

Iran and Venezuela Have Signed Several Agreements to Cooperate On the Development of Oilfields And Revitalization of Refineries and Petrochemical Plants, According to A Report by the Iranian Oil Ministry

IRAN NEWS

Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian Says Iran and Venezuela Enjoy Serious Determination as Well as Vast Resources That Can Guarantee The Implementation of the 20-Year Strategic Agreement

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Iran Recorded 159 Nuclear Achievements Last Year

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI) says the agency recorded 159 achievements in the past Persian calendar year (ending on March 20) in defiance of US sanctions as well as hurdles created by the West.

Speaking during a TV program on Monday, Mohammad Eslami said the nuclear achievements were made by young Iranian experts in different fields, including irradiation systems, microwave, radiopharmaceuticals, and plasma technology.

"Last year, we had 159 achievements. It was important for us to speed up the time needed to get results and ... turn an idea into a product," he said.

Eslami emphasized that the achievements were made despite US sanctions targeting Iranian radiopharmaceutical companies and not allowing them to send or receive any consignments.

The West is against uranium enrichment and fuel cycle in Iran because they are against the growth of the country's power, he said, adding, "Therefore, we had to create a nuclear fuel cycle from zero to a hundred, from research to the acquisition of infrastructure. All of them have been created indigenously." *See Page 7*

Tehran, Caracas Cement Ties With Signing 19 Cooperation Agreements



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran and Venezuela announced their decision to increase the volume of bilateral trade to 20 billion dollars, as Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi is visiting the country on the first leg of his tour of three Latin American nations.

The announcement came in a joint press conference attended by Raisi and his Venezuelan counterpart, Nicolas Maduro, in Caracas on Monday, after the two heads of state held bilateral talks.

"We have decided to increase the cooperation between the two countries," Raisi said.

"The volume of trade exchanges between Iran and Venezuela will be increased to 10 billion dollars in the first step, which can be raised to 20 billion dollars in the second step," Iran's president said.

Raisi noted that Tehran's relations with Caracas are not ordinary diplomatic ties, but are of a strategic nature.

"Having common interests, positions and enemies has helped deepen cooperation between the two countries and make it strategic," Raisi said.

The press conference was preceded by an official ceremony during which the two countries' ministers and other top officials signed a total of 19 cooperation agreements and memorandums of understanding.

The agreements were aimed at expanding cooperation between Tehran and Caracas in many areas, including in the field of petrochemicals, as the two sides move to expand overall cooperation in the oil sector.

The documents will also boost the two countries' cooperation in such areas as information and communication technology, energy, insurance, marine transportation, higher education, agriculture, medicine, culture and mines.

Meanwhile in a joint press conference with Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro, Raisi said a new world order is being formed in favor of freedom-seeking, independent countries, stressing that resistance against the arrogant powers has led to significant achievements.

The Iranian president said Tehran and Caracas have managed to improve "strategic" relations in recent years, but they should swiftly implement the previously signed agreements to upgrade ties to higher levels given diverse mutual capacities.

He added that Iran has capabilities in the field of exporting technical-engineering services and processing agricultural and mineral products.

"The Iranian nation has gained valuable experience and achievements in the field of science and technology thanks to its resistance against the arrogant system and [success to] overcome the sanctions," Raisi said, expressing Tehran's readiness to share them with Venezuela.

The Iranian and Venezuelan presidents also announced their decision to increase the volume of bilateral trade to \$20 billion.

The Iranian president stressed the importance of further activating the shipping lines between the two countries and called for strengthening cooperation in the industrial, mining, energy, monetary and banking sectors.

The Venezuelan president, for his part, pointed to Caracas's strategic relations with Tehran and said Venezuela is firmly determined to start a new round of bids aimed at expanding relations with Iran.

Maduro added that Iran and Venezuela have made efforts to reduce their dependence on oil revenues and increase the resistance of their economies against foreign upheaval and pressure.

In the new world that is being formed, imperialism is collapsing and the countries that have resisted the excessive demands of the arrogant powers are on the verge of victory, he emphasized.

The Venezuelan leader stressed the necessity of establishing a direct air line between the two countries and strengthening shipping lines to increase bilateral trade.

He noted that Tehran and Caracas have also appropriate capacities for cooperation in the fields of tourism, agriculture and animal husbandry.

That deal includes repairs to oil refineries in Venezuela, which has the world's largest crude reserves but has struggled to produce enough gasoline and diesel, leading to intermittent shortages that have forced drivers to queue for hours.

Iran has provided fuel and diluents to convert Venezuela's extra-heavy crude into exportable varieties and since 2020 has supplied parts for repairs to the refining circuit.

A unit of Iran's state-owned refiner NIORDC signed a 110-million-euro contract in May 2022 to make repairs at Venezuela's smallest refinery, El Palito, which has a capacity of 146,000 barrels per day.

Iran is also set to be involved in a modernization project at Venezuela's largest refinery complex, partly to restore distilling capacity.

Speaking in a joint meeting of Iranian and Venezuela tradesmen, Raisi said becoming stronger in the economic sector would be the most effective way to counter sanctions.

He added that the Iranian youths have succeeded in turning sanctions into opportunities by making use of the capabilities of the knowledge-based companies and maintaining peace and stability in the country against the upheavals.

He noted that Tehran and Caracas have enormous capacities to increase economic exchanges which have not been used yet.

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Germany Resumed Oil Imports From Iran in March

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany resumed its petroleum imports from Iran after five years earlier this year despite a continued regime of American sanctions that bans any trade of energy products with Iran.

Data cited in a Monday report by Iran's official IRNA news agency showed that Germany had taken delivery of a large petroleum shipment from Iran in March.

The report cited data from the European Union's statistics agency the Eurostat which showed the shipment imported by Germany had contained nearly 70,000 metric tons of Iranian crude oil or petroleum products.

Germany halted imports of crude oil or petroleum products from Iran after taking delivery of a 10,000-mt shipment in October 2018 and after the US withdrew from an international agreement on Iran's nuclear program and imposed sanctions on the country's oil exports.

Eurostat figures showed that total petroleum imports from Iran by EU countries this year have reached 66,884 mt with Germany and Bulgaria being the only two buyers. *See Page 7*

IRGC Vessels Equipped With 2,000-km-Range Missiles

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps' Navy Rear Admiral Alireza Tangsiri has said that the IRGC has for the first time equipped its vessels with domestically-made missiles that have a range of up to 2,000 kilometers.

Speaking on Monday in Tehran, Tangsiri said that the missiles have been mounted on the Iranian-made warship dubbed Martyr Soleimani.

The commander said that the warship has been for the first time equipped with domestically-made vertical launch missiles as well as surface-to-surface cruise missiles with ranges from 40 to 2,000 kilometers.

Tangsiri also spoke about the progress the Iranian missile industry has made after the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

He said that the missiles Iran possessed before the Islamic Revolution had a maximum range of 40 km, but now they have a minimum range of 2,000 km. Plus, he added, the country knows how to use the weapons without using any foreign help.

The IRGC commander also said that Iran has managed to achieve progress in manufacturing vessels and missiles while it has been facing difficult sanctions.

Iran Achieves Deterrence Power

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has achieved deterrence power in both regional and global arenas thanks to self-reliance in its defense industry, says a top commander.

Brigadier General Mohammad Shirazi, head of the military office of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, said on Tuesday that self-sufficiency and indigenization of defense products have made Iran reach deterrence power not only in the region but also at the global level.

He also warned that the enemy tries to prevent the Iranians' victory, adding, "The more successful we become, the more desperate the enemy gets."

The Leader, he asserted, wants the Iranians to use their own capabilities and capacities.

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

Homegrown Iranian military products have also found many clients in the world.

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities which are entirely meant for defense.

Russia to Respond to West in Kind If Necessary

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A senior Russian diplomat says his country's position on the multilateral negotiations to salvage the Iran nuclear deal will depend on the West's policy, but Moscow will respond in kind if it deems necessary.

Russia's ambassador to international organizations in Vienna Mikhail Ulyanov said in a tweet on Tuesday that the Western parties politicized the talks to the maximum possible extent, but their approach has failed to meet their interests.

"Western countries politicized multilateral discussions in Vienna to the maximum possible extent. But now they apparently started to understand that such policy doesn't correspond to their own interests," Ulyanov wrote.

He made clear that Russia's position will correspond to the West's policy, adding, "If necessary, we will respond."

Iran proved the peaceful nature of its nuclear program to the world by signing the JCPOA, commonly known as the Iran nuclear deal, with six world powers. However, Washington's exit in May 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of sanctions against Tehran left the future of the deal in limbo. *See Page 7*

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Deputy FM Holds Meeting With E3 Counterparts in UAE

TEHRAN (MNA)- Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs held separate meetings with his British, French and German counterparts in Abu Dhabi, the UAE.

Ali Bagheri Kani made the announcement in a tweet on Tuesday, writing, "Following diplomatic consultations with regional and extra-regional sides, we met with our German, French and English counterparts in Abu Dhabi and discussed a range of issues and mutual concerns." Earlier on Tuesday, the Iranian diplomat in another tweet announced that in line with Iran's policy of continuing political consultations with the neighbors, he traveled to the United Arab Emirates to discuss the promotion of bilateral cooperation and review regional issues with the Emirati officials.

U.S. assassination of Gen. Soleimani Crime Against Human Interests

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The U.S. assassination of top Iranian anti-terror commander Lieutenant General Qasem Soleimani and his companions was a crime against human interests, says a top Judiciary official.

Abbas-Ali Kadkhodaei, who heads a special committee formed to follow up on General Soleimani's murder case from legal and international aspects, made the remarks on Tuesday while addressing a meeting on the services of the fallen commander.

He called the assassination "a crime against the interests of humanity," emphasizing that various institutions are actively pursuing the case.

"Under the roadmap drawn up in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, it was agreed to tap into international aspects, among which is public opinion and elaboration on the crime committed by Americans. Various aspects of this act of terror must be explained to the peoples of the region and elsewhere in the world," Kadkhodaei said.

He added that colonial powers, including the United States, have long pursued their own interests in West Asia and sought to meddle in the affairs of the region.

The top Iranian judicial official noted that the political vacuums created in the aftermath of US-led invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq in 2001 and 2003 gave rise to the emergence of Takfiri militant groups and extremists in the region, after which the United States tried to make the most of the situation.

"Great proportions of Syrian and Iraqi territories were overrun by Daesh [Takfiri terrorist group], and Iran's national interests were threatened as well. The people of the region were plagued by Takfiri groups. Unfortunately, these groups used to perpetrate their crimes in the name of religion.



"Through Iran's measures and General Soleimani's perseverance, the menace of these Takfiri groups was purged from the region within a short period of time. The value and significance of the services that General Soleimani, his companions and Iran have rendered in the fight against Takfiri groups have not yet been recognized," Kadkhodaei said.

He also called General Soleimani's sacrifices in the fight against extremist militant outfits a great service to humanity and human societies.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), and their companions were assassinated in a US drone strike authorized by then-President Donald Trump near Baghdad International Airport on January 3, 2020.

Two days after the attack, Iraqi lawmakers approved a bill that required the government to end the presence of all foreign military forces led by the US in the country.

Both commanders were highly revered across the Middle East because of their key role in fighting the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

Turkmenistan Consul General Calls for Boosting Ties With Iran

BOJNOURD (Dispatches) - Turkmenistan's Consul General in the Iranian city of Mashhad, Gaiypov Ilyas Akmuhammadovich, has called for boosting economic cooperation between the two countries.

The diplomat said that meetings are taking place between officials of the two countries, stressing that such visits should increase as part of efforts to further expand bilateral relations.

Gaiypov Ilyas was speaking on Monday night in the city of Bojnourd, the capital of North Khorasan Province, northeast Iran. There, he addressed a seminar attended by Iranian and Turkmen businessmen.

He said that businessmen from Turkmenistan have attended the seminar in order to get familiar with North Khorasan Province's potentials with the final aim of boosting trade ties with the Iranian side.

Iranian Ambassador Attends Textile Exhibition in Italy

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian ambassador to Italy attended the European International Textile and Garment Technology Exhibition (ITMA 2023) held in Milan.

Mohammad-Reza Sabouri met and held talks with the organizers of the exhibition and the heads of European textile industry associations.

Various topics related to the textile industry and the potential for cooperation with active Iranian companies were discussed in this meeting.

Accompanied by the managers and organizers of the exhibition, Sabouri visited the Iranian booths at the European exhibition.

The Iranian exhibitors gave explanations about their capabilities and achievements.

The 19th edition of ITMA, which is the world's largest International Textile and Garment Technology Exhibition, is being held in Milan, Italy from 8-14 June 2023.

Iran Hub of Producing Flight Simulators in West Asia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Commander of Air Force of the Army of the Islamic Republic of Iran Brigadier General Hamid Vahedi has said that the Islamic Republic of Iran is the hub of manufacturing flight simulators in West Asia.

Vahedi made the remarks speaking in the unveiling ceremony of air traffic controller simulator made by Iran Army Air Force

The comprehensive system consists of five simulators, which include a flight control tower, precision approach radars, and an air traffic control radar.

The simulator system is used for training undergraduate and graduate students as well as on-the-job training courses for air traffic controllers.

The domestic ATC simulator has been made in Iran for the first time.

Iranian Envoy to China Announces End of His Successful Mission

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iranian ambassador to China Mohammad Keshavarzadeh has announced the end of his "successful" mission in the country.

I will leave Beijing for dear Iran in few hours and at the end of my mission, Iranian ambassador to Beijing Mohammad Keshavarzadeh wrote in a Twitter post in Farsi on Monday.

The diplomat said his achievements during his time as ambassador to China included the delivery of some 120 million doses of coronavirus vaccine from China to Iran, finalizing a 25-year strategic partnership deal between the two countries and an agreement reached between Iran and Saudi Arabia in Beijing in March to restore their diplomatic ties.

Aliabadi Becomes New Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade



TEHRAN (IFP) - Abbas Aliabadi becomes Iran's new Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade after securing a vote of confidence from the country's Parliament.

During a session on Tuesday, Aliabadi presented his plans for the post to the Iranian lawmakers and defended his agenda.

At the session, which was also joined by First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber, 157 lawmakers voted in favor of the proposed minister and 58 against Aliabadi. Eight others also abstained.

Aliabadi, 62, will replace Reza Fatemi Amin, who was given a vote of no confidence by the Parliament and dismissed from office in April over his performance and poor handling of the country's industrial development, especially over the soaring car prices.

Aliabadi holds a PhD in mechanical engineering and has been a professor in the field at various universities.

He has also overseen several developments projects in the country.

Pakistan Calls for Effective Cooperation With Iran in Fighting Drug Trafficking

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary General of Drug Control Headquarters Eskandar Momeni and Pakistan's Federal Minister for Narcotics Control Nawabzada Shazain Bugti called for effective cooperation and interaction in the fight against drug trafficking.

Momeni warned on Tuesday that smugglers have even entered waterways in recent years, which has been a problem for Iranian and Pakistani ports, so the two nations should improve coordination and collaboration in this respect.

He said in the meeting that despite the change of government in Afghanistan and its caretaker officials' promises, we witness the growth of narcotics production in the recent two years.

We witness the growth of producing different manufactured drugs in Afghanistan, he said, adding that Iran and Pakistan as the neighboring states of the country



have no choice but to pursue cooperation in prevention and treatment.

The Pakistani official added that the Iran-Pakistan border is the border of friendship and the two states should have more cooperation in intelligence.

He said that due to the circumstances in Afghanistan and the danger the country has created, Pakistan and Iran are aligned to resolve the drug crisis.

The narcotics are considered a big problem for all countries, he said, adding that the entry of new drugs added to the menace of this crisis, so all states and international entities should cooperate with Iran and Pakistan in this regard.

He also urged the Iranian police to provide Pakistan with training and treatment information in order to assist Islamabad to utilize Iran's model in this respect.

Iranian Diplomat Meets President Assad

DAMASCUS (IRNA) - Ali-Asghar Khaji, a senior aide to Iranian foreign minister, has met and conferred with Syrian President Bashar al-Assad in Damascus.

In a separate meeting in the Syrian capital on Monday, Khaji also met with the country's deputy foreign minister Ayman Sosan.

Shortly after his meetings, the Iranian Foreign Ministry official told reporters that his visit to Syria was aimed at consultations with the Syrian officials over the latest developments in the region and the ongoing situation in the Arab country.

Khaji noted that an expert level meeting within the so-called Astana peace format for Syria will be held next week in which senior officials from Iran, Turkey, Russia and Syria will seek to find a settlement to disputed issues in Syria.

He added that during his visit to Damascus, he and the Syrian officials sought to coordinate the positions of both sides ahead of the Astana expert talks.

The Syrian deputy foreign minister Sosan, for his part, said after the meeting that deputy foreign ministers of Iran, Syria, Turkey and Russia are also expected to convene on the sidelines of the Astana meeting to discuss efforts aimed at helping Damascus and Ankara resume their diplomatic relations.

Sosan said that Iran and Syria share views on finding a way out of the Syrian crisis and on the establishment of peace and security across the country.

Iran Envoy Confers on Trade Ties With Azeri Customs Chief

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian ambassador to Baku held a meeting with the head of the Azerbaijani customs administration to discuss ways to facilitate trade relations between the two nations.

Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Baku held a meeting with Shahin Baghirov, the State Customs Committee of the Azerbaijan Republic.

In the meeting, the closer cooperation between the customs of the two countries, especially in the four shared border crossings, removing barriers to exchanges and speeding up the customs and transit procedures, optimal use of the electronic system for declaring information before entering the border terminals, and other topics of mutual interest were discussed and emphasized in the meeting.

Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan have four operating road and rail border crossings in the cities of Astara, Bila Savar, Jolfa and Poldasht.

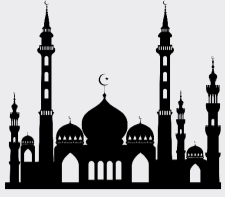
Iran, Tajikistan to Deepen Security Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - The First Deputy Minister of Internal Affairs of the Republic of Tajikistan Alamshozoda Abdurahmon Alamsho met Iran's Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi.

Also, on the same day, the Tajik official met with Majid Mir-Ahmadi, Iran's Deputy Interior Minister for Security and Law Enforcement Affairs various, and discussed with him mutual issues that concern both countries.

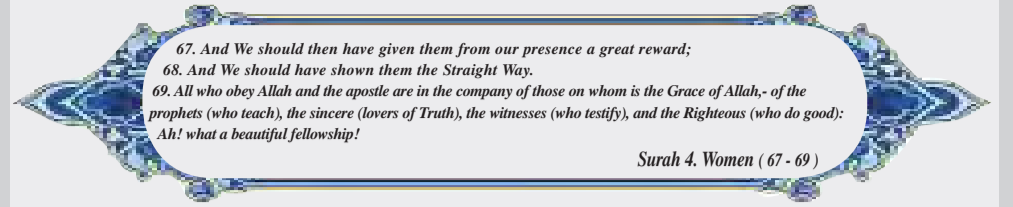
Economic exchanges between Iran and Tajikistan have increased over 5 times compared to the last two years, Mir-Ahmadi added.

During the joint meeting, Iran's Interior Minister Vahidi, and his Tajik deputy counterpart hold negotiations on the fight against terrorism, narcotics, terrorist activities, exchange of prisoners, and training of Tajik police forces by Iran.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:04
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:42
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:48



Iran's Blocked Assets in South Korea, Other States To Be Released Soon

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The economic spokesman for the Iranian administration said on Tuesday that Iran's foreign exchange resources (FOREX) blocked in South Korea and other countries will be released within the next few weeks.

Speaking to reporters on Tuesday, Seyed Ehsan Khandouzi, who is also the Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance (MEAF), in response to a question on the release of Iran's frozen assets in South Korea and other countries stated, "With the incessant efforts of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), good progress and achievements have been made in this area, the results of which will be witnessed in coming weeks."

Turning to the rising inflation rate in the country, Khandouzi noted that effective steps have been taken in order to reduce the growing inflation rate.

The economy minister pointed to some comments raised on the loan Iran has requested from the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and said that the loan would not create any commitment for the country but it means an increase in the country's capital at the IMF.

An independent technical team is incessantly working on receiving the loan from the international monetary body, Khandouzi concluded.

Answering a question regarding the formation of a joint investment committee between Iran and Oman, he stressed, "The initial step of forming this committee was taken at the beginning of the Sultan of Oman's visit to Iran. It has been several days that the Iranian delegation is in Muscat and talks are being held. The results of these



negotiations will be announced at the end of it."

He also said that the total industry production index in last year has grown by 9.6% in all seasons and 23 out of 24 large industries started their production.

Khandouzi said: Although we had a challenge in the food industry last year, with the government's action in the second half of the last year, this industry has grown by an average of 2.5%.

While referring to the statistics regarding Iran's economic growth, Khandouzi said: The World Bank has declared Iran's economic growth to be 4.7 percent, and the Central Bank has declared economic growth to be 3.5 percent with oil and 4.5 percent without oil.

The jump in non-oil exports was 53 billion dollars last year, he emphasized.

Referring to the inflation rate, he said: the producer inflation has reached 40.7 in April and 32.8 in May and estimates indicate a decrease in consumer inflation in the coming months too, but this does not mean that the government is satisfied with the economic situation and the stability of prices.

Pointing to the government's policy about decentralization of foreign currency-based exchanges, the Minister of Economy said: The share of the dollar and euro in commercial transactions has decreased from 30% to less than 10%.

Inflation Remains As High as 60%

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The Central Bank of Iran says the point-to-point inflation in the second month of the year (April 21-May 20) rose by 59.7 compared to the same period last year.

The Ecoiran website quoted a Central Bank source last month who claimed inflation in the first Iranian month of the year (March 21-April 20) rose by 68.7%. Just in that one-month prices jumped 5.2 percent, with the previous month witnessing another substantial hike of 6.6 percent.

However, Mohammadreza Farzin, the Head of the Central Bank promised on Monday that inflation will have a noticeable decrease next month.

One year ago, the rial was trading at around 300,000 to the dollar, while in early May it dropped to as low as 550,000 but currently it stands at 490,000.

Price inflation is highest in the food sector, which even last year was estimated to have been between 70-100 percent. Recent reports have spoken of lower-income families cutting down on nutritious food and being unable to afford many types of fruits and vegetables.

Tehran to Host Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran-Uzbekistan Business Forum is scheduled to be held in Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines, and Agriculture (ICCIMA) on Saturday, June 17.



According to reports, the event takes place simultaneous with a visit to Tehran by Uzbekistan's President Shavkat Mirziyoyev.

Representatives from 50 different Uzbek companies are said to participate in the forum which will also be attended by ministers and other high-ranking officials from both countries.

The Uzbek companies attending the forum are active in different areas including agriculture, sweets, chemicals, cosmetics and drugs, constructional materials, digital technologies, mining and geology, irrigation systems, plastic and textile industries, electronic equipment, leather, jewelry, and auto industries, energy, and transportation.

Non-Oil Exports To UAE Hit \$750m In 2 Months



TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$749.331 million to the United Arab Emirates (UAE) 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 the UAE was the fourth top export destination of Iranian non-oil goods in the mentioned two-month period.

The official further announced that exporting non-oil goods worth \$2.313 billion to Iran, the UAE was Iran's second source of import in the first two months of this year.

Iran and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to sign new memorandums of understanding (MOUs) on the avoidance of double taxation and facilitation of mutual investment.

The decision was made during a meeting between Iranian Minister of Finance and Economic Affairs Ehsan Khandouzi and UAE Minister of State for Financial Affairs Mohamed bin Hadi Al Hussaini on the sidelines of the annual meeting of the Islamic Development Bank (IsDB) Board of Executive Directors in Jeddah in mid-May.

During the meeting, the officials emphasized increasing cooperation in the fields of trade and foreign investment; in this regard, it was decided that appropriate measures should be implemented soon in order to sign agreements on facilitating foreign investment and avoidance of double taxation between the countries.

Pointing to the positive impact of the resumption of relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Saudi Arabia in the region, Al-Husseini said that the volume of trade between the two countries has increased about 40 times.

"This volume of trade in various fields indicates a natural and positive growth of relations and interactions between Iran and the UAE, and the role of the governments of the two sides is to encourage trade and facilitate it through agreements to avoid double taxation, and it is necessary to revise the existing agreements between the two countries," he said.

Iran Discovers Largest Porphyry Copper Deposit in Region

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has discovered a new copper deposit that is believed to be the largest such reserve in the Middle East and North Africa region.

A report by the IRIB News said that the porphyry copper deposit discovered in Sarcheshmeh region in the southeastern province of Kerman contains some 3 billion metric tons of copper ore with a purity of 42%.

The newly-discovered mineral deposit covers an area of 93,000 meters, said the report, adding that exploration activities have been conducted in some 106 locations in the area.

It said a second phase of exploration would be conducted in 60 locations in an area of 80,000 meters in the same region, adding that the operation could increase the amount of porphyry copper of the deposit to 4 billion mt.

The report said the entire exploration and discovery operation in the region has relied on Iranian experts and technicians. Porphyry deposits are large, low-grade metal ore bodies that are formed from hydrothermal fluids derived from an underlying magma reservoir.

Iran has large copper reserves in Sarcheshmeh as well as in Sungun in the northwestern Azerbaijan region near the border with Turkey.

Production of copper in Sungun, which is home to Iran's largest open-cast copper mine, began last week with the launch of a modern smelter in the region.

Iran has introduced massive plans to expand its mining and metals sector amid US sanctions on its direct oil exports.

Experts say copper reserves could play a major role in Iran's future economic development plans amid a rising demand for the metal in the international markets.

Syria, Iran to Boost Cooperation in Health, Higher Education

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran and Syria discussed means of enhancing bilateral cooperation in the health and higher education domains.

This came during talks held on Monday by the Minister of Higher Education and Scientific Research, Bassam Ibrahim, with Iranian Deputy Ministers of Science, Research, and Technology, Hashem Dadashpour, and Health, Treatment, and Medical Education, Abolfazl Bagherifard.

The two sides agreed to establish joint committees to follow up on the activation of the executive program of

the MoUs signed by Syria and Iran.

The talks also dealt with organizing joint visits by students and professors from universities to participate in training courses and scientific and cultural events in Iran, especially for students and professors of Persian language departments in Syrian universities.

Additionally, the two sides discussed means of developing cooperation in the medical field, conducting joint scientific research, and exchanging experiences and training in various advanced medical and pharmaceutical specialties such as biomechanics.

Iran Exports to Venezuela Up by 416% in Year to March

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran exported more than 49,000 tons of non-oil goods worth \$118.1 million to Venezuela during last Iranian year (ended March 20, 2023), an increase of 416% compared to the year before.

The figures were announced on Monday by Rouhollah Latifi, who serves as the spokesperson for the Trade Promotion Commission of Iran's House of Industry, Mine and Trade.

The figures were announced on the eve of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Venezuela.

Latifi said that the main non-oil goods exported to Venezuela from Iran over the past calendar year were automobiles, spare parts, fisheries products, sweets and chocolates, tomato paste, motor oil, chemicals, medicine and vaccines, fertilizers, detergents, clothing, handicrafts, ceramic tiles, various types of pipes and profiles, tractors, tankers, syringes, and electronic equipment.

Iran's main imports from Venezuela were aviation and electronic equipment.

Raisi departed Tehran on early Monday for a visit to three countries of Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba.

Prior to his departure, Raisi described relations with "independent Latin American states" as strategic.

"Export of technical and engineering manpower is among our important cooperation areas," Raisi said before the visit, adding, "We also cooperate with Latin American countries in the fields of politics, energy, science and technology, medicine, and economy."



IRISL Ready to Develop Maritime Transport in Latin American Routes



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Concurrent with the Iranian president's Latin America visit, the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) voiced readiness to dispatch a representative based in Caracas to facilitate the import and export of goods to and from Venezuela.

Earlier, ships were sent in the form of a regular line to Venezuela every three months, but now, the way has been paved for businessmen and economic activists to send ships to Venezuela in the shortest time possible to the destination of this country and other Latin American countries.

The national shipping fleet of the Islamic Republic of Iran announced its readiness to increase the origins and destinations of ships carrying export and import cargo between Iran and Latin America.

In line with the special emphasis of the Leader of the Islamic Revolution regarding the need to pay special attention to the promotion of trade with Latin America, the IRISL is seriously determined to continue the regular line for export of cargo to Venezuela and Latin American countries.

With the new regular lines, the time and cost of export and transport to Venezuela will reduce and it will be in favor of exporters.

U.S. Plans to Rejoin UNESCO From July

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States plans to rejoin UNESCO from July this year, ending a lengthy dispute that saw Washington end its membership in 2018, the UN cultural agency announced on Monday.

"It is a strong act of confidence in UNESCO and in multilateralism," said its director general Audrey Azoulay when she informed representatives of the body's member states in Paris of Washington's decision to rejoin.

The United States, a founding member of UNESCO, was a major contributor to UNESCO's budget until 2011, when the body admitted Palestine as a member state.



Syria Faces Torture Case at Top UN Court

THE HAGUE (Dispatches) - The Netherlands and Canada dragged Damascus to the International Court of Justice over allegations of torture, the UN's top tribunal said, marking the first such case in Syria's brutal civil war.

The case accuses Syria of breaching a UN convention against torture by mistreating and disappearing detainees, committing sexual violence including against children, and even by the use of chemical weapons.

It is the first time Syria has faced international justice over the conflict, which erupted after President Bashar al-Assad stopped the protests in 2011.



Ukraine Claims Recapture of 4th Village in Eastern Donetsk



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukrainian military officials said their troops have retaken another southeastern village from Russian forces, among the first — small — successes in stepped-up counteroffensive operations as the war drags on into its 16th month.

Western analysts and military officials have cautioned that an effort to rid Ukraine of entrenched, powerfully armed and skilled Russian troops could take years, and the success of any Ukrainian counteroffensive is far from certain.

Recent fighting on the western edge of a 1,000-kilometer (600-mile) front line has been complicated by a dam breach that sent floodwaters through a part of the Dnieper River separating the two sides.

Deputy Defense Minister Hanna Maliar wrote Monday on the Telegram app that Ukraine's flag was again flying over the village of Storozhiv, in the eastern Donetsk region. A day earlier, Ukrainian officials said their troops had taken three other small villages nearby — Blahodatne, Makarivka and Neskuchne — south of the town of Velyka Novosilka.

Vladimir Rogov, an official with the Moscow-appointed administration of the Zaporizhzhia region at the west end of the front line, said "heavy battles are raging" in the area on Monday, involving Russian artillery, mortars and air power.

The small villages — Blahodatne, for example, had a pre-invasion population of about 1,000 people — are part of an area where the Russian front lines jut out into territory held by Ukraine. While just a few kilometers (more than 1 mile) deep, the protrusion has become one of several epicenters of intense fighting in recent days along the front line that cuts across southern and eastern Ukraine.

Despite their small size, capturing the villages is an incursion into the first line of Russian defenses and could allow Ukrainian forces to try a deeper thrust into occupied areas. Russian forces control land totaling about one-fifth of Ukraine's total territory — though that's far less than they held before blistering Ukrainian counteroffensives last year that retook the northern city of Kharkiv and southern city of Kherson, among other places.

On Saturday, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said "counteroffensive, defensive actions are taking place" without specifying whether it was an all-out counteroffensive, which has been expected after a vast infusion of Western firepower and air defense systems into Ukraine. A day earlier, Russian President Vladimir Putin asserted that the counteroffensive had started and Ukrainian forces were taking "significant losses."

Ukrainian forces have focused on several patches in recent days, including the Zaporizhzhia region and near the devastated Donetsk city of Bakhmut. Russian authorities have said their troops have largely held their ground, and have not confirmed a Russian retreat from the three villages.

But Semyon Pegov, a prominent Russian military blogger who goes under the nickname WarGonzo, acknowledged Russian troops had withdrawn from Blahodatne, Neskuchne and Makarivka, and said Ukrainian forces were trying to push forward along the banks of the Mokri Yaly river on Monday.

Alexandret Kots, military correspondent for Russian daily Komsomolskaya Pravda, said Ukrainian forces were attempting to advance, despite heavy losses, toward the town of Staromlinovka, which sits on a strategic highway leading to the key city of Mariupol. Russian forces captured the Azov Sea port city over a year ago, after Ukrainian forces held out for several months in a grueling and desperate defense.

Former Italian PM Berlusconi Dies at 86

ROME (Dispatches) - Silvio Berlusconi cast a spell over Italy — and nearly led it to financial ruin.

Many Italians admired the media mogul for his wealth, his charm and his brash, boastful style, and they kept returning him to power, making him the country's longest-serving premier.

Berlusconi — who died Monday at the age of 86 — had a hold on Italian politics that he summed up in 2009: "The majority of Italians in their hearts would like to be like me."

That affection faded in 2011 when Europe's debt crisis turned Italy's economy into a shambles, and many blamed Berlusconi, forcing him from office. Handel's "Hallelujah Chorus" rose from the crowd outside the government palazzo where he handed in his resignation to end his third and final term as premier, a leadership tenure spaced out over 17 years.

His Forza Italia political party lost much of its support in recent years but was a coalition partner with current Premier Giorgia Meloni, a far-right leader who came to power in 2022. Berlusconi held no position in the government, and his death is unlikely to have any repercussions on the stability of the government; allies have already declared their intention to keep the party going.

Berlusconi was admitted to the San Raffaele Hospital in Milan on Friday, his second recent hospitalization for treatment of chronic leukemia. A state funeral will be held Wednesday in the city's Duomo cathedral, according to the Milan Archdiocese.

Once Italy's richest man, Berlusconi used his television networks and other media holdings to launch his long political career, inspiring both loyalty and loathing.

Supporters saw him as a capable and charismatic statesman who sought to elevate Italy on the world stage. To critics, he was a populist who threatened to undermine democracy by wielding political power as a tool to enrich himself and his businesses.

But there was no arguing he radically changed Italian politics when he entered the public arena in the 1990s, introducing U.S.-inspired campaigns.

For a while, Berlusconi seemed untouchable.



Sweden to Extradite Self-Proclaimed PKK Supporter to Turkey

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - The Swedish government decided to extradite a Turkish citizen resident in Sweden who had been convicted in 2013 of drug crime in Turkey.

The move came as NATO-member Turkey continued to hold up Sweden's bid to join the military alliance.

The man, who had served his prison sentence and was living in Sweden legally, claimed the real reason for his extradition was that he was active in a pro-Kurdish political party and supported a group Ankara considers to be terrorists.

Sweden's Supreme Court said there were "no obstacles" to his extradition, and that the man was under investigation in Turkey for posting online manipulated photos of President Recep Tayyip Erdogan which is punishable under Turkish laws.

Ankara has accused Stockholm of not doing enough to crack down on members of the outlawed Kurdistan Workers' Party, or PKK, and others whom it considers extremists.

The military alliance wants to admit Sweden before a summit next month in Vilnius, Lithuania. All existing NATO members must ratify a candidate country's accession protocol before it can join the trans-Atlantic alliance.

The Swedish Justice Ministry which didn't identify the man, confirmed to The Associated Press that the government in Stockholm had endorsed last month's ruling by Sweden's highest court to extradite him. It was not clear if the man is among a group of people Turkey wants extradited.

Last month, Sweden tightened its anti-terrorism laws. Swedish lawmakers included a prison term of up to eight years for individuals convicted of participating in an extremist organization in a way that is intended to promote, strengthen or support the group. The revisions took effect June 1.

The man told the Swedish court that in 2019 and 2020, "he expressed approval" on Facebook of posts critical of the Ankara regime. During the same time period, he uploaded and posted manipulated images of Erdogan.

Thailand's PM Frontrunner Pita Faces Election Commission Probe

BANGKOK (Dispatches)

Thailand's prime ministerial frontrunner Pita Limjaroenrat will be investigated over whether he was qualified to run in last month's election, a senior official has said, in another setback as he battles to win backing for his premiership.

Pita, the 42-year-old leader of the progressive Move Forward Party whose election victory stunned Thailand's military-backed establishment, has faced multiple complaints from rivals, three of which the poll body has dismissed for late submission, while four others against the party have been thrown out.

But Pita is by no means in the clear, with Thailand's Election Commission looking into whether he was knowingly unfit to register as a parliamentary candidate because of his ownership of shares in a media firm, which is prohibited under election rules.

Pita says he inherited the shares in the ITV television station, which has not broadcast since 2007, from his father. He says the shares in the firm, ITV, have since been transferred.

The candidate denies any wrongdoing and the party says it is not worried about the allegations.

He faces disqualification, up to 10 years in jail and 20 years banned from politics if found in violation.

"There is sufficient information and evidence to warrant further investigation into whether Mr Pita is qualified to run in the election," Election Commission Chairman Ittiporn Boonpramong told the AFP news agency.



"The Election Commission has set up an investigatory committee to investigate further."

The opposition Move Forward and Pheu Thai parties thumped conservative opponents allied with the military in a resounding rejection of nearly nine years of government led or backed by the army since its 2014 coup.

They have formed an alliance with six smaller parties, but Pita's bid to be prime minister and form the government is expected to face

resistance in a conservative-leaning Senate that was appointed under the military. A bicameral vote on a prime minister is expected by August, with weeks of uncertainty ahead.

Move Forward's anti-establishment agenda has put the party at odds with some influential, conservative business interests and institutions.

The party won huge support among the youth and in the capital Bangkok with a platform of institutional change, including reducing the army's political role, undoing monopolies and reviewing a controversial law against insulting the monarchy.

Asked about challenges against Move Forward, its Secretary-General Chaitawat Tulathon on Monday said the voice of the people will be protected.

"The Election Commission may take action against Pita in the future," he told a press conference.

"The party is confident that the allegations do not have sufficient evidence."

Erdogan's Unwavering on Two-State Policy To Resolve Cyprus' Ethnic Division

NICOSIA (Dispatches) - Turkey's president said that any deal resolving Cyprus' nearly half-century ethnic division must be based on recognition of a breakaway Turkish Cypriot state in the island nation's northern third.

President Recep Tayyip Erdogan's remarks in the north during his first overseas visit after his reelection last month aren't new, but suggest that Ankara's policy line on Cyprus remains unwavering, despite international condemnation of the two-state deal proposal that runs contrary to U.N. resolutions calling for a single, federated Cyprus.

"No one can bear to waste another 50 years of time," Erdogan said during a joint news conference with Turkish Cypriot leader Ersin Tatar. "If there is to be a return to the negotiating table, the only way to do this is to recognize the Turkish Republic of Northern Cyprus."

It also dashes hopes harbored by Cyprus' internationally-recognized government of a speedy return to negotiations, although a spokesman for President Nikos Anastasiades said Monday that Erdogan will be judged by his deeds rather than his words.

Cyprus was split in 1974 when Turkey invaded in the wake of a coup by supporters of union with Greece. Turkish Cypriots declared independence nearly a decade later, but that's only recognized by Turkey, which maintains more than 35,000 troops and an array of armaments in the north.

U.N.-led peace talks haven't resolved the dispute. The most recent round in July 2017 broke down over a Turkish insistence on maintaining military intervention rights and a permanent troop presence under any new arrangement. Another stumbling block was a Greek Cypriot rejection of a Turkish Cypriot demand for the right to veto all government decisions on a federal level. Turkish Cypriots number approximately about a quarter of Greek Cypriots.

Turkey and the Turkish Cypriots say it would be pointless to carry on negotiations based on a federated Cyprus and have instead pushed a two-state deal as a new starting point. Greek Cypriots say they can't agree to a deal that would formalize the country's division.

"The just demands of the Turkish Cypriots are clear and unequivocal. Turkish Cypriots have never been a minority and never will be," Erdogan said.

The Turkish president said Ankara would also push ahead with plans to supply Turkish Cypriots with electricity through an undersea cable. The north has for years experienced chronic power supply issues.



Manufacturing Is Sputtering in The World's Largest Economies



NEW YORK (CNN) - Manufacturers around the world are contending with weakening demand as the economic outlook for the industry darkens.

Factories in the United States and across the eurozone reported a decline in new orders for manufactured goods in May as they worked through their backlog of orders, according to recent business surveys released by data firm S&P Global. It's unclear for how long those backlogs, which swelled in the early days of the pandemic, will sustain the industry globally.

S&P Global data showed that the US manufacturing sector fell into contraction territory in May. A similar survey released by the Institute for Supply Management showed the industry contracted for the seventh consecutive month in May, at a faster pace than in the prior month.

US government data also show what could be the beginning of a consistent slowdown. The Commerce Department reported on Monday that factory orders excluding transportation, a volatile category, fell for the third consecutive month in April. Excluding defense, factory orders were down in four of the past six months through April.

Among manufacturers in the eurozone, production, new orders and backlogs all fell in May as the sector contracted at a faster pace that month, according to S&P Global figures. The 20-nation currency area's industrial production fell sharply in March, mostly due to a plunge in Ireland. The indicator measures the output of manufacturers, miners, and utility companies.

The situation isn't a whole lot better in China.

Business conditions in China's manufacturing industry, the largest in the world, improved in May, according to the Caixin manufacturing Purchasing Managers' Index. That was a temporary sigh of relief for investors fearing that growth is stalling in the world's second-largest economy, but recent data showed that exports from China fell 7.5% in May from a year earlier, the biggest decline since January, as imports contracted further that month.

China's shaky trade figures reflect weak demand for Chinese goods, and that's on top of other economic troubles the country faces such as rising unemployment and a deep slump in its property sector.

Globally, manufacturers' optimism fell to its lowest level since December, according to the JPMorgan Global Manufacturing PMI.

"Although activity in the manufacturing sector looks to have improved somewhat in May, that was mainly due to stronger growth in some large emerging markets," wrote Ariane Curtis, global economist at Capital Economics, in an analyst note. "The outlook for the industry remains bleak, with new export orders in particular falling sharply."

Consumers around the globe were forced to cut back their spending on services in 2020 because of the pandemic, resulting in a boom in goods purchases. That also rapidly grew manufacturers' backlogs of orders.

Consumers have since shifted their spending back toward services since countries around the globe rescinded pandemic-era restrictions. Both in the United States and Europe, hospitality businesses are gearing up for a record-breaking summer of travel. That ongoing shift toward services spending, coupled with tighter financial conditions because of central banks raising interest rates, spells trouble for goods producers, economists say.

People hold burning incense sticks as they pray for good results ahead of the National College Entrance Examination (NCEE), known as "gaokao", at a temple in Shenyang, in China's northeastern Liaoning province on June 5, 2023.

Apple Is Determined to Make Headsets Cool



NEW YORK (CNN) - When Apple unveiled its ambitious and very pricey new mixed reality headset earlier this week, executives ticked through a long list of impressive specs, teased big name partnerships and showed off a perfectly produced promo video.

But there was one thing Apple's execs did not do during the keynote presentation: wear the device. Even reporters who got early access to try on the device were asked by the company not to take pictures of the experience.

The omission has not gone unnoticed. Some industry watchers have suggested that Apple CEO Tim Cook and others may have made a conscious choice to avoid seeing silly pictures of themselves with headsets turned into memes online. But behind this speculation is a more serious potential problem: even Apple may struggle to make VR headsets look cool.

Over the past decade, headsets have developed a reputation for being bulky and strange looking. Palmer Luckey, the founder of Oculus (later acquired by Facebook), was widely mocked and memed in 2015 after being shown on a Time Magazine cover wearing a black headset with his legs bent, arms raised and head tilted up. He looked as though he would fly away at any moment.

The new Apple Vision Pro headset is displayed during the Apple Worldwide Developers Conference on June 05, 2023 in Cupertino, California. Apple CEO Tim Cook kicked off the annual WWDC23 developer conference with the announcement of the new Apple Vision Pro mixed reality headset.

It's not just headsets. Silicon Valley has struggled with the optics of other gadgets people wear on their face, too. An image of tech evangelist Robert Scoble wearing Google Glass in the shower had such a profound impact on the discourse around the product that then-Google CEO Larry Page once joked to him: "Robert, I really didn't appreciate the shower photo."

For Apple, the stakes are high to avoid similarly embarrassing visuals. The new headset, which blends both virtual reality and augmented reality, is Apple's most ambitious – and riskiest – new hardware product in years. And there are already a long list of challenges the company must overcome, including a high price tag (\$3,500) and an unproven market littered with rivals who have so far failed to achieve mainstream success.

In keeping with its usual playbook, Apple is leaning on its design, hardware and marketing chops to convince people to spend thousands on the device. As many viewers were quick to point out during Monday's event, the headset looks like a pair of designer ski goggles. In one early marketing image, a woman is shown wearing the headset while dressed in very chic clothing and lounging in an upscale living room.

But not everyone is convinced.

"They're certainly not sleek. They are trying to be sleek, but it's a big pair of goggles on your face," Lisa Peyton, an extended reality and experiential marketing professor at the University of Oregon, told CNN. "I would not wear that thing around outside — nobody will. Nobody will be wearing it around outside, and they know that."

The tech giant is known for its powerful marketing, including iconic campaigns that popularized its original Macs, iPods and the iPhone. Apple's silhouette ads in the early 2000s somehow managed to make not just iPods look cool, but also wired headphones. But Apple may still be fighting an uphill battle with its headset.

"It's not that Apple takes the uncool and makes it cool. Apple typically takes the average and makes it cool, takes the mundane and make it cool," Marcus Collins, marketing professor at the Ross School of Business at the University of Michigan and a former Apple employee, told CNN.

Newer Heart Transplant Method Could Allow More Patients a Chance at Lifesaving Surgery



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Most transplanted hearts are from donors who are brain dead, but new research shows a different approach can be just as successful and boost the number of available organs.

It's called donation after circulatory death, a method long used to recover kidneys and other organs but not more fragile hearts. Duke Health researchers said Wednesday that using those long-shunned hearts could allow possibly thousands more patients a chance at a lifesaving transplant — expanding the number of donor hearts by 30%.

"Honestly, if we could snap our fingers and just get people to use this, I think it probably would go up even more than that," said transplant surgeon Dr. Jacob Schroder of Duke University School of Medicine, who led the research. "This really should be standard of care."

The usual method of organ donation occurs when doctors, through careful testing, determine someone has no brain function after a catastrophic injury — meaning they're brain-dead. The body is left on a ventilator that keeps the heart beating and organs oxygenated until they're recovered and put on ice.

In contrast, donation after circulatory death occurs when someone has a nonsurvivable brain injury but, because all brain function hasn't yet ceased, the family decides to withdraw life support and the heart stops. That means organs go without oxygen for a while before they can be recovered — and surgeons, worried the heart would be damaged, left it behind.

What's changed: Now doctors can remove those hearts and put them in a machine that "reanimates" them, pumping through blood and nutrients as they're transported — and demonstrating if they work OK before the planned transplant.

Worm Genetics Reveals Key Sleep-Regulation Pathways

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Although the brain is thought to regulate sleep-how much, when, and how much sleep occurs-sleep deprivation affects the body, and body signals can affect sleep. The mechanisms that the body uses to regulate sleep, on the other hand, are largely unknown.

According to a recent study published in 'Cell Reports,' the body regulates sleep in worms through cellular pathways that ensure optimal protein function from synthesis to breakdown.

It can be difficult to know where to begin when studying the body's sleep regulation. The researchers from the University of Tsukuba chose an unbiased investigative technique known as forward genetic screening. To accomplish this, they first used a chemical to cause random mutations in 500 worms and then used a video-based monitoring system to identify the worms that slept much more or less than average. When they identified such worms, they looked at what mutations they had and how the mutations affected sleep.

"Using this method, we were able to identify that mutations in the sel-1 and sel-11 genes were associated with longer sleep duration," said senior author of the study Professor Yu Hayashi, adding, "Both genes code for proteins that are part of the endoplasmic-reticulum-associated protein degradation pathway, which helps cells to get rid of proteins that are misfolded."

The researchers also found that mutations in mars-1, which is important for protein synthesis, were associated with prolonged sleep in the worms. Moreover, although sel-1, sel-11, and mars-1 were expressed in a wide range of tissues when the researchers made the worms express normal versions of some of these genes in skin cells led to normal sleep patterns. These results indicated that protein-regulating pathways in the body are indeed important for controlling sleep.

"We were also able to identify some downstream pathways that are involved in sleep regulation by modifying the expression of proteins in the worms," said Professor Hayashi, adding, "Furthermore, when we tested our results from worms in mice, we found that these pathways also seem to regulate sleep in mammals." Sleep disturbances are widely considered to influence inflammation and immunity, and may contribute to diseases such as inflammatory bowel disease and arthritis. A better understanding of how sleep is regulated is thus key to disease prevention. The results of this study

add to a growing body of literature on sleep regulation and are hoped to improve sleep disturbance therapies in the near future that may prevent inflammatory diseases such as arthritis.



Syrians Turn Plastic Waste Into Rugs to Make a Living



DAMASCUS (Dispatches) - At a rubbish dump in northwest Syria, Mohammed Behlal rummages for plastic to be sold to recyclers and transformed into floor rugs and other items in the impoverished opposition enclave.

In opposition-held Syria, recycling is rarely an environmental impulse but rather a grim lifeline for needy residents looking for work or items they otherwise could not afford.

Braving the stench, insects and risk of disease, 39-year-old Behlal hacks through the rubbish pile with a scythe and bare hands.

He and two of his six children earn a living sifting through the refuse in Idlib province's village of Hezreh, earning \$7 to \$10 weekly.

"It's tiring ... but what can we do? We have to put up with this hard labor," said Behlal, who was displaced from neighboring Aleppo province during Syria's civil war.

"Thank God, at least we have work with the trash," he added.

Behlal was shot in the leg during the fighting and has had trouble finding employment.

Hunched over to collect pieces of plastic or metal, he throws everything into a bag to sell to a nearby scrap facility.

Syria's conflict has killed more than 500,000 people, and around half of the country's prewar population has been forced from their homes since fighting broke out in 2011.

More than 4 million people, most of them dependent on aid, live in areas controlled by opposition groups in Syria's north and northwest.

In a large scrapyard next to agricultural fields, workers sort plastic junk loosely into piles according to color.

Turkey's Exports to Persian Gulf States Up 29% in May

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey experienced a significant surge in its exports to Gulf countries in May, witnessing a growth rate of 29% compared to the same period in the previous year and amounting to \$1.69 billion (TL 39.55 billion). Turkey's overall exports in May showed an increase of 14.4% compared to the corresponding period in 2022, soaring to a total of \$21.7 billion, data from the Turkish Exporters Assembly (TIM) showed. Last month, exports amounted to \$817.9 million to Iraq, \$360 million to the United Arab Emirates (UAE), \$166.5 million to Saudi Arabia, \$206.9 million to Iran, \$55.3 million to Qatar, \$46 million to Kuwait, \$24.6 million to Oman and \$13.6 million to Bahrain. Saudi Arabia was the country with the highest proportional increase in exports.



EU Considers Aid to Tunisia to Boost Economy

TUNIS (Dispatches) - The European Union said it is considering more than one billion euros in aid to boost crisis-hit Tunisia's economy and reduce the flow of irregular migrants across the Mediterranean Sea.

The North African country, highly indebted and in talks for an IMF bailout loan, is a gateway for migrants and asylum-seekers attempting the dangerous voyages to Europe.

The EU is ready to offer Tunisia 900 million euros in long-term aid plus 150 million euros in immediate support in a bid to "strengthen our relationship", European Commission head Ursula von der Leyen said on a joint visit with the Italian and Dutch prime ministers.

The aid would be contingent on approval of the nearly \$2 billion loan currently under negotiation with the International Monetary Fund, according to a document posted on the European Commission's website.

But Tunisian President Kais Saied again on Tuesday rejected what he termed the "diktats" of the Washington-based lender.

Aside from trade and investment, the EU package would help Tunisia with border management and to combat human trafficking, with support worth 100 million euros this year, von der Leyen said.

"We both have a vast interest in breaking the cynical business model of smugglers and traffickers," she said. "It is horrible to see how they deliberately risk human lives for profit."

She said other joint projects with the bloc would help Tunisia export clean renewable energy to Europe, and deliver high-speed broadband, all with the aim of creating jobs and to "boost growth here in Tunisia".

Von der Leyen, after the four-way talks with Saied, said she hoped an EU-Tunisia agreement could be signed before the next European summit later this month.

She stressed that the EU is Tunisia's top trade and investment partner and had "supported Tunisia's path to democracy" since it became the birthplace of the Arab Spring popular revolts in 2011, describing it as "a long and difficult road".

Von der Leyen visited Tunisia with Italy's Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni and her Dutch counterpart Mark Rutte for talks with Saied, who has assumed near total governing powers over the country since 2021.

Rights groups have accused him of an "authoritarian drift" for restricting civil liberties and jailing opposition activists in what Amnesty International has labelled "a witch hunt".

Andrea Cellino, of the Middle East Institute Switzerland, said the EU should be doing more to hold Saied's administration accountable.

"And what about Tunisia reforms and restoring its democratic path?" he tweeted. "This sounds a lot like 'money for nothing'." EU governments, under pressure to reduce migrant arrivals, last week agreed on steps to fast-track migrant returns to their countries of origin or transit countries deemed "safe", including Tunisia.

Italy's far-right premier, Meloni, on her second Tunisia visit within a week, said she was "satisfied" with the EU offer of "a real partnership to face the migratory crisis and the question of development" in Tunisia.

Pentagon Papers Show Saudi Arabia, U.S. Traded Threats Over Oil

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Newly leaked Pentagon papers showed that Saudi Arabia's Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman threatened the United States with economic calamity over oil production decisions, according to the Washington Post.

Relations between U.S. President Biden and Saudi Arabia's bin Salman have been sour since before President Biden took office, with the latter threatening to make bin Salman a pariah. But newly leaked Pentagon documents suggested that Saudi Arabia's decision to cut production last October started a whole level of chilly for the duo's relationship.

Following Saudi Arabia's decision to cut oil production along with fellow OPEC+ members, President Biden—battling inflation at home and fearing production cuts would worsen the situation—had promised OPEC+ that there would be "consequences".

"I am in the process, when the House and Senate gets back, they're going to have to — there's going to be some consequences for what they've done with Russia," President Biden told CNN's Jake Tapper last October.

In response to President Biden's threat, the documents show that HRH threatened the United States with "major economic consequences."

Bin Salman said he would "not deal with the US administration anymore," according to the document, adding that there would be "major economic consequences for Washington."

It is unclear whether these comments were made directly to a US official or whether it was merely an intercepted conversation. Saudi Arabia again moved to cut production as recently as last week—this time volunteering to cut an additional 1 million



barrels per day from its already reduced production targets. The move would normally raise the hackles of the U.S. Administration, which already seems to have a bone to pick with Mohammad bin Salman over what the U.S. considers to be his role in the killing of Saudi dissident Jamal Khashoggi. But oil prices failed to elevate and stay that way following the cut, diminishing the likelihood of any meaningful U.S. response.

France Escapes a Further Downgrade But Economic Forecast Is Bleak

LONDON (Dispatches) - The Financial Times in March claimed that France was "becoming the new Britain," riding the wave of international business relocations and free market reforms that were underway. As foreign direct investment into Paris climbed above those going into other European capitals, it seemed that France was experiencing a post-pandemic boom, with falling energy imports and firm business investments offsetting a fall in consumer spending. However, after months of political upheaval and social disturbance, the current reality is markedly less upbeat.

Shortly after being downgraded by Fitch, France this month narrowly missed another negative review by S&P. As the economy begins to buckle under its debt burden, France's prospects of unseating London once again seem distant. In fact, King Charles' first state visit to France since becoming monarch — which was billed as a "celebration of Anglo-French relations" — was discreetly postponed as burning cars and tear gas adorned Parisian streets in lieu of the blue and red bunting. Successive strikes and violent demonstrations met the president's invocation of special executive powers to bypass parliament to raise France's legal retirement age. Though this will now come into law, the experience has left ratings agencies jittery.

Despite Finance Minister Bruno Le Maire and Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne going to great lengths to present France's public finances to S&P in the best possible light and the country avoiding a further downgrade, the recent meeting does not bode well for France. The eurozone's largest economy is now forecast to remain stagnant, which in the current global economic circumstances is explicable, but the nation's financial situation is staggeringly precarious.

Having left the group of 10 countries with the best economic ratings, France's gradual regression since losing its prestigious AAA rating a decade ago has now become more severe. Months of



disturbances and protests have not helped. However, more concerning to a government that has sought to jump-start the economy is that the hard-won pension, unemployment insurance and production tax reforms seem not to have registered with international agencies, which remain principally concerned with the country's wider deficit and debt. These, according to Fitch, will be difficult to reduce amid France's "political impasse," which can often lead to "sometimes violent" social disturbances.

In May, the French economy grew at its slowest pace in recent months, as the services sector lost momentum. The very sector that President Emmanuel Macron had hoped to cultivate in order to make France more competitive is sluggish and, in some cases, shrinking. Poor ratings will exacerbate this issue, with the French private sector seeing valuations fall as a result. Despite private sector employment having risen at its strongest rate in almost a year, recent data has shown a marked softening in business confidence as sagging demand and concerns over the domestic situation hit hard.

World Bank Needs New Playbook to Boost Private Investment in Emerging Markets

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The World Bank must use "informed risk-taking" to encourage private investors to get more engaged in helping developing countries deal with climate change and leapfrog fossil-fuel energy sources, its new president, Ajay Banga, said.

Banga told CNN's "Fareed Zakaria GPS" program that efforts now under way to stretch the World Bank's lending capacity and revamp its business model could potentially free up "tens of billions" of dollars, not the estimated trillions of dollars needed to ensure a just energy transition.

Private sector capital was critical since funds from governments, philanthropies, the World Bank and other multilateral development banks (MDBs) would never suffice to help poor countries adapt to and mitigate climate change, said Banga, a former Mastercard CEO who took office on June 2.

"The only way forward is to find a way to get the private sector to believe that this is part of their future," said Banga, who will visit Peru and Jamaica this week as part of a tour to visit countries in every region where the bank operates.

"What I think we have to do is ... to find ways in the MDB system to think of a different playbook - to take on the risks that they cannot take on," he said, noting that private companies were bound to deliver returns for shareholders and could not take on the risks involved, but the bank could help.

"That's kind of a thing that we can do with informed risk-taking," Banga said, noting that renewable energy was now cheaper in many cases than fossil fuels due to improvements in storage and duration.

Revival of Silk Route to Give New Impetus to Region's Growth

RIYADH (Dispatches) - In a bid to further boost trade ties with China, Saudi Arabia announced the revival of the Silk Route on the sidelines of a key business event that began in Riyadh on Sunday.

Speaking at the conference, Saudi Investment Minister Khalid Al-Falih said the Kingdom can serve as China's gateway to the Arab world as the world's second-largest economy seeks to elevate trade ties with the region.

The Kingdom represents 25 percent of the \$432 billion trade between China and Arab countries in 2022.

Commenting on the revival of the Silk Route, the minister said the initiative aligns with Saudi Arabia's future vision that seeks to diversify its economy and use modern technology to elevate the skills of its youth.

The volume of trade between Saudi Arabia and China hit \$106 billion in 2022, registering a 30 percent increase over 2021.

Al-Falih said the relationship between the Kingdom and China has grown "exponentially" in the past few decades. "Now, we are committed to working as a bridge that will link the Arab world to China," he said during the Arab-China Business Conference.

The minister added: "China plays a leadership role in advanced technology and innovation. We, in the Arab world, have the determination, human and monetary capital to support this field."

Speaking at the event, Saudi Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan said Chinese companies have huge investment opportunities in Arab nations, while countries in the region can make use of China's technical expertise to build a better future.

"Chinese technologies and competencies will enable us to build our futures and our economies for the next generations," he added.

Pointing out that the total trade between Arab countries and China grew 31 percent last year in comparison to 2021, Prince Faisal said the second-largest Asian nation is the biggest trade partner for Arab countries.

The foreign minister added that events like the Arab-China Business Conference will further elevate the trade relationship between both regions.

"Our gathering today is an opportunity for working to enhance the Arab-Chinese historical relationship, and to build a mutual joint future for a new era that will bring good to all of our people, keeping the peace and development in the world," Prince Faisal said on the first day of the event.

OPEC+ Production Plunged By 670,000 Bpd in May



LONDON (Dispatches) - OPEC+ slashed its crude oil production by 670,000 barrels per day (bpd) in May, as the voluntary cuts with which the group shocked the markets in April began, the latest Platts survey by S&P Global Commodity Insights showed.

In early April, a day before a regularly scheduled OPEC+ panel meeting, the biggest OPEC producers in the Middle East and several other members of the OPEC+ pact announced a total of 1.16 million bpd of fresh production cuts between May and December 2023.

The reduction is on top of Russia's current 500,000 bpd cut, which was extended until the end of the year. In those OPEC+ cuts, Saudi Arabia said it would reduce its crude oil production by 500,000 bpd and said that the move was "a precautionary measure aimed at supporting the stability of the oil market."

At the latest OPEC+ meeting on June 4, the voluntary cuts were extended through 2024, while Saudi Arabia announced a unilateral production cut of 1 million bpd for July, which could be extended beyond next month.

So, at the start of the fresh cuts in May, OPEC's crude oil production fell by 440,000 bpd to 28.16 million bpd, while non-OPEC producers saw output drop by 230,000 bpd to 13.17 million bpd, according to the Platts survey.

Saudi Arabia strictly complied with its pledge to cut 500,000 bpd beginning in May, and its production averaged 10 million bpd last month, per the survey.

The Reuters survey from last week also found that Saudi Arabia and the other major Persian Gulf producers that had pledged cuts from May stuck to their commitments. Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the UAE largely implemented their announced cuts last month, the Reuters survey of OPEC's production found.

Iraq, another key OPEC producer that has promised cuts, was well below quota in May — as it was in April — because of the ongoing dispute over Kurdistan's crude oil exports from the Turkish port of Ceyhan, which has shut-in production in the semi-autonomous region, both the Platts and Reuters surveys found.

Nearly 5,000 Palestinians In Israeli Jails

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Palestinian Prisoners Club has announced that around 5,000 Palestinians are imprisoned in jails and detention centers of the Zionist regime. Turkey's Anadolu Agency cited figures from a report by the Palestinian Prisoners Club on Tuesday which showed that nearly 5,000 Palestinians are being kept in 23 prisons and detention centers of the regime. Among those Palestinian prisoners, there are 31 women, 160 children and 17

journalists who are being kept in Damon prison located in the north of the occupied Palestinian territories, the club said. Over 700 Palestinian prisoners suffer from different diseases, 24 of whom have serious diseases such as cancer, the club noted. The Palestinian Prisoners Club added that 1,083 Palestinian prisoners, including 3 women and 19 children, are under administrative detention, which means a person is indefinitely held under custody without trial.



Asian Economic Heft Keeps Russia's Economy Afloat

LONDON (Dispatches) - Thirty-seven countries have imposed economic sanctions on Russia since its invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. The breadth of this campaign has few precedents in recent history. The sanctions covering finance, energy, technology, travel, shipping, avionics and commodities are aimed at one of the 10 largest world economies.

Yet the economic pressure on Moscow is by no means as hermetic as previous anti-war sanctions campaigns, such as the UN sanctions against Iraq after Saddam Hussein's 1990 invasion of Kuwait.

One year after their imposition, several things are clear. Sanctions have damaged the Russian economy and its future growth prospects. But they have neither caused its collapse nor helped to end the war in Ukraine.

There's been a lot of focus on how US dollar dominance facilitates Western financial sanctions. But the mixed results of the economic campaign against Russia demonstrate that a powerful countervailing trend has gone largely unnoticed: the rise of Asian commercial power as a facilitator of trade diversion that blunts Western sanctions.

Modern economic sanctions were created in the early twentieth century at a time of undisputed European mastery of the world economy, a mantle subsequently passed to the United States. This Western economic dominance lay behind the expansion of sanctions during the Cold War period. But the global economic centre of gravity has since moved towards the East.

In 2021 Asian economies constituted 39 per cent of global nominal GDP, making them the single largest continental bloc. Asian exports constituted 36 per cent of global exports, while the five largest Asian economies together — China and Hong Kong, Japan, South Korea, Singapore and India — accounted for a quarter of all global imports. Asia today constitutes three-quarters, and China and India fully half, of global year-on-year GDP growth.

The 2022 sanctions campaign against Russia has exposed the strategic consequences of this shift. Sanctions against Moscow were intended, as one US National Security Council official put it, as a form of economic 'shock and awe'. Yet after a brief financial crisis, Russia rerouted much of its trade towards Asian economies and weathered the initial sanctions onslaught.

Asian economies have acted as alternative destinations for Russian exports as well as new sources of imports. Trade links with China, India, Turkey, Persian Gulf states and Central Asian countries have buoyed the Russian economy. Bilateral trade between Russia and China grew 29 per cent in 2022 and 39 per cent in the first quarter of 2023. It may reach US\$237 billion by the end of 2023 — a sum larger than China's total bilateral trade with economies such as Australia, Germany or Vietnam. In 2022 Russian trade with the United Arab Emirates rose by 68 per cent while trade with Turkey increased by 87 per cent. Russo-Indian trade surged by 205 per cent to US\$40 billion.

Export diversion has been a lifesaver for Russian energy sales, which constitute a large share of its trade. In January 2022 European countries imported 1.3 million Russian barrels per day while Asian customers purchased 1.2 million. By January 2023 Russian sales to Europe had dropped below 100,000 barrels per day but exports to Asia had surged to 2.8 million.

Asian demand has more than substituted for the loss of oil exports to Europe. India has become the single largest purchaser of Russian seaborne crude, buying more than 1.4 million barrels per day since the beginning of 2023. Chinese importers are not far behind, buying between 800,000-1.2 million barrels per day in 2022. In one year, India, China, Turkey and the Persian Gulf states have entirely replaced European demand for Russian oil exports.

Asian exporters have also filled part of the gap left by Western suppliers of advanced manufacturing and high-tech equipment. Chinese firms now account for



40 per cent of new car sales and 70 per cent of smartphone sales in Russia. The withdrawal of Western foreign direct investment has severely impacted the domestic car industry. Russia has shifted to importing used European and Japanese cars through third countries, with new cars mainly coming from China.

China and Hong Kong have become key suppliers of microchips, which Russia began to stockpile before the war. In 2022, Russian companies shifted to importing more advanced chips, with the value of semiconductor and electronic circuit imports rising by 36 per cent between January and September compared to 2021. It remains to be seen how effective these import channels will be in the long run. But in the short run Western export controls on technology have not created a chip famine in Russia.

Russia's trading partners in the Eurasian Economic Union have also played a role in bypassing technology export restrictions. Central Asian economies are active as conduits of parallel imports and transit trade. The European Bank for Reconstruction and Development concluded that while Russian trade with the United States, United Kingdom and European Union has dropped significantly, 'EU [and] UK exports to Armenia, Kazakhstan and Kyrgyzstan... increased markedly' in a pattern 'consistent with [the] rerouting of trade to Russia'.

This rerouting effect through Central Asia is noticeable in imports of machines and chemical products. By October 2022 year-on-year increase in exports to Russia from China, Belarus, Turkey, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan and Armenia nearly equalled the fall in European, US and UK exports to Russia.

By acting as ersatz suppliers to the Russian economy, as substantial new customers for its commodity sales, and as a price-setters for Russian oil exports on global markets, Asian economies have considerably reduced the impact of Western sanctions. While the sanctions have lowered Russia's growth potential, its economy has been sustained by a major trade realignment. The participation of Japan, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore in financial and technology sanctions has had little effect, partly because commercial ties between these East Asian states and Russia continue in manufacturing and energy trade. Asia's sanctions-blunting commercial power therefore rests primarily with China and India and several Middle Eastern and Central Asian economies. These socioeconomic realities seem bound to complicate the future Western use of sanctions.

Russia's Gasoline Exports Have Surged By 37% This Year

LONDON (Dispatches) - Despite the Western sanctions, Russian oil companies boosted their gasoline exports by 37% between January and May compared to the same period in 2022, Russian daily Kommersant reported on Friday, citing sources familiar with the data.

The Russian Energy Ministry last month asked oil companies to reduce their exports and raise supply on the domestic market, according to Kommersant's sources.

After a sharp rise in wholesale gasoline prices in May and recommendations from the Energy Ministry to oil firms to curb exports, Russia's daily gasoline exports in the first six days of June were four times lower than the levels at the end of May, Kommersant reports.

Russia has stopped reporting official data about oil production and exports, much to the frustration of its OPEC+ partners, as the leader of the pack, Saudi Arabia, is reportedly looking to boost oil prices to at least \$80 per barrel—the estimated breakeven price for its budget for 2023.

Russia has redirected both crude oil and petroleum product exports after the EU embargoes on imports of seaborne Russian oil. The EU banned crude imports in early December 2022 and embargoed fuel imports from Russia as of February 5, 2023.

Russian gasoline exports surged in the first quarter of this year compared to the same period in 2022, as Moscow placed growing volumes of fuels with African customers after the EU embargo on seaborne imports of Russia's fuels. Russian gasoline exports were estimated at 1.9 million tons in the first quarter of 2023, up compared to 1.3 million tons exported in the same period of 2022, per Refinitiv data cited by Reuters.

The trade shift in Russian oil flows also benefits Moscow's Middle Eastern allies in the OPEC+ pact as the biggest Arab Gulf oil producers, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE), scoop up Russia's fuels at discounted prices.

Is Geothermal Energy The Key to Decarbonization?

LONDON (OilPrice) - As governments and private firms worldwide invest heavily in research and development into alternative clean energy sources, geothermal energy is attracting greater attention. Although still highly underdeveloped, the potential for new geothermal operations is significant, with countries across Europe converting old fossil fuel projects into geothermal energy sites and using new operations to power industry. But other countries, such as Peru and Japan, are finding it hard to get political and public support for these types of projects.

Geothermal energy can be produced by converting heat energy from under the Earth's crust. This energy is accessed through the digging of one-mile wells to access underground reservoirs to use steam and hot water, which can turn turbines connected to electricity generators. There are three types of geothermal energy operations: dry steam, flash and binary. While the potential for geothermal energy is significant, it remains largely untapped in most areas of the world due to the technological limitations of the past.

Thanks to greater investment into new geothermal technologies in recent years, several countries now have the means to tap into their geothermal resources. Some projects are already up and running in countries such as Iceland, El Salvador, New Zealand, Kenya and the Philippines, with geothermal energy meeting over than 90 percent of Iceland's heating demand. Many of these operations rely on dry steam plants or flash plants, which harness temperatures above 180°C.

There are several different types of geothermal technology in distinct levels of development. Technologies for direct use, including district heating, geothermal heat pumps and heating greenhouses, are mature and are widely used. This is similar in the case of technologies used for electricity generation from hydrothermal reservoirs with naturally high permeability. However, several innovative technologies are in the testing phase, such as enhanced geothermal systems. This is a man-made reservoir, established where there is hot rock but insufficient or little natural permeability or fluid saturation, therefore fluid must be injected into the subsurface under carefully controlled conditions, causing pre-existing fractures to re-open, creating permeability.

The global geothermal energy market was valued at \$6.6 billion in 2021, a figure that is projected to increase to \$9.4 billion by 2027, growing at a CAGR of 5.9 percent. The rollout of new technologies is expected to enable producers to access previously unreachable reserves, as well as reduce operational costs, encouraging investment in new projects worldwide.

In the U.K., a network of geothermal plants could help the country achieve its decarbonisation goals, as well as support disadvantaged communities. A report published this month shows that many areas with high geothermal potential are underneath towns and cities that require investment. The development of these resources could support the government's levelling up agenda, a moral, social and economic programme that sets out how to spread opportunity more equally across the U.K. Six of the areas identified in the top 10 index of the agenda, Redcar and Cleveland, Middlesbrough, East Lindsey, Hartlepool, Northumberland, and Bassetlaw, have been identified as having geothermal potential.

Marriages in China Slump to Historic Low

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Marriages in China dropped in 2022 to their lowest since records began, local news outlet Yicai reported, continuing a steady decline over the past decade although the matrimonial total may have been affected by stringent COVID lockdowns.

Just 6.83 million couples completed their marriage registrations last year, data published on the website of the Ministry of Civil Affairs showed, down about 800,000 from the previous year.

The drop in couples tying the knot, which follows pandemic restrictions keeping tens of millions locked in their homes or compounds for weeks last year, comes as authorities deal with a declining birth rate and a falling population.

In 2022 China's population fell for the first time in six decades, a decline that is expected to mark the start of a long period of decline in its citizen numbers with profound implications for its economy and the world.

China's birth rate fell last year to 6.77 births per 1,000 people, the lowest on record, from 7.52 in 2021.

Demographers warn China will get old before it gets rich, as its workforce shrinks and indebted local governments spend more on their elderly population.

To encourage marriage and boost the country's flagging birth rate, China said last month it would launch pilot projects in more than 20 cities to create a "new-era" marriage and childbearing culture.

Some provinces are also giving young newlyweds an extension of paid marriage leave.

Tehran, Caracas...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian president emphasized that Tehran and Caracas can reach the 20-billion-dollar target through investment.

The two sides agreed to remove customs, banking and tariff barriers in order to facilitate and accelerate economic exchanges, he noted.

Raisi said Iranian ambassadors, commercial offices, the house of science and technology and all active sectors in the fields of industry, mines and banking affairs must work to facilitate mutual trade ties.

A high-ranking delegation comprised of ministers of foreign affairs, oil, defense, and health is accompanying Raisi on the five-day tour, which will also take him to Nicaragua and Cuba.

Iran has close ties with many Latin American states in different domains and seeks to further deepen its relations with those nations.

Iran Recorded...

FROM PAGE 1

Referring to President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to Venezuela, the Iranian nuclear chief said the Islamic Republic's strategic relationship with Latin America has enraged the US.

The nuclear issue is one of the areas of Iran's cooperation with Latin America, he noted, adding that Tehran will cooperate with Caracas in the fields of irradiation and medicine.

"Venezuela says the Americans have blocked their medical industry. The US preaches about human rights but it does not respect human lives," Eslami said.

As a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), Iran has long been cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA).

The country showed to the world the peaceful nature of its nuclear program by signing the 2015 nuclear agreement, formally known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA), with six world powers.

It remains committed to its obligations under the JCPOA despite Washington's unilateral withdrawal from the deal in 2018 and its subsequent re-imposition of anti-Iran sanctions.

Germany Resumed Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

The figures showed that EU's petroleum imports from Iran had reached 4,181 mt in 2022.

The figures indicate that EU states are becoming increasingly reluctant to comply with US sanctions on Iran mainly because of a crunch in the international energy markets that has been exacerbated by the war in Ukraine.

That comes as some EU states have ignored Western sanctions imposed on Russia over the Ukraine war by continuing to import crude oil and gas from the country.

Russia to Respond...

FROM PAGE 1

Multilateral diplomatic efforts to revive the JCPOA have been stalled since last August, with Iran blaming the United States for failing to guarantee that it will not leave the deal again.

Former US president Donald Trump pulled out of the UN-endorsed agreement in May 2018 and imposed what he called "maximum pressure" sanctions against Iran.

Iran has repeatedly announced that the JCPOA revival is possible if the U.S. and the European signatories to the agreement have the will to reach that aim, warning that the opportunity will not last forever.

De Lig out of Nations League Finals

AMSTERDAM (Dispatches) - Defender Matthijs de Ligt suffered a calf injury in training with the Netherlands and today withdrew from the squad for this week's Nations League finals, the Dutch football association said.

The 23-year-old De Ligt, who has won 41 caps, suffered the injury in training on Saturday and is replaced in the 23-man squad by his Bayern Munich team mate Daley Blind.

The Netherlands are hosting the tournament and meet Croatia in the first semi-final in Rotterdam on Wednesday.

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Maia First Brazilian to Reach WTA Top 10

LONDON (Dispatches) - Beatriz Haddad Maia became the first Brazilian woman to reach the top 10 of the WTA rankings today following her dream run to the semi-finals of the French Open.

The 27-year-old beat Tunisia's Ons Jabeur in the last eight in Paris to become the first Brazilian woman in 55 years to reach a Grand Slam semi-final.

She was eventually beaten by eventual champion Iga Swiatek. Haddad Maia will take a ranking of 10 into the grasscourt season in which she impressed last year and will feature in this week's Nottingham Open as build-up to Wimbledon begins.

Nuggets Top Heat 108-95 for 3-1 Lead

MIAMI (Dispatches) - The mission for the Denver Nuggets was clear: Come to Miami, get two wins and head back home with a chance to finally become NBA champions. It's officially there for the taking.

The 47-year wait for Denver might be over as soon as Monday, with Nikola Jokic and his Nuggets now just one win away from getting the title that he's wanted for so long. Aaron Gordon scored 27 points, Jokic added 23 and the Nuggets beat the Miami Heat 108-95 to take a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals.

"We haven't done a damn thing yet," Nuggets coach Michael Malone said. "We have to win another game to be world champions."

Bruce Brown scored 21 off the bench for the Nuggets, who won their fifth straight road game to grab complete command. They'll have three chances to win one game for a title, two of those in Denver, the first in what's sure to be a raucous atmosphere for Game 5.

Jamal Murray had 15 points and 12 assists — his fourth consecutive double-digit assist game — for Denver.



"Today was a team effort," Murray said. "I can't even name one person. Everybody locked in. We've got one more to go."

Jimmy Butler scored 25 points for Miami, which has now fallen into 3-1 holes in each of its last three finals appearances — this one joining 2014 and 2020. Bam Adebayo had 20 points and 11 rebounds for the Heat, while Kyle Lowry added 13 points.

The Heat walked off the floor in silence, fully aware of how much trouble they're in now. "Now we're in a must-win situation, every single game — which we're capable of," Butler said. "It's not impossible."

The Nuggets were overwhelming favorites to start the series, for obvious reasons. Denver was the Western Conference's No. 1 seed; Miami was the Eastern Conference's No. 8 seed. The Nuggets had won nine of the last 10 regular-season meetings between the teams, and their run of success over the Heat has continued through four games of the finals.

committed his fifth foul and had to go to the bench with 9:24 left — and it was down to 86-81 when Butler converted a three-point play with 8:42 remaining.

But the Nuggets — who fell apart in the fourth quarter of Game 2 for their lone loss of the series — didn't fold, even with their two-time MVP still out. Murray made a 3-pointer to stop Miami's 8-0 spurt, and Jeff Green made a huge corner 3 from near the Heat bench for a 94-85 edge with 6:21 left.

"We have guys that can step up, night in and night out," Gordon said.

Jokic checked out with Denver up 10. He came back with the Nuggets up nine. Miami didn't take advantage of that chance, and now finds itself on the wrong end of history. A team that had to scramble just to make the playoffs now needs to pull off the ultimate scramble to win a championship.

"This is what this year's been all about for this group, so definitely not going to hang our heads or quit," Heat guard Duncan Robinson said. "That's not an option. It's not going to happen. So we'll band together and get on this flight tomorrow and find a way to figure it out."

Teams that take a 3-1 lead in the NBA Finals have won 35 out of 36 previous times, and the Heat will have to buck that trend to keep Denver from winning its title.

"We have an incredibly competitive group," Heat coach Erik Spoelstra said. "We've done everything the hard way and that's the way it's going to have to be done right now — again. And all we're going to focus on is getting this thing back to the 305. Get this thing back to Miami. And things can shift very quickly."



Rodri Named Champions League Player of The Season

NYON (Dispatches) - Manchester City midfielder Rodri was named the Champions League's Player of the Season by UEFA after a stellar 2022-23 campaign.

The 26-year-old Spain international scored the winning goal as City lifted the trophy for the first time when they beat Inter Milan 1-0 in Saturday's final.

Rodri appeared in all but one of City's Champions League matches, scoring twice. He delivered a standout performance in the final, earning the Player of the Match award.

Napoli's Khvicha Kvaratskhelia was named the Champions League's Young Player of the Season, capping a remarkable campaign for the 22-year-old Georgian.

Kvaratskhelia won the league title with Napoli and also claimed Serie A's Player of the Season award earlier this month.

Team of the season:
Goalkeeper Thibaut Courtois (Real Madrid)
Defenders: Kyle Walker (Man City), Ruben Dias (Man City), Alessandro Bastoni (Inter), Federico Dimarco (Inter)
Midfielders: John Stones (Man City), Kevin De Bruyne (Man City), Rodri (Man City)
Forwards: Bernardo Silva (Man City), Erling Haaland (Man City), Vinicius Junior (Real Madrid)

Hong Kong to Host First Men's ATP Tennis Event in 20 Years

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - International men's tennis will return to Hong Kong in January for the first time in more than 20 years, the ATP Tour said, and will act as build-up to the Australian Open.

The outdoor hard-court event will be held on December 31 to January 7 and replaces the tournament in Pune, India which took place this year around the same dates, the men's ATP Tour said.

It will be the first ATP Tour event in Hong Kong since 2002 and previous players to have featured include Grand Slam champions Pete Sampras, Andre Agassi, Boris Becker and Michael Chang.

There will be total prize money of more than US\$650,000 (RM2.9 million) and the tournament comes just before the 2024 Australian Open, which is scheduled to start on January 15.

Philip Mok, president of Hong Kong's tennis association, said: "Our goal has been to bring an ATP Tour level event back to Hong Kong for several years and we are thrilled to make it a reality."

Hong Kong will this October host a women's WTA event for the first time since 2018.

International men's and women's tennis is returning to China after a prolonged absence because of the Covid-19 pandemic.

Toppmoeller Named Eintracht Frankfurt Manager



BERLIN (Dispatches) - Dino Toppmoeller has been named as the new manager of Bundesliga side Eintracht Frankfurt until 2026, the club announced.

Toppmoeller had recently been employed as Julian Nagelsmann's assistant coach at Bayern Munich and was previously in the same role at RB Leipzig.

During a playing career that took him to several clubs including Manchester City and Augsburg, Toppmoeller played 16 games for Frankfurt, scoring three times during a brief stint at the club in the 2002/03 season.

As a manager, Toppmoeller coached F91 Dudelange in Luxembourg from 2016 to 2019, where he won three championships and two league cups.

Eintracht Frankfurt's sporting director Markus Kroesche welcomed the new coach in a

statement, saying "it was only a matter of time before Dino Toppmoeller became a head coach in the Bundesliga".

"The way he plays football fits in with our philosophy. And as a former Eintracht player, Dino, who speaks fluent English and French, will have no problem finding his feet in Frankfurt quickly."

Toppmoeller, who had been rumoured to continue his collaboration with Nagelsmann at a new club before taking the Frankfurt job, said "the path we have taken suits me, we think the same way about football."

"Eintracht Frankfurt's development in recent years has been impressive. Due to my past, I've always had a special relationship with Eintracht and have constantly followed the club's path."

Toppmoeller, 42, is the son of former Frankfurt manager Klaus Toppmoeller.

Frankfurt had been without a manager since parting ways with Oliver Glasner after the German FA Cup final in early June.

Glasner won the Europa League with Frankfurt during his first season at the club and took the side to fifth, their highest finish in decades.

Al Ahly Win African Champions League



CASABLANCA (Dispatches) - Egyptian giants Al Ahly won the African Champions League after scoring a late equalizer to grab a 1-1 draw against Wydad Casablanca of Morocco in the second leg of the final on Sunday that secured a 3-2 aggregate victory.

Defender Mohamed Abdelmoneim flicked on a corner from Ali Maaloul with 13 minutes remaining, with the ball looping over the home defense and into the corner of the net to hand the Cairo club a record-extending 11th title. After losing 2-1 in the Egyptian capital in last Sunday's first leg, Wydad had been on course to win on the away goals rule after fullback Yahya Attiat Allah scored a 27th-minute free kick to hand the home team the lead in front of an expectant 50,000-strong crowd at Casablanca's Mohamed V Stadium.

Wydad were looking to complete a dream season for Moroccan football, after the heroes of their national team in reaching the World Cup semi-final in December, but the Cairo club reaffirmed their status as Africa's top side after losing to Wydad in last year's final.

Al Ahly have now won more than double the number of titles in Africa's top club competition than their nearest rivals. This was their fourth successive final and sixth in the last seven editions.

Real Madrid's New No.7 Vinicius Jr



MADRID (Dispatches) - Vinicius Junior is inheriting the No.7 shirt at Real Madrid, allowing him to follow in the footsteps of Cristiano Ronaldo and Raul.

The iconic jersey at Santiago Bernabeu has come up for grabs following the departure of Eden Hazard — with the Belgian forward being released as a free agent. He had filled the No.7 spot in Real's ranks since 2019-20.

While Hazard toiled in the Spanish capital, Vinicius has seen his stock soar. The Brazil international, who joined Real from Flamengo in 2018, has become one of the most exciting talents on the planet. At just 22 years of age, he already has 225 appearances and 59 goals for the Blancos to his name — to sit alongside the two La Liga titles and Champions League crown that he has helped to capture.

Vinicius will be giving up No.20 in Madrid, which is expected to go to Fran Garcia following his return to the Bernabeu from Rayo Vallecano, while fellow Brazilian Rodrigo is being upgraded from 21 to 11.

Vinicius endured a testing 2022-23 on the personal front, as he was subjected to vile racist taunts on a regular basis, but he will not be running away from his tormentors and is expected to sign a new contract this summer that will keep him in Madrid until 2027.

Bordeaux Punished For Pitch Invasion With Costly Forfeit

BORDEAUX (Dispatches) - Bordeaux's chances of an immediate return to Ligue 1 were all but dashed on Monday when a French league disciplinary committee declared their last game of the season, halted after fan attacked a Rodez player, a victory for the visitors.

Bordeaux started the match on June 2 third on goal difference behind Metz with only the top two promoted. Rodez were battling to avoid relegation.

The match was halted after 23 minutes when a home fan came onto the pitch and pushed over Rodez player Lucas Buades, who had just put the away team in front.