colleagues, many of whom were core IPCC contributors.

To have even a coin-toss chance of staying under the 1.5C threshold, emissions of carbon dioxide, methane and other drivers of warming generated mostly by burning fossil fuels must not exceed 250 billion tons (Gt), they reported.

Bettering the odds to two-thirds or four-fifths would reduce that carbon allowance to only 150 Gt and 100 Gt, respectively -- a two- or three-year lifeline at the current rate of emissions.

Keeping the Paris temperature targets in play would require slashing CO2 pollution at least 40 percent by 2030, and eliminating it entirely by mid-century, the IPCC has calculated.

Ironically, one of the big climate success stories of the last decade has inadvertently hastened the pace of global warming, the new data reveal.

A gradual drop in the use of coal -- significantly more carbon intensive than oil or gas -- to produce power has slowed the increase in carbon emissions.

But it has also reduced the air pollution that shields Earth from the full force of the Sun's rays.

Particle pollution from all sources dampens warming by about half-a-degree Celsius, which means -- at least in the short term -- more of that heat will reach the planet's surface as the air becomes cleaner.

Published in the peer-reviewed journal Earth System Science Data, the new study is the first in a series of periodic assessments that will help fill the gaps between IPCC reports, released on average every six years since 1988.

"An annual update of key indicators of global change is critical in helping the international community and countries to keep the urgency of addressing the climate change crisis at the top of the agenda," said co-author and scientist Maisa Rojas Corradi, who is also the environment minister of Chile.

Co-author Valerie Masson-Delmotte, a co-chair of the 2021 IPCC report, said the new data should be a "wake-up call" ahead of the COP28 summit, even if there is evidence that the increase in greenhouse gases has slowed.

Spain's 3,000-Year-Old Tuna Fishing Tradition



MADRID (Dispatches) - As the sun rises in the Gulf of Cadiz on Spain's southern tip, a team of fishermen lifts the tip of a vast system of nets with bluefin tuna trapped inside.

"Hoist!" they cry before men in wetsuits jump into the water to deliver a final blow to the fish captured using this 3,000-year-old netting tradition.

Dubbed an "almadraba", the system of nets is designed to catch large bluefin tuna during their annual migration from the Atlantic into the warmer Mediterranean to lay their eggs.

The nets form a series of chambers that trap only the biggest of the migrating tuna.

The tuna are "practically like bulls" and their blows are like "the kick from a horse," said the captain of the fishing boat, 61-year-old Antonio Ponce.

Tuna have been caught in this stretch of water using this method since the Phoenicians ruled the Mediterranean from around 1,200 BC.

Use of the technique in Spain almost disappeared in the 1970s due to a lack of profitability but demand for quality tuna from Japan breathed new life into the sector.

Over 1,600 tons of bluefin tuna are caught annually off the coast of Spain's southern province of Cadiz using the "almadraba" technique.

Around 500 fishermen in Cadiz use the system, according to the Almadraba Producers' and Fishermen's Organisation (OPP51).

Aside from Spain, the technique is only found in Italy, Morocco and Portugal.

Because the nets only catch the biggest tuna, it is a "sustainable technique," said Jose Luis Garcia Varas of the Spanish branch of the World Wildlife Fund (WWF).

In the early 2000s, the global popularity of sushi put bluefin tuna in danger but the establishment of regional fishing quotas allowed the species to recover.

Atlantic bluefin tuna was in 2021 moved from the category of "endangered" to that of "least concern" by the International Union for Conservation of Nature. In Spain, the Japanese taught local fishermen to minimize the stress endured by the tuna to improve the taste of the meat.

Fishermen now use a sawn-off shotgun called a "lupara" to kill the tuna instantly.

While the structure of the nets "has remained more or less the same for many years," what has changed is "the way of treating the fish to achieve quality, to take away their suffering," said Ponce.

The Japanese also taught locals how to consume parts of the tuna which were previously thrown away -- and got them to eat raw fish.

Bluefin tuna "has 25 parts, 25 textures, 25 tastes. They were not known before," said Julio Vazquez, the 43-year-old head chef at the El Campero restaurant in the coast town of Barbate.

His menu includes 32 different dishes using bluefin tuna.

"When my mother or my grandmother cooked, there was not so much diversity," he added.

Vazquez recalled that the bestselling Spanish cookbook "1080 Recipes" by the late culinary author Simone Ortega had only one tuna recipe -- for a gratin using tinned tuna.

While 80 per cent of the tuna caught in Cadiz used to go to Japan, now 70 per cent is sold in Spain and just 30 per cent heads to Asia, according to OPP51.

Thousands of people head to Cadiz -- a region of whitewashed houses and sandy beaches -- to eat bluefin tuna caught using the "almadraba" technique.

Loss of Smell From COVID-19 Much Less Likely With New Variants



LONDON (Dispatches) - One of the signature symptoms of COVID-19 infection in the early months of the pandemic was a loss of the sense of smell.

Now, new research finds that is no longer the case, thanks to the new variants that have been circulating more recently.

The risk of losing sense of taste or smell is now only about 6% to 7% of what it was during the pandemic's early stages, according to researchers at Virginia Commonwealth University (VCU) School of Medicine in Richmond, Va.

"At the beginning of the pandemic, smell and taste loss were considered common symptoms of COVID-19. Before viral tests were readily accessible, we relied a lot more on such symptoms to diagnose those infected. However, as different variants of the COVID-19 virus have emerged, the types of symptoms most commonly experienced changed as well," said study author Dr. Evan Reiter, who is the medical director of VCU Health's Smell and Taste Disorders Center.

For the study, the researchers used a national database of more than 7 million patients who tested positive for COVID-19, calculating the prevalence of smell and taste loss as a symptom of the virus during peak periods of infection for each variant wave.

The team found that the risks of smell loss from a COVID-19 infection for Alpha and Delta, both pervasive variants in 2021, were only 74% and 64% of what was observed in the early stages of the pandemic.

They saw even steeper declines in loss of smell in 2022 and early 2023, as Omicron variants dominated. The risk of smell loss from infection was as low as 6% compared with 2020 rates.

Oceans Warmer Last Month Than Any May on Record

PARIS (Dispatches) - Global oceans were warmer last month than any other May in records stretching back to the 19th century, the European Union's climate monitoring unit reported.

Sea temperatures at a depth of about 10 metres were a quarter of a degree Celsius higher than ice-free oceans in May averaged across 1991 to 2020, according to the Copernicus Climate Change Service (C3S).

Year-round, long-term trends have added 0.6C to the ocean's surface waters in 40 years, said C3S deputy director Samantha Burgess, noting that April had also seen a new record for heat.

Temperatures over the ocean could be further boosted in coming months "as we are seeing the El Nino signal continuing to emerge in the equatorial Pacific," she said in a statement, referring to a periodic, natural shift in ocean winds that enhances warming globally.

Above water and over land, meanwhile, Earth's surface temperature last month tied as the second hottest for May, according to C3S. The Copernicus finding are based on computer-generated models that draw on billions of measurements from satellites, ships, aircraft and weather stations worldwide.

Oceans, which cover 70 per cent of Earth's surface, have kept the planet liveable as global warming caused by human activity -- mainly the burning of fossil fuels -- has accelerated.

The surface of the planet is, on average, 1.2C hotter than pre-industrial levels, a level which has already unleashed devastating climate impacts.

Oceans absorb a quarter of the CO2 we spew into the atmosphere, and 90 per cent of the excess heat generated by climate change.

But at a terrible price.

Widespread marine heatwaves are decimating coral reefs and the ecosystems that depend on them, including more than half-a-billion people.

The accelerated disintegration from below of giant ice sheets could lift oceans by a dozen metres, and ocean acidification is disrupting life cycles and food chains from the tropics to the poles.

Moreover, oceans -- along with forests and soil, which soak up an even larger percentage of human-generated greenhouse gases -- are showing signs of battle fatigue, and their capacity to soak up CO2 could diminish.

Copernicus also reported that temperatures in several parts of the world were higher than normal, including Canada, where wildfires over the last several weeks have so far decimated more than three million hectares (8 million acres).

There are 413 wildfires burning across the country from Pacific to Atlantic, including 249 deemed "out of control".

Earlier this month, the World Meteorological Organization (WMO) said there's a 60 per cent chance that an El Nino will form before the end of July, and an 80 per cent change by the end of November.

Most of the warmest years on record have occurred during El Ninos, and scientists are concerned that this summer and next could see record temperatures on land and in the sea.

In Antarctica, meanwhile, sea ice extent reached a monthly record low for the third time this year, with satellite data showing it was 17 per cent below average in May.



Switching to Zero-Emission Vehicles Could Save 90,000 Lives by 2050



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Consider yourself a lifesaver if you opt for an electric vehicle next time you buy or lease a new car.

Electric cars can save millions of lives and reduce healthcare costs by improving air quality so people can breathe better and freer, according to a new report by the American Lung Association. Zero-emission electric vehicles don't emit exhaust gas or other pollutants into the atmosphere. Instead of gasoline, these vehicles are powered by batteries that can be charged at charging stations.

If all new cars, pick-up trucks, and SUVs sold by 2035 were zero-emission, there would be up to 89,300 fewer premature deaths, 2 million fewer asthma attacks, 10.7 million fewer lost workdays, and a savings of \$978 billion in public health benefits across the United States by 2050, according to lung association projections.

"Transportation is a leading source of air pollution and climate change pollution, and we will continue to have challenges meeting clean air standards until we transition passenger vehicle sales to zero-emission," said report author Will Barrett, senior director for clean air advocacy at the American Lung Association.

The new report also projects that the nation's electric grid will be powered by clean energy instead of fossil fuels by 2035. This grid produces electricity via renewable energy generators, such as off-shore wind, land-based wind, hydropower, solar power and other sources.

"The report essentially illustrates the potential for major health benefits if all new passenger vehicles sold are zero-emission coupled with a net-zero power grid," said Barrett.

Bank of Canada Hikes Rates to 22-Year High

OTTAWA (Dispatches) - The Bank of Canada hiked its overnight rate to a 22-year high of 4.75%, and markets and analysts immediately forecast yet another increase next month to ratchet down an overheating economy and stubbornly high inflation.

The central bank had been on hold since January to assess the impact of previous hikes after raising borrowing costs eight times since March 2022 to a 15-year high of 4.50% - the fastest tightening cycle in the bank's history. Surprisingly strong consumer spending, a rebound in demand for services, a pick-up in housing activity and a tight labor market show excess demand is more persistent than anticipated, the central bank said in a statement.



World Bank Cuts 2024 Global Growth Forecast

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Bank raised its 2023 global growth outlook as the U.S., China and other major economies have proven more resilient than forecast, but said higher interest rates and tighter credit will take a bigger toll on next year's results.

Real global GDP is set to climb 2.1% this year, the World Bank said in its latest Global Economic Prospects report. That's up from a 1.7% forecast issued in January but well below the 2022 growth rate of 3.1%.

The development lender cut its 2024 global growth forecast to 2.4% from 2.7% in January, citing the lagged effects of central bank monetary tightening and more restrictive credit conditions that were reducing business and residential investment.

These factors will slow growth further in the second half of 2023 and into 2024, but the bank released a new 2025 global growth forecast of 3.0%.

World Bank Chief Economist Indermit Gill put a gloomy spin on the new forecasts, saying that 2023 would still mark one of the slowest growth years for advanced economies in the last five decades.

Two thirds of developing economies will see lower growth than in 2022, dealing a major setback to pandemic recovery and poverty reduction and increasing sovereign debt distress, he added.

"Even by the end of next year, a third of the developing world will not beat the per-capita income levels that they had at the end of 2019," Gill told reporters. "That's five lost years for nearly a third of the world's countries."

In January, the World Bank had warned that global GDP was slowing to the brink of recession, but since then, strength in the labor market and consumption in the U.S. had exceeded expectations as has China's recovery from COVID-19 lockdowns.

U.S. growth for 2023 is now forecast at 1.1%, more than double the 0.5% forecast in January, while China's growth is expected to climb to 5.6%, compared to a 4.3% forecast in January after COVID-reduced growth of 3% in 2022.

The bank, however, halved its previous 2024 U.S. growth forecast to 0.8%, and cut China's forecast by 0.4 percentage point to 4.6%.

The euro zone got a forecast increase to 0.4% growth for 2023 from a flat outlook in January, but the forecast for next year was also cut slightly.

Recent banking sector stress is also contributing to tighter financial conditions that will continue into 2024, the lender said.

It cited one potential downside scenario where banking stress results in a severe credit crunch and broader financial market stress in advanced economies. This would likely cut 2024 growth by nearly half to just 1.3% - the slowest pace in 30 years outside of the 2009 and 2020 recessions.

"In another scenario where financial stress propagates globally to a far greater degree, the world economy would fall into recession in 2024," the bank added.

The bank said inflation is expected to gradually edge down as growth decelerates and labor demand in many economies softens and commodity prices remain stable. But it added that core inflation is expected to remain above central bank targets in many countries throughout 2024.

Despite China Heatwave, Weak Factory Demand Curbs Coal Prices, LNG Imports

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - An ongoing heatwave in China is boosting power demand for cooling, but tepid industrial demand and record high coal inventories are keeping prices at two-year lows and limiting spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) imports.

Analysts do not see coal prices rising or spot LNG imports picking up anytime soon as a sluggish domestic recovery from COVID-19 curbs and shrinking exports dampen power demand from manufacturers, which account for about two-thirds of electricity use in the world's No. 2 economy.

"China has gotten used to using less LNG," said Alex Siow, lead Asia gas and LNG analyst at pricing agency ICIS.

The outlook will hurt coal and LNG exporters, as China is the world's biggest coal importer and vies with Japan as the top LNG buyer. The industrial and power sectors account for more than half of the country's gas demand.

"Weak industrial demand is the root cause, with key gas consumers like ceramics and glass makers operating at low rates as they face poor external demand," said a senior Chinese trader, who declined to be named as he is not authorized to speak to media.

He added that some of these plants have cut production by a third versus last year.

The weak outlook for coal and gas demand comes despite meteorologists warning of unseasonably hot weather for June, with temperatures exceeding 37 Celsius (98.6 Fahrenheit) from Beijing to Xinjiang.

Abundant piped gas supply, with some industrial users having agreed in late 2022 to additional purchases from state producers PetroChina and Sinopec, has also cut into spot LNG demand, the trader said. At the same time, a weakening Chinese yuan has kept many importers on the sidelines, despite LNG prices having slumped to a two-year low around \$9 per million British thermal units (mmBtu) from record highs hit last year after Russia's Ukraine invasion.

China's LNG imports in May rose 7.2% from April to 7.7 billion cubic meters (bcm), Refinitiv data showed. While this was higher than May 2022 amid COVID-19 lockdowns, it lagged May 2021 shipments.

"There have been some spot buys, but that is more for trade optimization," Siow said. ICIS forecasts China will import 73 million metric tons of LNG this year, up 15% from last year, when soaring prices curbed demand.

Industries that switched to coal when gas prices spiked last year have stayed with it, Siow said, as LNG prices remain uncertain in the near future. Spot LNG prices remain above breakeven levels of \$6.50/mmBtu for southern China's power producers.



China's Biggest State Banks Cut Deposit Rates

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's biggest banks said they have lowered interest rates on yuan deposits, in actions that could ease pressure on profit margins and reduce lending costs, providing some relief for the financial sector and wider economy.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China Ltd, Agricultural Bank of China Ltd, Bank of China Ltd and China Construction Bank Corp all cut their rates from Thursday, websites from each bank showed.

The state-backed banks cut rates on demand deposits by 5 basis points and three-year and five-year time deposits by 15 basis points.

This is the second such cut within a year, with previous action taken in September.

"The deposit rate cuts will push savings into consumption and investment and ease the pressure on banks' net interest margins (NIM), opening the door for further monetary stimulus," said Gary Ng, Asia Pacific senior economist of Natixis. He expects a 50 basis points cut in the reserve requirement ratio (RRR) soon to support local government bond issuance. But additional loan prime rate cuts will only come if economic data or financial risks deteriorate to a level that prevents China from meeting its 5% target, said Ng.

China cut the RRR in March but has kept its benchmark lending rate unchanged this year, as widening yield differentials with the United States limited the scope for substantial monetary easing.

Major state banks' net interest margins have shrunk following pressure to lower borrowing cost for individuals and businesses to stimulate the economy, and as credit demand remains subdued.

Eurozone in Recession at Start of 2023

LONDON (Dispatches) - The eurozone entered into a technical recession at the start of the year, shrinking by 0.1% for a second consecutive quarter, figures from the EU's statistic agency showed.

Eurostat revised down an earlier forecast that had predicted slight growth, after economic powerhouse Germany said last month it had fallen into recession.

The worse-than-expected figures come as inflation and higher interest rates have curbed

demand in Europe's largest economy.

Eurostat cut its earlier estimate of 0% growth in the final quarter of 2022 and 0.1% growth in the first quarter of 2023 to 0.1% contractions in both periods.

Two consecutive quarters of shrinking gross domestic product is the threshold for a technical recession.

The bad news comes after a painful year for European economies as surging energy prices sparked by Russia's war on Ukraine sent inflation spiraling.

The European Central Bank has responded by hiking its key rates by 3.75% points since embarking on an unprecedented campaign of monetary tightening in July last year.

The latest figures cast doubt over more optimistic predictions for the whole 2023.

The European Commission forecast in mid-May that growth for the year would reach 1.1% across the 20 countries that use the single currency.

Charlotte de Montpellier, an economist at ING Bank, predicted that the figure for 2023 would only reach 0.5%.

"Since the spring, all the data has been bad," she told AFP, pointing in particular to German industrial production and new orders.

"The European economy is in a phase of stagnation and has had difficulty getting through the winter because of the energy shock."

Even though gas and oil prices have fallen in recent months, last year's surge in prices has had a major impact on household confidence and forced a reduction in consumption.

Capital Economics said in a note it thinks "GDP is likely to contract again in Q2 (the second quarter) as the effects of monetary policy tightening continue to feed through".

"Domestic demand has been hit hard by the combination of inflation and rising interest rates," it said.

Headline inflation for the 20 EU countries using the euro dipped to 6.1% in May.

But inflation remains well above the 2.0% target set by ECB.

U.S. Trade Deficit Widens To 6-Month High

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The U.S. trade deficit widened by the most in eight years in April as imports of goods rebounded while exports of energy products declined, a trend that if sustained, could result in trade being a drag on economic growth in the second quarter.

The increase reported by the Commerce Department was the biggest since April 2015 and pushed the trade gap to the highest level in six months. It led economists to expect that trade could chop off as much as 2.5 percentage points from gross domestic product this quarter, unless imports reversed course, a tall order given the persistent strength in domestic demand. A strong dollar and slowing global demand could curb exports.

"The terms of trade are worsening and this will bring down second-quarter estimates of real GDP growth closer to the 1% stall speed where bad things can happen and the economy can stumble and go over the cliff," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWDBONDS in New York.

The trade deficit jumped 23.0% to \$74.6 billion. Data for March was revised to show the trade gap narrowing to \$60.6 billion instead of the previously reported \$64.2 billion. The government revised the goods trade data from 2018 while the trade services figures were revised from 2017.

Those revisions showed the trade deficit was not as large as previously thought in the first quarter. As a result, economists expect the government to raise its GDP growth estimate for the January-March quarter to as high as a 2.3% annualized rate when it publishes its third estimate later this month.

The revisions to the trade data followed on the heels of last week's solid construction spending data. The government's second estimate of first-quarter GDP last month showed trade made no contribution to the economy's 1.3% growth rate after adding to GDP for three straight quarters.

Adjusted for inflation, the goods trade deficit shot up 16.5% to \$95.8 billion in April. Goldman Sachs lowered its second-quarter GDP growth tracking estimate by half a percentage point to a 1.7% rate.

Stocks on Wall Street were trading mostly lower. The dollar slipped against a basket of currencies. U.S. Treasury prices fell. Goods imports rose 2.0% to \$263.2 billion in April, boosted by motor vehicles, parts and engines. There were also increases in imports of industrial supplies and materials, though petroleum imports fell to the lowest level since August 2021.

Imports of consumer goods surged \$1.8 billion, driven by cellphones and other household goods. Food imports were the lowest since December 2021. Imports of services decreased \$0.4 billion to \$60.4 billion, weighed down by declines in transport and travel. Overall imports increased 1.5% to \$323.6 billion.

India Central Bank Holds Rates as Expected



MUMBAI (Dispatches) - India's central bank kept its key lending rate steady for a second straight policy meeting, as widely expected, but signalled that monetary conditions will remain tight for some time as it looks to further curb inflationary pressures.

Despite hitting an 18-month low of 4.70% in April, analysts do not expect India's inflation to fall to the Reserve Bank of India's (RBI) 4% medium-term target in a sustainable manner for some time.

The monetary policy committee (MPC), which has three members from the RBI and three external members, kept the repo rate steady at 6.50% in an unanimous decision.

India has raised rates by 250 basis points (bps) since May 2022, but surprised analysts in April by keeping them unchanged.

"It is a pause in this meeting of the MPC and I have not said anything about the pivot. Whatever I said in the last meeting - that it is not a (policy) pivot - I reiterate that," Governor Shaktikanta Das told reporters.

All 64 economists in a Reuters poll had predicted Thursday's outcome and some had started pencilling in rate cuts early next year.

However, India's one-year overnight indexed swaps (OIS) rose 8 bps to 6.64% while five-year OIS jumped 11 bps to 6.13%, signalling markets are now pricing in a longer timeframe for rate cuts.

India's hold on rates contrasts with recent central bank actions elsewhere.

Two major central banks -- the Reserve Bank of Australia and the Bank of Canada -- have surprised markets this week by resuming rate hikes to combat stubbornly high inflation, pushing up bond yields across developed markets.

The RBI maintained its policy stance of "withdrawal of accommodation" to ensure inflation progressively aligns with the committee's target while remaining supportive of economic growth, Das said while announcing the MPC's decision.

Iran Defeat China in 2023 Volleyball Nations League

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has emerged victorious over China in the 2023 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) Week 1 being held in Japan. In the first set, China beat Iran 25-23 but the Iranian players defeated their Chinese squad 25-15 in the second set. Behrouz Ataei's men beat the rival 25-20 in the third set of the match. Iran started the prestigious campaign with a 3-0 loss against hosts

Japan in Nagoya but showed a great performance against Poland in the second match by being defeated 3-2 against the world's No.1. The FIVB Volleyball Men's Nations League is an annual international volleyball competition contested by the senior men's national teams of the members of the Fédération Internationale de Volleyball, the sport's global governing body.



Chinese Energy Storage, Battery Firms Consider Big Investments in Vietnam

HANOI (Dispatches) - Two Chinese makers of energy storage systems and batteries are weighing investments worth hundreds of millions of dollars in Vietnam, industry and government sources said.

The combined value of the investments could exceed \$1 billion, according to one person with direct knowledge of the discussions.

A growing number of Chinese companies are launching or expanding manufacturing projects in Vietnam, a global export hub thanks to its array of free trade deals and cheap labour.

Xiamen Hithium Energy Storage Technology, a startup that is expanding in Europe and the U.S., has approached officials and industry managers in Vietnam to potentially invest up to \$900 million to build a plant on more than 30 hectares of industrial land, the person said.

If the investment is finalised at that figure, the company would become one of the largest foreign investors in Vietnam.

A second source familiar with the discussions said the investment under consideration would be worth at least \$500 million.

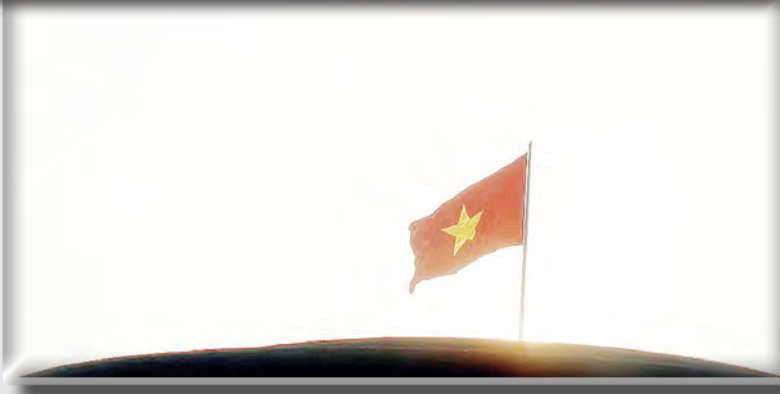
The sources were not authorised to speak to media and declined to be identified.

Hithium, which is based in the southeastern port city of Xiamen, said in a statement to Reuters that it had no new deals near closing. It also said it plans to expand its production capacity to 70 Gigawatts (GW) by the end of this year from just 15 GW now.

Growatt New Energy, which leases a pre-fabricated plant in Vietnam, is planning to spend about \$300 million to acquire about 15 hectares of industrial land to build a new factory, the first source said.

A separate source familiar with the discussions also said Growatt plans to expand in Vietnam.

Growatt, which produces battery systems and energy storage inverters for residential and commercial use, did not reply to requests for comment.



Both companies are in talks with multiple authorities and industrial parks about potential locations for their plants, the sources said.

Vietnam is also a growing market for renewable energy as its booming economy grapples with frequent power cuts due to increasing demand, climate change and a weak power grid. It has yet to pass legislation, however, that would permit the use of energy storage facilities to strengthen its power network.

Hithium, which currently does not have a presence in Vietnam, specialises in manufacturing stationary energy storage products, including cells and larger containers that help manage the intermittent supply of energy from solar or wind farms.

The global stationary energy storage market is estimated to jump in value to roughly \$224 billion by the end of the decade from just over \$31 billion in 2021, according to Precedence Research. Major companies in the market include Tesla, Panasonic and Philips.

World Should Take...

FROM PAGE 1

He then pointed to the Tel Aviv regime's desperate attempts to fabricate historical facts, which have dramatically intensified recently, stressing that the history of the blessed al-Aqsa Mosque is known to all, and that international bodies confirm that the site belongs to Muslims and reject the regime's evil schemes to divide time and space in the holy compound.



The Zionist regime is well aware how much Al-Aqsa Mosque is precious and important for Muslims and Palestinians and for this reason this regime has decided to take action against the first Qibla of Muslims and every time it does something to make Palestine and Muslims angry.

Of course at the same time this savage regime continues its murder and crimes against Palestinians and it gets no due response from the international bodies.

According to reports, Israeli forces carried out a raid against the city of Ramallah in the Tel Aviv-occupied West Bank, wounding at least 10 Palestinians.

The troops targeted the city, which serves as the seat of the Palestinian Authority, in early Thursday, attacking its residents with both live rounds and rubber-coated steel bullets.

Citing a witness, Reuters said "a large military convoy" arrived in downtown Ramallah, prompting hundreds of Palestinians to gather in the area.

"Some Palestinian youth hurled stones at the Israeli forces, who fired live bullets, stun grenades, and teargas at the crowd," the agency added. Palestinians also blocked roads by setting garbage containers on fire.

Medical sources said six Palestinians were injured by the forces' rubber bullets and four by live fire unleashed by the troops.

The Israeli military specified the reason behind the swoop as the demolition of the house of a suspect allegedly involved in a resistance operation in the holy occupied city of al-Quds last November.

According to the occupying regime, the operation had featured an explosion of improvised explosive devices planted at two bus stops.

A couple of days ago the Zionist forces killed a toddler which enraged Palestinians and some nations and international bodies reacted strongly but it was not enough to stop Zionists' crimes and the regime went on killing spree.

The Islamic Republic of Iran as the main supporter of Palestinian nation against Israel has repeatedly urged international bodies and nations to take a serious action against this fake and criminal regime but so far it has gone unnoticed and unfortunately Muslim nations are more focused on their own issues than paying attention to Palestine and Palestinians and this is something which encourage the Zionist regime to go on killing spree without getting due response.

Palestinians have to take action and rely on their own will power than waiting for international support as this proverb says "You want a thing done, do it yourself" because other Muslim countries are mostly busy with their own domestic affairs and domestic rifts than paying attention to Palestinians.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has been and will be the main supporter of Palestinians and it will not spare any support and help to the oppressed Palestinians people because it is one of the principles of the Islamic Revolution that it should support the oppressed people especially Muslims in the world and the international bodies are recommended to act fairly when it comes to countries and nations like Palestine whose rights are violated and ignored.

Wildfires Burn Across Canada With Little Relief in Sight



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Forest fires continued to burn across Canada as the country endured its worst-ever start to wildfire season, forcing thousands of people from their homes and sending a smoky haze billowing across U.S. cities.

About 3.8 million hectares (9.4 million acres) have already burned, roughly 15 times the 10-year average, according to federal Minister of Emergency Preparedness Bill Blair. Warm, dry conditions were expected to persist in the months ahead.

Although wildfires are common in Canada, it is unusual for blazes to be burning simultaneously in the east and west, stretching firefighting resources and forcing the Canadian government to send in the military to help. Hundreds of U.S. firefighters arrived in Canada to help and more were on their way.

Prime Minister Justin Trudeau blamed climate change. "These fires are affecting everyday routines, lives and livelihoods, and our air quality," Trudeau said on Twitter.

Some of the worst fires have sprung up in the eastern province of Quebec, and more than 11,000 people had to evacuate their homes in Quebec.

Wildfire season started unseasonably early in Alberta last month and burned a record area, and Nova Scotia continues to battle its largest-ever blaze.

In parts of the Pacific province of British Columbia, which is facing the second-biggest wildfire on record, temperatures were forecast to hit 33 Celsius (91 Fahrenheit) on Thursday, before thunderstorms and heavy rains arrive on Friday.

Rob Schweitzer, executive director of BC Wildfire, said lightning strikes could spark more blazes in tinder-dry forests and the outcome would depend on how much precipitation comes with the storms.

"When you get 150 or 200 strikes in one day from lightning coming through the province, it's impossible to have enough resources to suppress them all," he said.

Wildfires have eased in Alberta, the center of Canada's oil and gas industry, but more than 3,000 people remain under evacuation orders and heat warnings are in effect in the south of the province.

Smoke-forecasting website BlueSky Canada showed wildfire smoke spreading across much of the country on Thursday. The smoke is set to intensify in Ottawa, Toronto, Cleveland and Pittsburgh and remain thick in other cities along the east coast of the United States, including New York.

Japan to Push Child Care, Labor Reforms to Stem Falling Births

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Japan aims to reform labor law, easing the way for couples to work and share household chores, in a bid to avert an expected sharp fall in the number of its young people by the 2030s, three government sources with direct knowledge of the matter said.

Prime Minister Fumio Kishida has said a fast-ageing Japan has a last chance to reverse a decline in births, which could hurt economic growth and social security, before the 2030s bring a drop in the share of young people in the population.

Kishida is set to unveil a final version of his child care policy at a news conference on June 13. The labor reforms will allow workers to opt for a more flexible work-style such as three days off each week, the sources, who sought anonymity because they are not authorised to speak to media, told Reuters.

Further regulation to be adopted in fiscal 2024 will put a uniform cap on overtime. The new plan also aims for those who engage in care or undergo fertility treatment to hold down jobs.

The child allowance plan calls for abolition of income limits on recipients, while clarifying that such allowances are available until a deadline of March 31 subsequent to attaining the age of 18, up from 15 now.

The draft plan seeks to further rectify long working hours so that both parents can share household chores without throwing an unfair burden on mothers.

Men working long hours have traditionally formed the bulk of the workforce at many Japanese firms, but reform proponents say this forces women to shoulder a disproportionate share of domestic chores.

Government officials could not immediately be reached for comment outside business hours.

Arctic Could Be Ice-Free a Decade Earlier Than Thought

PARIS (Dispatches) - The Arctic Ocean's ice cap will disappear in summer as soon as the 2030s and a decade earlier than thought, no matter how aggressively humanity draws down the carbon pollution that drives global warming, scientists said.



In its landmark 2021 report, the IPCC forecast with "high confidence" that the Arctic Ocean would become virtually ice-free at least once by mid-century, and even then only under more extreme greenhouse gas emissions scenarios.

Even capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius in line with the Paris climate treaty will not prevent the North Pole's vast expanse of floating ice from melting away in September, they reported in Nature Communications.

"It is too late to still protect the Arctic summer sea ice as a landscape and as a habitat," co-author Dirk Notz, a professor at the University of Hamburg's Institute of Oceanography, told AFP. "This will be the first major component of our climate system that we lose because of our emission of greenhouse gases." Decreased ice cover has serious impacts over time on weather, people and ecosystems — not just within the region, but globally.

"It can accelerate global warming by melting permafrost laden with greenhouse gases, and sea level rise by melting the Greenland ice sheet," lead author Seung-Ki Min, a researcher at Pohang University of Science and Technology in South Korea, told AFP.

Greenland's kilometres-thick blanket of ice contains enough frozen water to lift oceans six metres.

By contrast, melting sea ice has no discernible impact on sea levels because the ice is already in ocean water, like ice cubes in a glass.

But it does feed into a vicious circle of warming. About 90 per cent of the Sun's energy that hits White Sea ice is reflected back into space.

But when sunlight hits dark, unfrozen ocean water instead, nearly the same amount of that energy is absorbed by the ocean and spread across the globe.

Both the North and South Pole regions have warmed by three degrees Celsius compared to late 19th-century levels, nearly three times the global average.

An ice-free September in the 2030s "is a decade faster than in recent projections of the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC)", the UN's science advisory body, said Min.

South Korea Vows Support for Its Chip Sector

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea pledged support for its chip sector, with President Yoon Suk Yeol describing competition in the industry as an "all-out war" amid heightened Sino-U.S. tension.

Earlier in the day, Yoon met with about 60 industry leaders, lawmakers and ministers to discuss how to maintain South Korea's lead in memory chips, foster development of system semiconductors, and secure materials, equipment and labour. "Geopolitical issues have become the biggest risk for companies to manage as of late. Companies alone cannot resolve this problem - it is one that the nation should tackle by strengthening cooperation with closely communicating with like-minded countries like the United States," Yoon told the meeting.

The government plans to help expand research and development, bolster smaller players, strengthen legal protection for chip technology and set up a chip testing facility, the industry ministry said in a statement.

South Korea has sought to avoid becoming embroiled in a tit-for-tat row between China and the United States over semiconductors. On one hand, chipmakers Samsung Electronics Co Ltd (005930.KS) and SK Hynix Inc (000660.KS) depend on U.S. technology and equipment. At the same time, about 40% of South Korea's chip exports go to China, trade ministry data showed.

Over One Million Tickets Sold For Women's World Cup

ZURICH (Dispatches) - This year's Women's World Cup in Australia and New Zealand is on track to become the most attended standalone women's sporting event ever with over one million tickets sold, FIFA said.

FIFA president Gianni Infantino said the ninth edition of the Women's World Cup, which starts on July 20, has sold 1,032,884 tickets, surpassing the previous tournament in France in 2019.

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Declan Rice Will Leave West Ham

LONDON (Dispatches) - Declan Rice will leave West Ham United in the close season, chairman David Sullivan said, a day after the midfielder captained the club to their first European trophy in 58 years.

Sullivan said a gentleman's agreement means Rice can leave despite a year remaining on his contract with the option to extend it by a further 12 months. When asked if Wednesday's 2-1 victory over Fiorentina in the Europa Conference League final was Rice's last game for the club, Sullivan told Talksport: "I think it has to be.

Jokic's Historic Effort Sends Nuggets Past Heat in Game 3

DENVER (Dispatches) - Denver Nuggets coach Michael Malone has viewed a lot of top-notch performances from the club's star tandem of Nikola Jokic and Jamal Murray.

So he didn't have any trouble assessing their efforts in Game 3 of the NBA Finals. "By far their greatest performance as a duo in their seven years together," Malone said. Jokic produced a historic stat line of 32 points, 21 rebounds and 10 assists, and Murray also had a triple-double as Denver notched a 109-94 victory over the host Miami Heat to take a 2-1 lead in the NBA Finals.

Jokic became the first player ever to log at least 30 points, 20 rebounds and 10 assists in an NBA Finals game. He made 12 of 21 shots and blocked two shots as Denver bounced back from a Game 2 home loss.

Murray scored a game-high 34 points to go with 10 rebounds and 10 assists for the Nuggets, who controlled the contest. And as Malone correctly pointed out, it is the first time two players on the same team have scored 30 points during a triple-double in NBA history.

"Regarding Nikola, nothing he does surprises me, ever," Malone said. "The guy has shown over and over again that he's built for these moments. He thrives on these moments, the biggest stage, and he did that again tonight. ..."

"Jamal is a guy that thrives, lives and excels in the moment. Never afraid of it and you can't say that for a lot of players. ... Jamal missed our last two postseasons (with a knee injury). He's been dying to get back to this setting and just go out there and put on the performance that he's putting on."

Jimmy Butler scored 28 points and Bam Adebayo added 22 points and 17 rebounds for the Heat, who trailed by as many as 21 points.

"We didn't play our best tonight," Butler said. "We got to come out with more energy and effort." The Nuggets are two victories away from their first NBA title after the stellar showings by their star tandem.

"Running out of things to say," Murray said of Jokic. "He makes the game look easy."

Christian Braun scored 15 points on 7-of-8 shooting off the bench, and Aaron Gordon had 11 points, 10 rebounds and five assists for Denver.

The Nuggets used Jokic's 10th triple-double of the postseason to regain home-court



advantage. Jokic has three of the five 30-20-10 performances in NBA postseason history. The others came from Hall of Famers Wilt Chamberlain and Kareem Abdul-Jabbar.

Jokic, as is his custom, downplayed his memorable performance.

"I'm just glad we won the game," the two-time league MVP said. "It was a big one for us just because they won in our arena. We just didn't want to go down 2-1."

Denver shot 51.2 percent from the field but was just 5 of 18 (27.8 percent) from 3-point range. The Nuggets had a 58-33 rebounding advantage and a 60-34 edge in points in the paint.

"They just pummeled us in the paint," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "They didn't even have to shoot threes ... we didn't offer much resistance."

Miami made 37 percent of its field-goal attempts and was 11 of 35 (31.4 percent) from behind the arc. Caleb Martin added 10 points off the bench for the Heat.

After leading by five at halftime, the Nuggets scored the first six points of the second half on a Jokic hoop and back-to-back baskets by Gordon to take a 59-48 lead.

Miami was later within seven before Denver began pulling away with a 21-9 surge. Kentavious Caldwell-Pope made a jumper to give Denver a 78-62 edge, and Braun capped the run with a layup and a ferocious slam as the lead reached 82-63 with 50.2 seconds left in the third quarter.

The Heat scored the final five points to trail 82-68 entering the final stanza, and Adebayo sank two free throws to cut the deficit to 12 in the opening minute of the final quarter.

However, Murray hit a jumper and Jokic followed with the next four points to start an 11-2 run. Braun converted a three-point play with 8:45 left and made a floater 17 seconds later to push the Denver lead to 93-72 with 8:28 to play.

Murray's jumper made it 101-84 with three minutes left. Miami later narrowed the gap to nine before the Nuggets closed it out.

Denver held a 53-48 advantage at the break. Murray had 20 points to lead the way.

Liverpool Sign Argentine World Cup Winner Mac Allister



LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool signed Argentine World Cup winner Alexis Mac Allister from Brighton for a fee that could rise to a reported £55 million (\$69 million).

The 24-year-old is the first piece in a midfield rebuild for Liverpool, who finished a disappointing fifth in the Premier League.

"It feels amazing," said Mac Allister, who is understood to have signed a five-year deal at Anfield. "It's a dream come true. It's amazing to be here and I can't wait to get started."

"I wanted to be in from the first day of pre-season, so it's good that everything is done. I'm looking forward to meeting my teammates."

"It was a fantastic year for me -- World Cup, what we achieved with Brighton -- but now it's time to think about Liverpool and try to be a better player and a better human being every day."

Liverpool manager Jurgen Klopp is seeking to bolster his midfield options after the departures of James Milner, Naby Keita and Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain.

The club were priced out of a move for England teenage star Jude Bellingham, who is set to join Real Madrid after the clubs agreed a fee of 103 million euros (\$110 million).

Swiatek to Face Muchova For French Open Crown

PARIS (Dispatches) - Defending champion Iga Swiatek was pushed hard by Beatriz Haddad Maia at the French Open, but the top seed soaked up the pressure to overcome the Brazilian 6-2 7-6(7) and reach a third final in four years at Roland Garros.

She will play the unseeded Karolina Muchova, who saved a match point before overcoming second seed Aryna Sabalenka 7-6(5) 6-7(5) 7-5 to end the Belarusian's hopes of becoming world number one.

Swiatek, who lifted the Suzanne Lenglen Cup last year and in 2020, was put through the wringer by Haddad Maia but held her nerve in a tense tiebreak to see off the 14th seed's challenge.

"She has a really nice game for clay courts with a lot of top spin," Swiatek said of Haddad Maia, who beat the Pole in their only other meeting in Toronto last year.

"She can also play flat and aggressive. She's a fighter. For every match, she played fierce."

Sabalenka would have taken over top spot in the rankings by winning the title in Paris, but the Australian Open champion wasted her opportunity at 5-2 in the third set against Muchova and bowed out after losing the last five games in a row.

That made Muchova only the third player ranked outside the top 40 to reach the Roland Garros final after Jelena Ostapenko (2017) and Swiatek (2020) - both of whom won the title.

The last unseeded player left in the men's and women's draw, Muchova, who fought back from the mid-200s into the top 50 after an injury in 2021, was at her skillful best to subdue the big-hitting Sabalenka.

"I don't really know what happened," Muchova said. "The atmosphere, the people pushing me in all the match. I just keep fighting and it worked. I really don't know what happened. I am so happy."

There was light at the end of the tunnel for Japan's Miyu Kato after a difficult few days, as she put her women's doubles disqualification behind her to claim the mixed doubles crown with Germany's Tim Puetz.

The pair rallied to beat Canada's Bianca Andreescu and New Zealander Michael Venus 4-6 6-4 (10-6) in the final.

Bayern Munich Sign Austria Midfielder Laimer



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Austria international Konrad Laimer has joined Bayern Munich on a free transfer from RB Leipzig, the Bavarian club announced.

The midfielder's deal at the German champions will run until 2027.

"I'm in the right place here," Laimer said in a statement Bayern released on Friday.

"It's a dream come true for me. FC Bayern is one of the biggest clubs in the world."

Bayern CEO Jan-Christian Dreessen said: "We are delighted to have signed Konrad Laimer... together we will hopefully now celebrate many more great victories and titles."

Laimer's deal with the German Cup holders expired in the summer and the midfielder had been allowed to negotiate with other clubs since January 1.

Known for his relentless pressing, Laimer played 190 games for Leipzig, scoring 15 goals and assisting 19 more. He won the German Cup in 2022 and 2023 with Leipzig.

The Austrian had been linked with a move to Munich for several months and was a favourite of former Bayern manager Julian Nagelsmann, who coached him at Leipzig.

Laimer is Bayern's first summer signing and the first major arrival since the departure of sporting director Hasan Salihamidzic, who was sacked by the club in late May.

Bayern won the league title on goal difference from Borussia Dortmund on the final matchday. It was their 11th straight German championship.

Laimer will join a star-studded Bayern midfield which includes Joshua Kimmich and Leon Goretzka and fellow Austrian Marcel Sabitzer.

Sabitzer, who will return to Bayern after spending the second half of the season on loan at Manchester United, also joined Munich from RB Leipzig.

Guardiola in Top Three Coaches of All Time

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Manchester City's Pep Guardiola is one of the top two or three coaches of all time, former Barcelona team mate Carles Puyol said ahead of Saturday's Champions League final in which Guardiola will bid to win the trophy for a third time.

Puyol played alongside Guardiola for Barcelona and was captain of the Barca team managed by him a few years later, winning the Champions League in 2008-09 and 2010-11.

"I (played) with Pep for two years and to be honest you could already see these leadership qualities in him in all sorts of ways," Puyol told Laureus Spirit of Sport.

"The way he spoke, his commitment to the club, and you could already see him as a coach."

"For me, if not the best, he's certainly among the top two or three coaches of all time."

Puyol, who spent 15 years at Barcelona and won six La Liga titles as well as three Champions Leagues, said Guardiola was already the master tactician even when still a player under Dutch coach Louis van Gaal.

"Even having a coach like Van Gaal, who I love very much, sometimes Pep would even move us around, as a defender. He'd switch us into a back three, a back four at times," Puyol said.

"I clearly remember one game against Atletico Madrid and I was stunned at how he could be playing and still visualise the best way to defend."

Guardiola has turned Manchester City into the dominant force in English football since arriving there in 2016.

He has won five of the last six Premier League titles and on Saturday City claimed the domestic double by beating Manchester United in the FA Cup final -- his 11th trophy for the club.



Djokovic Beats Alcaraz to Reach French Open Final

PARIS (Dispatches) - Novak Djokovic defeated an ailing Carlos Alcaraz 6-2, 5-7, 6-1, 6-1 to become the second oldest men's finalist in French Open history and close in on a record 23rd Grand Slam title.

Djokovic, a two-time Roland Garros champion, will break the record he shares with Rafael Nadal for the most men's Grand Slam titles if he beats Casper Ruud or Alexander Zverev in the final.

The 36-year-old Serb can also eclipse Nadal as the tournament's oldest winner and regain the number one ranking from Alcaraz, who was severely limited by cramp in the last two sets.

"First and foremost I have to say tough luck for Carlos, because at this level the last thing you want is cramp, physical problems at the last stages of Grand Slam," said Djokovic.

"I feel for him, I feel sorry and I hope he can recover."

Alcaraz's physical struggles drained the suspense as he gamely fought to carry on after a thrilling first two sets, with Djokovic dominating the opener before the Spaniard levelled in the second.

The 20-year-old pulled up clutching his right calf as Djokovic held serve for 1-1 in the third set, effectively giving his rival the next game rather than struggle through to the changeover.

Alcaraz was a shadow of the unshakable, all-action player who began the match, his movement heavily restricted as Djokovic breezed through the rest of the set.

He returned for the fourth set after a bathroom break looking somewhat more mobile, but after Djokovic saved a break point in the opening game any lingering resistance from Alcaraz subsided.

