

President of Uzbekistan Shavkat Mirziyoyev, Leading a Delegation, Is to Visit Tehran Today to Meet Iranian Officials for Boosting Their Bilateral Ties in All Fields

IRAN NEWS

Pakistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs (MOFA) Spokesperson Mumtaz Zahra Baloch in His Weekly Briefing Said That 12th Round of Political Consultations of Pakistan-Iran Will Be Held Soon

VOL. XXIX, No. 7791 TEHRAN Price 50,000 Rials

www.irannewsdaily.com

SATURDAY JUNE 17, 2023 - KHORDAD 27, 1402

2 DOMESTIC

World Order Changing Due To Resilience of Independent Nations



> SEE PAGE 2

3 DOMESTIC

Iran-South Korea Trade at Lowest Level



> SEE PAGE 3

4 INTERNATIONAL

North Korea Fires Two Short-Range Ballistic Missiles



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Croatia Stun Hosts Netherlands To Reach Nations League Final



> SEE PAGE 8

Leader Hails Recent Victory of Islamic Jihad Against Israel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has lauded the recent victory of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad movement against Israel, saying the growing power of Palestinian resistance groups is the key to bringing the occupying regime to its knees.

Ayatollah Khamenei made the remarks in a meeting with Secretary General of Palestine's Islamic Jihad movement Ziad al-Nakhleh and his accompanying delegation in the Iranian capital of Tehran on Wednesday.

The Tel Aviv regime launched a deadly bombing campaign on Gaza on May 9, sparking the firing of over 1,000 rockets by the Islamic Jihad toward the occupied territories.

The two sides agreed after five days of fighting to an Egyptian-brokered ceasefire that took effect on May 13. Israeli aerial assaults killed at least 33 Palestinians in Gaza, including six children, and wounded 147, according to the Palestinian Health Ministry. Several Islamic Jihad leaders were also among the Palestinian victims of the latest conflict, which marked the worst episode of fighting between Gaza's resistance factions and Israel since a 10-day war in 2021. **See Page 7**

Tehran-Havana Cooperation Progress Despair to Hegemons



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - The Iranian president said that Iran and Cuba's cooperation, which is in the path towards progress, can create hope in independent nations and despair in hegemons.

Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks in the meeting of high-ranking delegations of Iran and Cuba on Thursday. The Iranian president proposed forming a joint commission on technological cooperation between the two countries for complementary cooperation in these fields.

Pointing out that relations between Iran and Cuba have changed since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, he said, "In the years since the victory of the Islamic Revolution, the relations between the two countries have always been developing, and especially in recent years and during the coronavirus pandemic, constructive cooperation has taken place."

Stating that Iran and Cuba have important common grounds, including in fighting for independence, he said, "Iran is ready to cooperate with all countries, but if a country acts against the interests of our nation, we will stand against it."

Raisi referred to the resistance of the Iranian nation against sanctions and extensive pressures, adding, "Iran considers relations with independent countries as one of the ways to tackle sanctions."

Stating that his visit to Cuba, and the Cuban president's visit to Tehran in the near future can be steps effective in developing relations between the two countries, the Iranian President said, "The activation of the Joint Commission of Economic Cooperation of the two countries can provide faster solutions for implementation of agreements."

Raisi stressed that the US and bullying powers cannot do anything against independent nations, saying, "Our cooperation in the path towards progress can create hope in independent nations and despair in hegemons."

Miguel Diaz-Canel, the president of Cuba, for his part, referred to Raisi's visit and said, "Your visit to Cuba is meaningful and the proof of existence of a set of common values and views between the two countries."

"The three countries that you chose as destination for your regional trip have a meaningful relationship with the Iranian Revolution", he continued, adding that, "I am confident that your visit to Cuba will be a turning point in the history of relations between the two countries."

Meanwhile Iran and Cuba signed six agreements to expand economic, political and judicial cooperation between the two allied countries.

The memoranda of understanding (MoUs) were signed during President Raisi's state visit to Cuba.

The MoUs were focused on judicial issues, political cooperation as well as on customs and information technology, according to a report by Iran's official IRNA news agency.

Along with Raisi, Cuban president Miguel Diaz-Canel watched on as ministers and senior officials of Iran and Cuba signed the deals in the Palace of the Revolution in the Cuban capital Havana.

The agreements came less than a day after Raisi's delegation signed three similar cooperation deals with officials in Nicaragua.

Those agreements were in the fields of judicial cooperation, trade and supply of medical equipment, said the IRNA.

Unconfirmed reports by Iranian media outlets suggested Iran had secured tens of billions worth of economic and trade deals during Raisi's four-day tour of Latin America where he has visited Venezuela, Nicaragua and Cuba.

The tour was part of Iran's efforts to diversify its trade partners and to join ranks with countries that have been targeted by foreign sanctions.

New Iran Nuclear Deal Must Be Foolproof Against Violations

TEHRAN (MNA) - If the Islamic Republic were to return to a nuclear accord, it would do so in a manner that prevents the US or its allies from violating their commitments and dragging their feet, Mohammad Marandi said.

"We have to keep in mind the history of what happened, and that is that for decades now, there has been a standoff between Iran and the United States. And it's been based upon misinformation. In other words, [Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin] Netanyahu for example has been claiming for roughly 30 years now that Iran is on the verge of developing a nuclear weapon. In fact, I think around 30 years ago, he said 'it's months away.' So this misinformation that comes out of the West or their allies has been the foundation upon which they put pressure on Iran," the advisor to the Iranian negotiating delegation in the nuclear talks told Sputnik.

Delving into the history of nuclear negotiations, Marandi recalled that going back to the 2000s, European countries would make promises to reevaluate their positions on the nuclear issue, but then drag their feet for years at a time after Iran agreed to halt its nuclear activities. **See Page 7**

Oman FM Says U.S., Iran Close on Prisoner Deal

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran and the United States are close to finalizing a deal on the release of Americans held in Tehran, Oman's foreign minister said.

Omani Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi said in an interview he senses "seriousness" on the part of both Washington and Tehran as their negotiators try to salvage the 2015 nuclear deal, Al-Monitor reported.

"I can say they are close," Albusaidi said of a potential prisoner agreement. "This is probably a question of technicalities."

"They need to have a framework [and] a timeframe of how this should be orchestrated," he said of the frozen funds. "I think they're ironing those things out."

Oman, which acted as a backchannel for the 2015 nuclear accord, has been a recent venue for indirect talks between US and Iranian officials, according to several sources with knowledge of the effort.

On Monday, Iran's Foreign Ministry confirmed reports that Muscat hosted the discussions, adding they "were not secret." **See Page 7**

Top Saudi Diplomat To Visit Tehran Today

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Saudi Arabia's Foreign Minister Prince Faisal bin Farhan Al Saud will visit Iran today (Saturday) amid warming relations between the two Middle Eastern powers, official sources say.

The sources said on Thursday that the top Saudi diplomat will hold talks with Iranian officials during his Saturday trip to Tehran.

Earlier, some sources raised the possibility of the reopening of the Saudi embassy during Prince Faisal's Tehran visit.

Last week, Iran officially reopened its embassy in the Saudi capital, Riyadh, in line with a China-brokered reconciliation agreement that restored their ties severed seven years earlier. Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed in Beijing on March 10 to resume their relations and reopen their diplomatic missions within two months.

In a joint statement after signing the agreement, Tehran and Riyadh highlighted the need to respect each other's national sovereignty and refrain from interfering in the internal affairs of one another.

They also agreed to implement a security cooperation agreement signed in April 2001 and another accord reached in May 1998 to boost economic, commercial, investment, technical, scientific, cultural, sports, and youth affairs cooperation.

Google Removes Leading Iranian Marketplace App From Its Store

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Iran-based marketplace app, Divar, has been removed from Google Play as sanctions hit e-commerce.

According to an email published by Divar, Google said the app has been removed to comply with the sanctions regime of the United States against Iran.

"Products on Google Play may be subject to United States' and other jurisdictions' export control and sanctions laws and regulations," read Google's email.

Divar had more than 10 million active users before being removed from Google Play.

The company's public relations published a statement on its website Thursday warning that the removal of its application will cause the spread of malware of the same name and will violate the rights of users.

Google had previously removed some other applications developed in Iran from its store. In November last year, 10 Iranian apps were removed from the Google Play store, including Divar's business competitor "Sheipour".

Israel's Policies Will Set Entire Region on Fire

GAZA (Dispatches) - A senior official with the Hamas resistance movement says the policies pursued by Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's far-right cabinet in the occupied Palestinian territories will set the entire region ablaze.

Speaking to the Gaza-based Al-Aqsa TV, Saleh al-Arouri, the deputy head of Hamas' political bureau, warned of a regional conflagration as a result of Israel's illegal settlement construction activities and expulsion of Palestinians from the occupied West Bank.

"The fascist Zionist regime is trying to target al-Quds and the West Bank, and today we are witnessing the intensification of its settlement activities in these areas," he said.

"The strategy of the current extremist regime will set the entire region on fire. The ruling Zionist regime has plans to evict Palestinians from the West Bank."

On Monday, the US-based news website Axios reported that Tel Aviv had informed Washington it planned to build 4,000 new units in several existing West Bank settlements.

The report came after Netanyahu's cabinet shelved plans to advance the highly controversial E1 settlement project under US pressure. **See Page 7**

Sokhan Gostar Institute

IRAN NEWS

PRIVATE ENGLISH NEWSPAPER IN IRAN



Advertisement Department
021-44253335-39

www.irannewsdaily.com
info@irannewsdaily.com

@irannewsdaily @irannewsdaily

President Felicitates Putin on Russia National Day

TEHRAN (IRNA) - President Ebrahim Raisi has congratulated his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin on the occasion of Russia National Day.

Raisi issued a message on Wednesday to congratulate Putin on the occasion which marks the day on June 12 1991 on which the Russian parliament formally declared Russian sovereignty from the Soviet Union.

The day is regarded by many Russians as an opportunity to demonstrate their national pride.

World Order Changing Due To Resilience of Independent Nations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's president says the resilience of independent nations in Latin America and elsewhere has led to an ongoing transformation of the world order and the decline of the United States.

Ebrahim Raisi made the remarks while addressing members of parliament in Nicaragua, the second leg of his three-nation tour of Latin America.

"The domineering powers want to force their selfish interests on the nations, and that's why we should question why America and some Western countries, who pretend to care about human rights, freedom and democracy, don't respect the real votes of the nations in Palestine, Lebanon, Afghanistan, Iraq, Syria and Latin America," he said.

They have oppressed the Palestinian people for 70 years and have not allowed democracy to happen in this country, added Raisi.

He said that in the past, imperialist powers used their armies or their agents to impose their will on other countries, but now they've resorted to sanctions to achieve that goal.

The president said that "military occupation, coup and sanctions" are the tools of the regimes against independent nations, adding, "The US and Western countries claim to fight terrorism verbally, but in reality, as they admitted during the US presidential election, they created and supported the Daesh terrorist group."

Pointing to the US crime in assassinating General Qassem Soleimani, a hero of the fight against terrorism, Raisi said that people of the world reject Washington's false claims of fighting terrorism.



"The current world order is changing and the indicators show that the authority of domineering power and the U.S. is declining and the will of the nations in Latin America and West Asia is rising," he said.

He said that the media empire of the colonial system tries to change the views of nations. "Imperialism tries to affect the influential groups of nations, and the duty of the elites of free societies is to prevent this."

He emphasized Iran's policy of developing relations with independent countries, noting that there are many opportunities for developing relations between Latin American countries, especially Nicaragua and Iran, and the Islamic Republic of Iran is fully ready to share its experiences and capacities with Nicaragua.

Therefore, he stressed, constant communication between independent countries is vital so that they are better protected against imperialist plans and conspiracies.

He also noted that Iran and Nicaragua share a common history of resistance and combat a common enemy, as well as respect for the people's will and vote.

President of the Assembly Gustavo Porras Cortés also addressed the meeting before Raisi, saying the efforts to improve people's welfare, realize freedom, independence, justice, and defense against US imperialism as the commonalities between Iran and Nicaragua.

Iran-Belarus

Cooperation Entering New Stage

TEHRAN (MNA) - Describing Iran as an important international player with huge economic potential, the Belarusian president said that the cooperation between Belarus, and Iran is entering a new stage.

The Republic of Belarus has special relations with the Islamic Republic of Iran, Belarusian President Aleksandr Lukashenko said as he received the credentials from ambassadors of nine countries in Minsk on 15 June, BelTA has learned.

"Minsk and Tehran have always deeply understood each other, being subjected to unfair, illegal sanctions," the head of state said.

Aleksandr Lukashenko stressed that Belarus views Iran as an important international player with a huge economic potential. "Today, our cooperation is entering a new stage," the president said.

FM Congratulates Alicia Bárcena On Her Appointment

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian foreign minister congratulated Alicia Bárcena on her appointment as the new foreign minister of Mexico.

The Foreign Minister of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Hossein Amirabdollahian, wrote a message on his Twitter page, saying: "I am sure that the friendly and long-standing relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the United Mexican States will be further strengthened during her tenure in all areas of interest to the two countries."

Mexico is an independent country located in North America and the 14th largest country in terms of size, the 10th most populated country in the world, its capital is Mexico City and its official language is Spanish.

Iran, Cuba to Produce New Vaccines

HAVANA (IP) - Minister of Health and Medical Education has announced the expansion of medical cooperation and vaccine production between Iran and Cuba.

On the sidelines of the visit of the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Cuba, Iran's Minister of Health and Medical Education Bahram Einollahi, stating the proper health status of Cuba, further added that Iran has been cooperating with Cuba in the field of health and medication since the victory of the Islamic Revolution.

"Cuba is one of the advanced countries in the field of vaccine production," said Einollahi, referring to the cooperation between Iran's Pasteur Institute (IPI) with Cuba in COVID-19 vaccine production.

Referring to the signing of memoranda of understanding on cooperation between Iran and Cuba in vaccine production, Iran's Health Minister noted that the cooperation between the two countries in producing new vaccines will be continued.

Iran's Health Minister, elsewhere, says with the proposal of the Pasteur Institute of Iran and the approval of the Ministry of Public Health of Cuba (MINASP) production of new vaccines will be started.

West Lies About Nuclear Negotiations Priority



TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman for the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran said that Westerners and Americans announce in the media that nuclear negotiations are not a priority for them, but this is a lie.

The spokesman of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization, Behrouz Kamalvandi added in an interview: "The West was looking to gather the nuclear capability of our country, they want Iran not to have these capabilities."

He said that America's dream is to destroy Iran's nuclear industry.

Kamalvandi, regarding the agreements between Iran and its agency, emphasized: "the cameras that were reactivated according to the agreement with the International Atomic Energy Agency are in the centrifuge production center of Isfahan."

He clarified: "This current centrifuge manufacturing center in Isfahan is the same as of Karaj production line which was moved to a safe place after sabotage, because wherever the enemy sabotaged Iran's nuclear facilities, our country's facilities were moved to a safer place and also the quality of nuclear products were increased too."

Kamalvandi said: "29 cameras and agency devices were collected, and according to the agreement, about 10 cameras were activated in Natanz."

The spokesman of Iran's Atomic Energy Organization noted: "the information stored in the cameras will remain with Iran and will not be accessible to the agency until an agreement is reached."

Regarding the type of agency surveillance in Fordo, Kamalvandi said: "the surveillances in Fordo are based on safeguard protocols and no extra security cameras have been installed there."

He also emphasized that the agency no longer has any questions regarding the two alleged locations of Abadeh and Jaber bin Hayyan.

Kamalvandi continued: "Providing the necessary political space to end the issue of Torqezabad and Varamin is enough, and the negotiations with the agency about these two issues are ongoing."

Iran Unveils RFCC Catalyst in Major Leap for Refining Sector

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has marked its latest achievement in the oil refining industry with the unveiling of a residue fluid catalytic cracking (RFCC) catalyst at Imam Khomeini Oil Refinery in central Iran.

During the unveiling ceremony, the refinery's CEO, Majid Rajabi, said the RFCC unit has been designed to produce gasoline, liquefied gas, and light diesel, with a daily capacity of 94,370 barrels. "This unit utilizes the fluid catalytic cracking process and is currently the largest FCC (fluid catalytic cracking) unit in the country," he noted.

"The unit has been specifically designed to produce a maximum amount of high-octane gasoline, capable of producing 8 million liters of gasoline (per day)," he added. Rajabi emphasized that the RFCC unit could meet the needs of other oil refineries in Iran, streamlining their operations and making them more cost-effective.

Imam Khomeini Oil Refinery was established in 1993 and became the largest single-unit refinery in Iran with a nominal capacity of processing 150,000 barrels per day (bpd).

The refinery's capacity has increased to 250,000 bpd and is currently a major producer of Euro-4 grade gasoline in Iran.

Oil, Tech Export to Latin America Is Gov't's Zenith

TEHRAN (Shana) - A member of Iran's Parliament on Thursday said oil and technical know-how export to Latin America shows that the 13th (incumbent) administration's power has reached its climax.

Touching upon President Seyyed Ebrahim Raisi and his accompanying delegation's visit to Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba, Hadi Beiginejad told the official IRNA news agency, "The construction and overhaul of refineries in these [Latam] countries give greater credit to Iran and represent the failure of U.S. hegemony."

The member of parliamentary Energy Committee described Raisi's tour of Latin America, once a backyard of the United States, and Iran's political and economic contracts with Venezuela, Nicaragua, and Cuba as the pinnacle of the 13th administration's diplomacy and the country's sovereignty.

The approach not only improves Iran's economy and gives it greater influence in international arenas, particularly in Latin America, but also helps the other countries develop their

refining and petrochemical infrastructure, noted the lawmaker.

He said the Raisi administration's political and economic diplomacy showed that the U.S. is not everything to the world, adding, "The government's policies have resulted in developing ties with other countries like Indonesia, some Asian and Latin American states, and even African countries as economic and political partners since the U.S. has exposed its treacherous and bullying nature in its relations with other countries in different junctures of history."

Elaborating on the incumbent government's energy diplomacy and its impact on neutralizing sanctions, Beiginejad said, "Sanctions would work if the government failed to transact and transfer its products and services while the country's exports have increased and the neutralization of sanctions will gradually become evident."

The parliamentarian called for the countries hit by U.S. sanctions to form a club to hand Washington's hegemony further defeat.

Pakistan Federal Minister for Narcotics Control Visits Tehran

TEHRAN (Pakistan Embassy) - The meeting of Triangular Initiative (TI), facilitated by United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), was held in Tehran from 13th to 14th June 2023.

The Pakistan delegation was led by Federal Minister for Narcotics Control Nawabzada Shahzain Bugti. The federal Minister was accompanied by Director General Anti-Narcotics Force, Major General Mohammad Aniq-ur-Rehman, and some senior officers.

During his stay in Tehran, Honorable Minister attended the Triangular Initiatives event.

Separately, the Minister met with Secretary General of Anti-Narcotics Headquarters Dr. Eskandar Momeni, and discussed issues related to narcotics control and smuggling through borders of the two countries.

Honorable Minister Mr. Bugti, stressed on the need to control the drug trafficking in the region, especially in the border area between Pakistan and Iran. He emphasized that

training of law enforcing agencies would help in controlling the drug trafficking going through borders and would enable both countries to eliminate this menace. Dr. Momeni, agreed on the need for continuous cooperation between the drug control departments of the two countries so as to ensure the smooth trade going through the borders between Pakistan and Iran.

At the end of the 14th TI Senior officials Meeting (SOM), a joint statement was released. In the statement, it was agreed that to counter the illicit drug problem, there was need to make concerted efforts by both Pakistan and Iran together. UNODC would provide a progress report on activities and achievements of TI as well as on its progress achieved in collecting / mobilizing technical and financial assistance.

United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC) launched Triangular Initiative (TI) in 2007 by engaging three neighboring countries, Pakistan, Iran and Afghanistan for promoting information exchange and encouraging joint field operations among these three states against drug trafficking networks and serious operatives.





PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:05
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:43
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:01
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:48

73. But if good fortune comes to you from Allah, they would be sure to say - as if there had never been Ties of affection between you and them - "Oh! I wish I had been with them; a fine thing should I then have made of it!"

74. Let those fight in the cause of Allah Who sell the life of this world for the hereafter. To him who fighteth in the cause of Allah, - whether he is slain or gets victory - Soon shall We give him a reward of great (value).

Surah 4. Women (73 - 74)

Iran-South Korea Trade at Lowest Level

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Former Secretary General of Iran-South Korea Joint Chamber of Commerce says the trade between Iran and South Korea in the past two years has been at the lowest level ever, adding that Korean carmakers are keen to export their products to Iran.

Speaking to ILNA, Pouya Firouzi said that the chamber cannot be an official source for announcing the status of Iran's frozen fund in South Korea, adding that the government has directly started talks with South Korean government over the fate of the frozen money and the chamber in any condition is just a consumer and listener. He added that ultimately this is the governments who announce the mechanism and the chamber is not allowed or able to confirm or deny unfreezing of the fund.

He then said that the trade relation of Iran and South Korea in the past two years has fallen to the lowest level and last year Iran's exports to Korea stood at \$82m and in return it imported \$736m of goods. He added that the trade volume of both country once was \$6b and the figure has slumped considerably.

Touching upon the main factors behind this decline, Firouzi said that the main factor was the exit of South Korean companies from Iran after imposition of sanctions and the private sector was unable to have banking transactions with South Korea and it seems the frozen money in South Korea helped this decline to get faster and worse.

He said that policy of importing cars from South Korea is in two parts, adding that weak trade ties with Korea and domestic policies caused banning cars from South Korea and if these two factors change, South Korean companies are interested to have some share from Iran's car market.

Firouzi added that before the exit of South Korean companies from Iran, they had some discussions with Koreans on imports of goods which were importing technical



knowhow, imports of technology and ultimately investment of Korean companies in Iran but unfortunately sanctions stopped them and actually trade between the two countries was halted, adding that South Koreans' investment in Iran hinges on macro policy-makings of Iran.

He added that he does not know why South Korea does not like to pay Iran's frozen money in dollar and they want to pay it in its national currency won, adding that he is not aware that the talks between the two countries is in which direction, reiterating that paying money in won is not in the benefit of the country and Koreans will benefit from it.

Last week South Korean media said Seoul and Washington are mulling over ways to release Iran's \$7 billion funds frozen due to U.S. sanctions on Tehran.

In an article on Tuesday, the Korea Economic Daily said the move will help Seoul resume its business ties with Tehran as well as President Joe Biden in the 2024 U.S. presidential election.

Citing diplomatic and government sources in Seoul, the conservative business daily said Korean and U.S. government officials are involved in working-level discussions under Washington's leadership to unfreeze the Iranian funds.

South Korea has reportedly blocked \$7 billion which it owes for importing Iranian oil prior to full imposition of U.S. sanctions in May 2019. Bilateral ties between Iran and South Korea are frayed because of Seoul's refusal to release the Iranian money held at two commercial banks – Woori Bank and the Industrial Bank of Korea.

Iran Elected Chairman of ASPAG in ILO

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – In a meeting of the labor ministers of member countries of the Asia-Pacific region, Iran was elected as head and coordinator of Asia-Pacific Group (ASPAG) at the International Labor Organization (ILO).

In this expert-level meeting, headed by the Philippines as the current coordinator of the region, the candidacy of the Islamic Republic of Iran was raised for this position and it was unanimously approved by the member countries.

In the tripartite system of the International Labor Organization, the group of governments are organized within the framework of four regional groups including Asia and Pacific, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, and Africa and play a key role in the decision-making assemblies.

The regional coordinators are responsible for forging relations of the organization with member states and also representatives of countries of respective regions in decision-making meetings including screening group meetings, the Board of Directors' meetings, and specialized meetings of the International Labor Conference.

Latin America a Key Market for Iran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian termed Latin America as a key market for Iran, saying that Venezuela is the gate to the Islamic Republic's trade activities in that region.

Amirabdollahian was speaking in Nicaragua on Wednesday, the third day of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi's five-day tour of three Latin American countries that will later take him to Cuba.

Raisi began his tour in Venezuela where Iranian and Venezuelan officials signed documents aimed at expanding bilateral relations.

Amirabdollahian, who is part of the delegation accompanying Raisi, said that 26 documents were signed that focus on economic, trade as well as scientific and technological issues.

The top diplomat said that the administration of President Raisi favors a balanced foreign policy which prioritizes economic diplomacy.

In that line, Amirabdollahian noted, Iranian and Venezuelan officials held negotiations on different issues.

He added that Venezuela serves as a gate for Iran's trade activities in Latin America while 'friendly countries' in that region can gain access to West Asia markets through the Islamic Republic.

Iran's Export of Products To India Rises in Q1

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – India's Ministry of Industry and Commerce put the value of trade exchanges between Iran and India in the



first four months of the current year at over \$700 million.

In this period, Iran's export of goods and commodities to India registered a six percent hike, the ministry said.

This is while the value of trade exchanges between the two countries from January to April 2023 witnessed a 19 percent decline compared to the same period of last year.

The latest statistics released by the India Ministry of Industry and Commerce show that the total value of India's trade exchange with Iran from January to April 2023 reached \$702 million.

The statistics put the value of trade exchanges between Iran and India from January to April 2022 at over \$873 million.

According to this report, the reduced value of trade exchanges between the two countries is the result of a considerable decline in exports from India to Iran, which were 29 percent lower compared to last year's corresponding period.

Rice, fresh fruits and tea were among the main products exported from India to Iran in this period while India imported oil products, raw materials for the production of paint, and different types of agricultural crops from Iran.

Iran to Supply 200k Cars to Venezuela in 5 Years

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran will supply 200,000 cars to Venezuela under a five-year deal signed during a trip by Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the South American country earlier this week.

CEO of Iran's second largest car manufacturer Saipa said that the memorandum of understanding signed a day earlier between him and Venezuelan industry ministry authorities would cover exports of finished cars from Iran as well as cars manufactured in a joint plant in the country.

Mohammad Ali Teymouri said that Saipa will supply a first batch of 2,000 cars to Venezuelan customers within the next few months.

Teymouri said that authorities of the two countries had also agreed to restore manufacturing at a plant operated by Venezuelan Iranian Automotive Company (Venirauto), a company in Venezuela which has remained inactive since 2015.

He said the launch of operations at the plant, where Saipa and Iran's largest carmaker IKCO own 36% of the shares, would allow Iran to expand its presence in the Latin American car market.

The CEO said Saipa would also work to revive another car factory in Venezuela, which is focused on production of commercial vehicles and trucks, after some nine years of inactivity.

Iran and Venezuela have joined ranks in their efforts to counter the American sanctions targeting their economies.

The two countries signed contracts worth nearly \$20 billion during a two-day visit by Raisi to Venezuelan capital Caracas that ended on Tuesday.

Iran-Armenia Trade Exchanges to Reach \$3b

TEHRAN (Tasnim) –Iran's trade exchanges with neighboring Armenia currently reached \$700 million, Iran's newly-appointed ambassador to Armenia said, adding that the volume of bilateral trade is targeted to reach \$3 billion.

Speaking in a meeting with the governor general of Zanjan province on Thursday, Mehdi Sobhani stated that the expansion of relations with neighboring states is among the main foreign policy agendas of the administration of President Ebrahim Raisi.

Provinces can play a leading role in boosting the country's economy, he emphasized. Sobhani put the value of Iran's exchanges of trade with Armenia at more than \$700 million and reiterated that it is targeted to increase to \$3 billion in the future.

Armenia is the gateway for Iran to enter a lucrative market of a 200-million population due to its membership in the Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU), Iran's new envoy

stated, calling on Iranian producers to take advantage of opportunities created for them to get the lion's share at this profitable market. Stressing the need to organize an exhibition of showcasing products of this province, Sobhani said that flourishing foreign trade will help boom production and generate employment in the country.

Iran, Nicaragua Ink Major Cooperation Documents

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran and Nicaragua have signed three major cooperation documents as part of President Ebrahim Raisi's visit to the Latin American country.

During a ceremony in Managua early on Thursday where the documents were signed by officials from both countries, President Raisi stressed that the Iranian foreign policy is focused on promotion of connections with independent states.

He noted that the situation of the world would be changed if the hegemonic states respected the will of the nations.

The president also said that the documents signed between Iran and Nicaragua cover wide areas of cooperation including trade, economy and health.

Noting that both sides also agreed for cooperation on techno-scientific areas, Raisi said that the Islamic Republic has made significant technological progress despite the Western sanctions on the country and stands ready to share experiences with other nations.

Iranian president invited Daniel Ortega, the President of Nicaragua, to pay a visit to Iran in the near future.

Islamic Azad University Hosting Over 55K Foreign Students

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Islamic Azad University hosts around 55,000 foreign students from 30 countries, the university's deputy head of International Affairs and Non-Iranian Student Affairs of the Islamic Azad University announced.

Addressing a graduation ceremony of international students at Islamic Azad University Central Tehran Branch on Wednesday evening, Jalal Derakhsheh said that around 55,000

foreign students from 30 countries study at the Iranian Islamic Azad Universities.

Currently, the Islamic Azad University has branches in five countries, including the UK, Iraq, Lebanon, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and Afghanistan, he added.

He further noted that the primary preparations for opening new branches of the university in three other countries are on the agenda.

Iran to Discuss INSTC In SPIEF

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – The Islamic Republic of Iran will discuss the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) at the Saint Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF).

During a visit by Iran's Minister of Roads and Urban Development Mehrdad Bazrpash to St. Petersburg for participating in the 26th St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF), the completion

of the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) will be put at the top of the agenda for negotiations. Upon his arrival at Saint Petersburg Airport on Thursday, Bazrpash said, "We are pursuing and agreeing in the field of international corridors and all transportation sectors with a focus on the INSTC."

Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings will be held between senior transport officials of the two countries of Iran

and Russia in the fields of corridor, transit, port and air network as well as all the transportation sector, he added. Given the geographical location of Iran and its connection to the Caspian Sea and the Persian Gulf and Sea of Oman, many countries have shown their keenness to establish cooperation with Iran in this field, the roads minister continued.

According to the scheduled program, Iran's roads minister will meet the First Deputy Prime Minister of the Russian Federation, Deputy Prime Minister of Russia for Construction and Regional Development, and Russian Minister of Transport to discuss bilateral ties. The SPIEF Investment & Business Expo exhibition will be held as part of the St. Petersburg International Economic Forum. The exhibition is a platform for constructive dialogue, searching for solutions, consolidating efforts and fostering the exchange of experience among the Forum participants. St. Petersburg International Economic Forum (SPIEF) has been held annually since 1997 and is a major business event in the world. Over the past 25 years, the forum has cemented its status as a leading international event focusing on key issues on the global economic agenda.

India, Pakistan Evacuate Over 180,000 People



MANDVI (Dispatches) - Authorities in India and neighbouring Pakistan have evacuated more than 180,000 people from vulnerable coastal areas in the path of cyclone Biparjoy, set to whirl in from the Arabian Sea and make landfall.

Biparjoy, which means 'disaster' or 'calamity' in the Bengali language, was centred 100 km (62 miles) off Jakhau port in India's western state of Gujarat and 240 km (149 miles) off Pakistan's southern port of Karachi, weather officials said. "We are expecting the cyclone to make landfall during the evening, around 8 or 8:30 p.m.," said Manorama Mohanty, the Gujarat director of the India Meteorological Department (IMD), which warned the process could last until midnight.

Chinese PM Meets With Palestinian President



BEIJING (Dispatches) - Chinese Premier Li Qiang met with visiting Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas in a drive by Beijing to elevate relations and increase its overall presence in the Middle East.

Li, who took office just this spring with little foreign policy experience, called Abbas "an old friend of the Chinese people" who has made "important contributions to the promotion of China-Palestinian relations."

The meeting came a day after Abbas was greeted with full military honors by Xi Jinping, China's president and head of the ruling Communist Party.

North Korea Fires Two Short-Range Ballistic Missiles



SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea fired two short-range ballistic missiles, South Korea's military said Thursday, shortly after Pyongyang warned of an "inevitable" response to ongoing US-South Korea joint military drills.

South Korea and the United States, which have ramped up defence cooperation in response to growing threats from the nuclear-armed North, are currently carrying out joint large-scale live-fire "annihilation" exercises.

Seoul's Joint Chiefs of Staff said it had detected the launch of "two short-range ballistic missiles from the Sunan area into the East Sea between 19:25 and 19:37 (1025 to 1037 GMT)," referring to the body of water also known as the Sea of Japan.

"We have stepped up monitoring in case of further provocations and are maintaining readiness in close coordination with the United States," it said, adding that the launches were a "grave provocation" which violated UN sanctions.

Tokyo also confirmed the missile launches, with a defence ministry official telling reporters that the two missiles had landed in waters within Japan's exclusive economic zone.

"The missiles may have flown on irregular trajectories," Japan's top government spokesman Hirokazu Matsuno told reporters, adding that one had flown 850 kilometres (530 miles) and the other around 900 kilometres at altitudes of 50 kilometres, before landing in Japan's EEZ.

Relations between the two Koreas are at one of their lowest points in years, with diplomacy stalled and the North's leader Kim Jong Un declaring his country an "irreversible" nuclear power, as well as calling for ramped-up weapons production, including of tactical nukes.

North Korea has conducted multiple sanctions-busting launches this year, including test-firing its most powerful intercontinental ballistic missiles, and last month attempting to put a military spy satellite into orbit.

In response, the hawkish administration of South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol has bolstered defence cooperation with the United States and Japan, including expanding joint drills, which had been scaled back because of Covid-19, and during a bout of ill-fated diplomacy.

Yoon personally watched South Korean and US troops take part in the live-fire exercises Thursday.

All such drills infuriate Pyongyang, which regards them as rehearsals for invasion.

North Korea released a statement Thursday slamming the drills, with a defence ministry spokesperson saying they were "targeting the DPRK by massively mobilizing various types of offensive weapons and equipment", referring to the country by its official name.

"Our response to this is inevitable," it added in the statement, which was carried by the official Korean Central News Agency.

It added that the drills were "escalating the military tension in the region", and warned: "Our armed forces will fully counter any form of demonstrative moves and provocation of the enemies."

On Wednesday, South Korea filed a lawsuit seeking damages from North Korea for the 2020 demolition of a liaison office.

The office was established in 2018 with funding from Seoul at an industrial zone near the border in North Korean territory, as South Korea's then-president Moon Jae-in pressed for a diplomatic breakthrough with Pyongyang.

But after that process collapsed and relations deteriorated, North Korea demolished the building in June 2020.

Seoul said it was seeking 44.7 billion won (\$35 million) in damages, with the country's Unification Ministry describing the demolition as "clearly an illegal act".

North Korea is likely to ignore any ruling by the court, but there is precedent in South Korea and the United States for damages being awarded against its government.

Ukraine Claims Gains Despite Russia Powerful Resistance

KYIV (AFP) - Kyiv reported progress in its counteroffensive on the eastern and southern fronts, despite contending with strong resistance from Russian troops.

The chief of the UN's atomic watchdog arrived in the southeastern region of Zaporizhzhia -- home to Europe's largest nuclear plant and one of the current fronts -- to assess risks to the site following the destruction of a major dam.

His visit came as Kyiv, bolstered with Western weapons and training, pushed its long-awaited effort to force Russian troops off its territory.

AFP journalists saw Ukrainian artillery continue to target Russian positions around the frontline hotspot of Bakhmut, in the eastern Donetsk region.

Moscow claimed victory in Bakhmut last month after the longest battle of the war that claimed thousands of lives and left the city in ruins.

"The enemy is pulling up additional reserves and is trying with all its might to prevent the advance of Ukrainian forces," Ukrainian Deputy Defence Minister Ganna Malyar told a briefing.

Erdogan Dampens Hopes of Sweden Joining NATO in July

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan rebuffed growing international pressure on Ankara to ratify Sweden's NATO membership bid before the Western defense alliance meets in July.

Western officials had hoped Erdogan would soften his position on the diplomatically charged issue after he secured a hard-fought re-election last month.

But Erdogan signalled no major shift in comments released by his office as Turkish and Swedish officials were locked in a new round of talks in Ankara.

"Sweden has expectations. It doesn't mean that we will comply with them," Erdogan was quoted as saying.

"In order for us to meet these expectations, first of all, Sweden must do its part." Sweden and its Nordic neighbor Finland ended decades of military non-alignment and applied to join the US-led defense bloc in response to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Turkey and fellow NATO member Hungary -- both pushing a more accommodating line with Russia -- were the last to ratify Finland's membership this year.

But both countries' parliaments have yet to approve Sweden's entry.

Unanimous backing is needed for new countries to secure the guarantees afforded by the world's most powerful defense alliance.

US President Joe Biden pressed Erdogan about Sweden during a call he placed a day after the Turkish leader extended his two-decade rule until 2028.

Ankara hopes to win US congressional approval of a major defence package that could substantially modernise Turkey's ageing fleet of fighter jets.

Biden directly linked the F-16 fighters' sale with the Swedish bid for the first time.

Erdogan "still wants to work on something on the F-16s. I told him we wanted a deal with Sweden, so let's get that done," Biden told reporters after the call.

And NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg personally discussed the bid with Erdogan in Istanbul ahead of an alliance summit in Lithuania in July.

Greece Searches for Hundreds Feared Missing After Migrant Boat Sank

KALAMATA (Dispatches) - Rescue ships fanned out in search of hundreds of migrants feared missing after their overcrowded boat capsized and sank as they tried to reach Europe. At least 78 people died.

So far, 104 people who were aboard the fishing boat traveling from Libya to Italy have been rescued, but authorities fear that many more may have been trapped below deck. If confirmed, that would make the tragedy one of the worst ever recorded in the central Mediterranean.

"The chances of finding (more survivors) are minimal," retired Greek coast guard admiral Nikos Spanos told state-run ERT television.

The U.N. migration agency, known as IOM, estimated that the vessel was carrying 700 to 750 people, including at least 40 children, based on interviews with survivors. Those rescued were mostly men and included Egyptians, Syrians, Pakistanis, Afghans and Palestinians, Greek officials said.

Authorities revised the confirmed death toll from 79 to 78 following an overnight count of the bodies, and rescue workers transferred the dead to refrigerated trucks.

"The survivors are in a very difficult situation. Right now they are in shock," Erasmia Roumana, head of a United Nations Refugee Agency delegation, told The Associated Press after meeting the rescued migrants in a storage hangar in the southern port of Kalamata.

"They want to get in touch with their families to tell them they are OK, and they keep asking about the missing. Many have friends and relatives unaccounted for."

Mohamed Abdi Marwan, who spoke by phone from Kobani, a Kurdish majority town in northeastern Syria, said that five of his relatives were on the boat, including one who 14 years old. Marwan said he's heard nothing about his relatives since the vessel sank. He believes his nephew Ali Sheikhi, 29, is alive, after family members spotted him in photos of survivors, but Marwan said friends are still making their way to the makeshift camp in Greece to confirm.

"Those smugglers were supposed to only have 500 on the boat and now we hear there were 750. What is this? Are they cattle or humans? How can they do this?" Marwan said. He said that each of his relatives paid \$6,000 for the trip.

Greece declared three days of mourning and politicians suspended campaigning for a general election on June 25. A Supreme Court prosecutor ordered an investigation into the circumstances of the deaths.

Greek authorities said that the vessel appeared to be sailing normally until shortly before it sank, and declined repeated offers of rescue, while a network of activists said they received repeated distress calls from the vessel during the same time.



Boris Johnson Deliberately Mised Parliament

LONDON (Dispatches) - Boris Johnson deliberately misled the British parliament in an unprecedented way over rule-breaking parties at his office during COVID-19 lockdowns, a committee said on Thursday in a damning verdict that further tarnished the former prime minister.

Almost a year ago, Johnson was talking about remaining prime minister into the 2030s. But the privileges committee - the main disciplinary body for lawmakers - said on Thursday he should now be stripped of having automatic access to parliament.

The committee also accused Johnson of being "complicit in a campaign of abuse and attempted intimidation" towards them.

In typically combative style Johnson, who in 2019 led the Conservatives to a landslide election victory, dismissed the report as "a lie" and "a charade", and accused committee members of waging a vendetta against him.

The stand-off will do little to heal the deep divisions in the Conservatives and can only pile pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak, whose push to try to boost Britain's flagging economy is being overshadowed by the ongoing Johnson drama.

The more than 100-page report detailed six events held at Downing Street, the prime minister's offices and residence.

"We conclude that in deliberately misleading the House Mr Johnson committed a serious contempt," the committee said:

"The contempt was all the more serious because it was committed by the prime minister, the most senior member of the government. There is no precedent for a prime minister having been found to have deliberately misled the House (of Commons, lower house of parliament)."

It recommended that he should not be entitled to a former member's pass, which enables most former prime ministers and lawmakers to gain automatic access to parliament. Parliament will consider the committee's recommendation on Monday.

Asked about the report's conclusions, a spokesman for Sunak said the prime minister had not as yet read it but he believed the committee had carried out the inquiry properly and "that it would not be right to traduce or criticise the work" of it.

The committee, made up of four Conservatives and three opposition lawmakers, rejected Johnson's defence that the gatherings were within the rules and that his advisers had supported his belief that was the case.

One Vision: The Surgeon, the Millionaire And 500,000 Eyes

BASANTAPUR (Dispatches) - She never dances with her husband, but when the bandages were peeled from her eyes after a double cataract operation to cure her blindness, Nepali farmer Santi Maya leapt up to clasp his hands.

"I am so happy," said Maya, who does not know how old she is, as the elderly couple swayed on the playground of a school converted into a temporary eye hospital.

"I can see the world," she cried. "Yesterday everything was closed. Today, I can see everywhere."

Now she will be able to do household chores again and collect grass for the cattle, she added.

Maya was one of more than 200 beneficiaries of a cataract treatment camp in Basantapur, a small town perched high on a Himalayan hillside.

It was run by a pioneering surgeon who has performed more than 130,000 operations, funded by a tech multimillionaire once jailed in the United States for mail fraud. The pair plan to restore the vision of 500,000 people worldwide by 2030.

Nepal has one of the world's highest rates of cataracts, where the lens of the eye slowly clouds over, with vision blurring before giving way to blindness.

It has multiple causes but in the developing world poverty is a key driver.

For subsistence farmers whose livelihoods are marginal at the best of times, the impact can be devastating – and doubly so for their families, who lose a breadwinner and at the same time have to take on the burden of care.

"It feels like you have become a corpse," said farmer Rudra Prasad Nepal, 66, after his left eye was unwrapped. "I could not differentiate what is seed, what is fertilizer, what is pesticide and what to use," he explained.

"If you are old and cannot see, you feel hated in your home or family."

Anaesthetised with an injection into the eyeball, each patient has their eyelids drawn back with retractors recalling a scene from "A Clockwork Orange".

Surgeon Sanduk Ruit sliced into the cornea from the side, removing the clouded lens whole or cutting it up with an ultrasound knife, working barefoot to better adjust the pedals under the operating table that control his microscope's focus and suction.

He slid in a new lens matching the patient's vision prescription, made for as little as four dollars by his institute's factory in Kathmandu, before cauterising the wound. Each operation was finished in around seven minutes.

At 68, he is well into six figures for lifetime surgeries and has multiple international awards to his name, but remains keenly aware that every procedure "could change not only the vision of this patient, but the entire outcome of his life, his family".

"That's not a small thing to be given responsibility" for, he added.

But when he removes the bandages the next day and sees their reaction, "every time that makes me giggle".

Ruit grew up in Olangchung Gola, a remote village towards both the Chinese border and Kanchenjunga, the world's third-highest mountain -- and nine hours' walk from the nearest motorable dirt road.

Culturally Tibetan, its people are Walung, one of the smallest groups in Nepal's ethnic patchwork, and largely yak herders and traders.

It is an unlikely origin for a pioneering surgeon, but Ruit's father recognised his potential early and enrolled him at missionary school in Darjeeling, the best education he could afford.



Lithium Boom Comes to Brazil's Misery Valley'

ARACUAI (Dispatches) - In a cloud of gray dust, a heavy-duty excavator loads a truck with stone blocks containing lithium, the "white gold" of the clean-energy revolution, which some hope will transform this parched, impoverished region of Brazil.

Sun-scorched and drought-prone, the Jequitinhonha valley, in the southeastern state of Minas Gerais, is one of the poorest places in the country.

But the region, nicknamed "misery valley," is on the cusp of a boom: it is home to around 85 percent of the lithium reserves in Brazil, the world's fifth-biggest producer of the metal, an essential ingredient in electric vehicle batteries.

Authorities in the region are eager to tap the potential of the silvery-white metal.

Last month they threw a fanfare-filled event at the Nasdaq stock exchange's headquarters in New York, where they launched an initiative to attract investment to what they are calling "Lithium Valley."

Not everyone is thrilled at the idea, however.

Some residents in the region of around one million people complain about the environmental impact of lithium mining, others that local communities are not being included.

"This is the Jequitinhonha valley... They want to call it 'Lithium Valley.' But let's not put mining interests before our people's identity," says Aline Gomes Vilas, 45, a local activist in the town of Aracuai.

Ana Cabral-Gardner, chief executive of Canadian mining firm Sigma Lithium, is keen to respond to such criticism.

Her company, which started mining in the valley in April, is among the first to tap its lithium reserves. Its goal is to produce more than 600,000 vehicle batteries' worth of the metal in its first year, eventually scaling up to three times that amount.

Sigma calls itself a "green lithium" miner, and emphasizes its social and environmental credentials.

Lithium mining is notoriously water-intensive, a problem given that the metal is typically found in water-poor regions.

The impoverished Jequitinhonha valley is home to around 85 percent of the lithium reserves in Brazil. Cabral-Gardner, who is Brazilian, says her company reuses 90 percent of its water supplies, protects the local stream and uses no chemicals in the mining process.

"Our entire operation is built around finding a balance between sustainability and mining," she tells AFP. "I've been called the 'hippie CEO.'"

In Aracuai, which sits near Sigma's mine, Gomes Vilas says it is already having a negative impact, including damage to people's homes from explosions used in the mining process.

"This was a peaceful rural area. Now there's a constant racket. There are already houses with cracks in the walls from the explosions," she says.

"The whole house shakes every time there's an explosion," adds Luiz Gonzaga, a 71-year-old farm worker who lives next to the mine.

"They're digging pretty far from me for now, and the dust is already bothering us. Imagine what it will be like when they start digging closer."

Brazil, a country with a history of rapacious resource booms and busts, needs to ensure communities like this benefit from lithium mining, advocates say.



Airport Threatens Albania's Fragile Wild Paradise



NARTA (Dispatches) - Flamingos and Dalmatian pelicans laze in the azure waters of a shallow lagoon near Albania's Adriatic coast.

But this avian paradise's days may be numbered, ecologists warn, with a new airport being built close by to cash in on the Balkan nation's tourism boom.

Its construction near Vlora has triggered protests from environmentalists, who say it is being built inside a protected area and poses a serious risk to a variety of birds.

"This project goes against the laws of nature," said Zydjon Vorspi of the Protection and Preservation of Natural Environment in Albania group.

"Building such vast infrastructure in an area known worldwide for its exceptional biodiversity means blocking the birds' paths and creating major problems for local, as well as international, populations."

The lagoon is fed by the Vjosa, billed as Europe's last major "wild river", which was given national park status with much fanfare by the Albanian government in March after a campaign supported by Hollywood star Leonardo DiCaprio.

Millions of birds pass through the Narta lagoon and the nearby Karavasta estuary to the north every year, providing critical grounds for migratory species travelling between northern Europe and the African continent.

The airport will likely have a direct impact on the habitat, ecologists say, with jets disrupting migratory flyways and nesting areas that could irreparably damage the fragile ecosystem.

"We can already see that some species are worried," Niko Dumani, a biodiversity specialist, told AFP.

S.Africa Clinic Hopes to Save Penguins' Future

GQEBERHA (Dispatches) - A small fish is dangled under the beak of an emaciated penguin at a South African clinic, to whet the bird's appetite.

The sickly animal is among dozens undergoing treatment in the coastal town of Gqeberha, where a dedicated rehabilitation center is on a mission to bring African penguins back from the brink of extinction.

"We are trying to reverse some of the human damage caused to these birds over the years," says Caitlin van der Merwe, a seabird ranger at the Southern African Foundation for the Conservation of Coastal Birds (SANCCOB).

Threatened by climate change and human activity, the endangered species, which waddles awkwardly on land but turns into a fast-swimming torpedo in the water, has suffered a drastic decline in numbers.

Around 50,000 mating pairs — penguins are monogamous — inhabited the shorelines of South Africa and Namibia three decades ago. Today the number has dropped to 10,000 pairs.

That's a jaw-dropping 80 per cent population decrease, which zoologists say is even more worrying given that a healthy penguin population is considered indicative of a healthy marine ecosystem.

"The species declining, that means there's a big issue in the marine environment," says Carl Havemann, who heads the penguin clinic.

The center is currently teeming with feathered patients.

Over the past two weeks, about 40 baby penguins have been transferred here from Bird Island, an islet home to one of Africa's largest penguin colonies about 60 kilometers off Gqeberha, formerly known as Port Elizabeth.

Heavy rains have battered the island, washing away nests and chicks.

The little black and white birds traditionally dug their nests into a thick layer of guano — a mixture of droppings and remains that accumulate over time.

But the organic substance has been plundered for use as natural fertiliser, and the penguins now have to make do with branches or in cracks in the rocks, which make for a less sturdy home.

And for the first three months of their lives the birds are covered only by grey plumage that offers little protection from water and cold.

The rains caused many to drown or die of hypothermia.

"With climate change, weather events are becoming more and more extreme and these obviously impact the natural colonies," Havemann says.

Some survivors are being treated in the seabird rehabilitation center's intensive care unit, where staff are busy disinfecting, stitching and bandaging wounds.

Footbaths, sardines and medicines are also part of the treatment.

In total, around 100 birds, both young and adult, are cared for in the clinic.

The goal is to return them to the wild in the shortest time possible, limiting interaction with humans to what is strictly necessary.

The penguins huddle together, their shoulders raised as if they are perennially cold.

Some are kept hydrated through a small tube inserted in their gullets. Desperate ones are euthanised. For those who are fit enough, rehab continues in the pool.

"If they don't swim, they don't drink," says van der Merwe, as she whispers soothing words to a small penguin furiously waving its wings while she holds it between her thighs.

It is suffering from borreliosis, an infectious disease caused by bacteria, and needs antibiotics.

Besides extreme weather events, African penguins are also threatened by diseases, overfishing and pollution. Gqeberha is home to a major port and huge cargo ships refuel offshore.

Spills in the recent past have seen frantic attempts to rescue and clean up oil-tarred penguins.

At current rates of decline, African penguins could become extinct within a decade, according to the Environment Ministry.

"The ocean has such a complexity. If we take bits here and there, the whole system will collapse," van der Merwe says.

Repentant Ranchers Rescuing Colombian Wildlife



BOGOTA (Dispatches) - Two newborn pumas and a convalescening porcupine share a room in the home of the Zapata family, which has renounced livestock farming to focus on stewardship of the Colombian Amazon and its animals uprooted by deforestation.

Just over a decade ago, the Zapatas decided to change their ways, and instead of cutting back trees for pasture, plant new ones.

They sold their cows and let the jungle claim back most of their land in San Jose de Guaviare in southern Colombia.

Today, the family of three work to rehabilitate animals affected in a variety of cruel ways by humanity's encroachment on nature.

They sacrificed part of their home and backyard, where for the moment they house 60 creatures, ranging from monkeys, birds and armadillos to a spotted wild cat known as an ocelot.

"This farm was dedicated to cattle raising: 56 hectares of which only about 12 (hectares) were... forest," said Dora Sanchez, who runs the ranch-turned-reserve with husband Hector Zapata, 57, and daughter Samantha, 23.

"Little by little, my family understood that (conservation) is a good thing," the 48-year-old told AFP on the former ranch now called the Nupana reserve.

"We must preserve and protect the forest, because it is the source of life... We are one hundred percent convinced that it is the jungle" that is the future, she added.

Like many others in this rural department of Guaviare, the Zapatas were attracted by the dream of making a new life in a "land without men for men without land."

Eni Intensifies Talks to Sell Stake in Low-Carbon Unit

MILAN (Dispatches) - Italian energy group Eni has intensified talks with several investors over a potential sale of a minority stake in its renewables and retail business Plenitude, three sources with knowledge of the matter said.

Two of the sources said that Eni is working on a disposal of between 5% and 15% of Plenitude and could even do a deal before Italy's summer break, which is normally in August.

Plenitude, which last year recorded an adjusted operating profit of 345 million euros, could be valued at more than 6 billion euros (\$6.5 billion) in the private transaction, one of the sources said.



Peak in Oil Demand in Sight Before End of Decade

LONDON (Dispatches) - Global oil demand could peak before the end of this decade as the energy crisis has accelerated the transition to cleaner technologies, the International Energy Agency (IEA) said.

The Paris-based agency forecast in its Oil 2023 medium-term market report that annual demand growth would slow sharply over the next five years, from 2.4 million barrels per day this year to 400,000 bpd in 2028.

"The shift to a clean energy economy is picking up pace, with a peak in global oil demand in sight before the end of this decade as electric vehicles, energy efficiency and other technologies advance," IEA Executive Director Fatih Birol said in a statement.

"Oil producers need to pay careful attention to the gathering pace of change and calibrate their investment decisions to ensure an orderly transition," Birol said.

Energy prices soared last year after Russia, a major exporter of fossil fuels, invaded Ukraine and cut deliveries of natural gas to Europe.

Western powers imposed bans and price caps on Russian oil exports to drain a major source of cash for Moscow's war effort. Oil and gas prices have fallen in the past several months.

World demand for oil will rise by 6% between 2022 and 2028 to reach 105.7 million barrels per day because of the needs of the petrochemical and aviation sectors, the IEA said.

But annual growth will slow significantly, from 2.4 million bpd day this year to just 400,000 bpd in 2028. "Growth in the world's demand for oil is set to slow almost to a halt in the coming years," the IEA said. In its 2022 World Energy Outlook, the IEA had forecast world demand peaking and stabilizing after 2035.

But the energy crisis is "hastening the shift toward cleaner energy technologies," the organization said.

The use of oil for the transport sector should decline after 2026 as more and more electric vehicles hit the road, it said.

The need for oil will decline from 2024 in the 38 nations that are part of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development, whose members range from Australia to European countries, Japan, Mexico and the United States.

"Nevertheless, burgeoning petrochemical demand and strong consumption growth in emerging economies will more than offset a contraction in advanced economies," the IEA said.

Demand growth in China, the world's second-biggest economy, will slow "markedly from 2024 onward" following a post-COVID rebound this year.

"Global oil markets are still slowly recalibrating after three turbulent years in which they were upended first by the COVID-19 pandemic and then by Russia's invasion of Ukraine," the agency said.

"Global oil markets could tighten significantly in the coming months," it added, noting production cuts by the OPEC+ alliance of major producers led by Saudi Arabia and Russia. "However, the multifaceted strains on markets look set to ease in the following years."

While demand is set to slow, global investments in oil and gas exploration, extraction and production are "on course to reach their highest levels since 2015" with a 15% annual rise to \$528 billion in 2023.

U.S. Consumer Prices Slow in May

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - U.S. consumer prices rose moderately in May, leading to the smallest annual increase in inflation in more than two years, though underlying price pressures remained strong, supporting views that the Federal Reserve (Fed) would keep interest rates unchanged on Wednesday while adopting a hawkish posture.

The Consumer Price Index (CPI) increased 0.1% last month as gasoline prices fell, the Labor Department said Tuesday. The CPI gained 0.4% in April. In the 12 months through April, the CPI climbed 4.0%. That was the smallest year-on-year increase since March 2021 and followed a 4.9% rise in April.

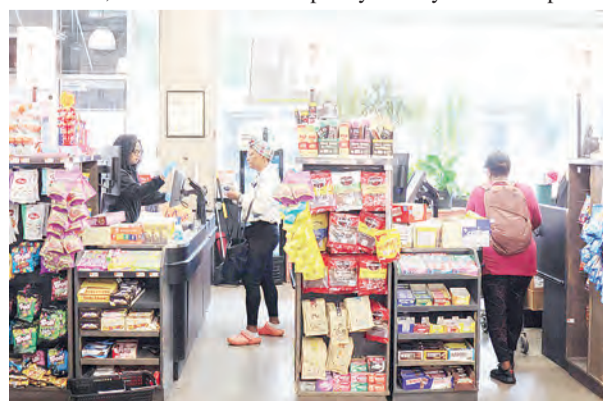
The annual CPI peaked at 9.1% in June 2022, which was the biggest increase since November 1981, and is subsiding as last year's large rises drop out of the calculation.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI gaining 0.2% last month and increasing 4.1% year-over-year.

The report was published as Fed officials prepared to gather for a two-day policy meeting. Data this month offered a mixed picture of the labor market, with nonfarm payrolls increasing solidly in May, but the unemployment rate rising to a seven-month high of 3.7% from a 53-year low of 3.4% in April.

Economists believe that the gradual inflation and labor market slowdown gives the U.S. central bank enough room to skip raising interest rates on Wednesday for the first time since March 2022 when the Fed embarked on its fastest monetary policy tightening campaign in more than 40 years.

The Fed, which has hiked its policy rate by 500 basis points, is expected to leave the door open to further rate increases.



With the economy showing signs of slowing, economists argue that the Fed should pause further rate increases while assessing the impact of the steps it has taken so far to cool demand.

Overall inflation is decelerating, thanks to energy and food costs. Food commodity prices have dropped back to levels seen prior to Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

Inflation is, however, proving to be sticky excluding these volatile categories, and remains well above the Fed's 2% target. The so-called core CPI increased 0.4% in May, rising by the same margin for the third straight month.

High rents continued to put upward pressure on the core CPI, with used cars and trucks also providing a boost. The rise in used cars and trucks reflects the delayed impact of increases during winter and early spring.

China's Economy Slows In May, Firming Case For More Support

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy stumbled in May with industrial output and retail sales growth missing forecasts, adding to expectations that Beijing will need to do more to shore up a shaky post-pandemic recovery.

The economic rebound seen earlier this year has lost momentum in the second quarter, prompting China's central bank this week to cut some key interest rates, with expectations of more to come.

Industrial output grew 3.5% in May from a year earlier, the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) said on Thursday, slower than the 5.6% expansion in April and slightly below a 3.6% increase expected by analysts in a Reuters poll, as manufacturers struggle with weak demand at home and abroad.

Retail sales - a key gauge of consumer confidence - rose 12.7%, missing forecasts of 13.6% growth and slowing from April's 18.4%.

"All the data points so far sent consistent signals that the economic momentum is weakening," said Zhiwei Zhang, president of Pinpoint Asset Management.

Data ranging from factory surveys and trade to loan growth and home sales have shown signs of weakness for the world's second-biggest economy. Crude steel output extended both year-on-year and month-on-month falls in May while daily coal output fell from April too, NBS figures showed.

The soft run of data has defied analyst expectations for a sharper pickup, given comparisons with last year's very weak performance, when many cities were under strict COVID lockdowns.

The figures also reinforce the case for more stimulus as China faces deflationary risks, mounting local government debts, record youth unemployment and weakening global demand.

"Insufficient domestic demand and sluggish external demand could interrupt the momentum in the ongoing months, leaving China with a more gradual U-shape recovery trajectory on its month-on-month growth path," said Bruce Pang, chief economist at Jones Lang LaSalle.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

Introducing stimulus with large-scale policy easing would be the first step, Pang said. "But it could need two to three years to shore up a slowing economic recovery."

China's central bank on Thursday cut the interest rate on its one-year medium-term lending facility, the first such easing in 10 months, paving the way for cuts in the benchmark loan prime rates (LPR) next week.

The yuan hit a fresh six-month low after the rate cut and China's stock markets rose, with the benchmark CSI 300 gaining 0.6% and Hong Kong's Hang Seng Index climbing 1.2%.

Markets are also betting on more stimulus, including measures targeting the floundering property sector, once a key driver of growth.

New Zealand Dips Into Recession, Putting Rate Hikes in Doubt

WELLINGTON (Dispatches) - New Zealand slipped into recession as the economy shrank in the first quarter, data showed, reducing the risk the central bank would need to hike interest rates further but creating a new headwind for the government's re-election hopes.

Gross domestic product (GDP) matched analysts' expectations of a 0.1% contraction in the March quarter but was well below the Reserve Bank of New Zealand's (RBNZ) forecast of 0.3% growth. Furthermore, fourth-quarter GDP was revised to a contraction of 0.7% from a decline of 0.6%.

The New Zealand dollar slipped 0.2% to \$0.6197 after the data as it was in line with market expectations and gave traction to the central bank's position that no further interest rate hikes would be needed.

Weakness in the economy was broad-based with output from half of the country's industries contracting, according to the Statistics New Zealand data. Growth was hurt by the impact of two major cyclones and flash floods in Auckland in January and February. "It's clear that the New Zealand economy is losing momentum," Westpac senior economist Michael Gordon said in a note. "What remains to be seen is whether things have slowed enough to put us on a path back to low and stable inflation."

Employment remains strong in New Zealand, limiting the effects for many people of a recessionary environment.

However, while the recession remains technical after two consecutive quarters of contraction, it has become a significant political issue as New Zealand heads towards an election in October, with voters struggling with higher living costs.

Siemens to Invest \$2.2b to Ramp Up Global Production

ZURICH (Dispatches) - Siemens will spend 2 billion euros (\$2.16 billion) on a new global investment plan, the German engineering and technology group said on Thursday, as it gears up to meet increased demand triggered by global stimulus packages.

Siemens will build new factories, research and development centers and training sites around the world, the company said in a statement, as it aims to tackle problems exposed by the COVID pandemic and rising geopolitical tensions.

As part of the investment program, which will cover announcements made during 2023, Siemens will spend 200 million euros on a new plant for its industrial automation division in Singapore.

"Siemens is experiencing significantly above-market growth. Today we announce an investment strategy to boost future growth, drive innovation and increase resilience," said Siemens Chief Executive Roland Busch in a statement.

Siemens will also increase its research and development spending by 500 million euros this year, the company said on Thursday.

The company, which employs 311,000, is seen as a bellwether for the health of the global industrial economy. In 2022 it increased its annual sales by 16% to 72 billion euros.

"This wave of investments is supported by our record order backlog and reflects our confidence in the future," Busch later told an event in Singapore.

The company has previously said it expects its total addressable market for its products, which range from trains to industrial software, to expand by 7% per year between 2022 to 2027.

The increase will be partly driven by stimulus programs, such as the Inflation Reduction Act in the United States and Europe's Green Deal. Siemens also wants to grow faster than rivals and increase market share, Busch told analysts last month.

The investment program - which will see further investment in Europe and the United States - could also be a response to the global COVID-19 pandemic, which gummed up supply chains and logistics.

Rising tensions between Beijing and Washington have made many companies wary of their dependence on China, especially with U.S. attempts to block China's access to the latest technology.

Busch had originally favoured China as a location for the Singapore project but he faced resistance from Siemens's supervisory board worried about the growing geopolitical tensions in the region, German business newspaper Wirtschaftswoche said earlier this week.

Goldman Sachs Slashes Year-End Oil Price Forecast to \$86



LONDON (Dispatches) - Goldman Sachs has slashed its year-end oil price forecast to \$86 per barrel Brent, down from a previous projection of \$95, as it sees higher supply from sanctioned oil exporters offsetting the recent OPEC+ and Saudi cuts amid potentially underwhelming demand.

Goldman analysts have been bullish on oil in recent months, expecting tight markets in the second half of the year. Less than two weeks ago, the Wall Street bank said it expects a rally in oil and commodities, after the biggest-ever destocking in commodities that is currently underway. But even back then, Goldman's analysts acknowledged their price calls had been wrong so far this year.

"Bulls, like ourselves, find comfort in the fact that end-use demand across the commodity complex has not shown recessionary signs and investment in supply remains elusive," Goldman's analysts said in the note at the end of May, as carried by Bloomberg. "But this misses the point that we were wrong on price expectations."

Between the end of May and the second week of June, the OPEC+ producers decided to keep the current cuts until the end of 2024, while OPEC's top producer, Saudi Arabia, said it would voluntarily reduce its production by 1 million bpd in July, to around 9 million bpd. The cut could be extended beyond July, Saudi Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said.

Despite the unilateral Saudi cut and the extended production reductions at the broader OPEC+ group, Goldman Sachs now sees little chance of an oil price spike later this year, expecting Brent at \$86 a barrel in December, and WTI Crude at \$81, down from \$89 per barrel in the previous forecast.

Resilient Russian oil supply and higher-than-expected supply from Iran and Venezuela will weigh on prices, according to the bank.

"After an initial sharp 1.5 million barrels per day drop, Russian supply has nearly fully recovered despite the decision by many companies to stop buying Russian barrels," Goldman's analysts wrote in a June 11 note as carried by CNBC.

Iranian "Zoo" Wins Award At Beijing Int'l Film Festival

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian short film "The Zoo" written and directed by Nafiseh Zare' has been awarded at the 13th Beijing International Film Festival in China.

Produced by Kaveh Mazaheri and Sorena Ekbatani, 'The Zoo' was featured in the 12th Beijing International Short Film Festival held on November 18-28, 2022.

According to the film's synopsis, Ra'na is looking for a deer she has dreamt of in the zoo while her mother is trying to tell her important news.

Earlier in January, "The Zoo" was chosen as the joint winner of the best film prize at the Second Diyarbakir International Short Film Festival in Turkey.



In China's Lithium Hub, Mining Boom Comes at a Cost

YICHUN (Dispatches) - Down a steep dirt road from the Baishi Huashan lithium mine in southern China, trucks laden with silvery grey ore rumble towards a cluster of smelters in the valley below that have sprung up to cash in on the electric vehicle battery boom.

The city of Yichun, China's most prospective region for lithium, is ground zero in the country's push to cut its reliance on imports of the metal for its battery industry, which makes three-quarters of the world's lithium-ion batteries.

Mining the metal from a rock called lepidolite, Yichun aims to quadruple its output to about 350,000 metric tons of lithium carbonate equivalent (LCE) by 2025, or as much as the world's top exporter Australia produced last year.

However, with much higher production costs than other Chinese mining regions, Yichun is the most vulnerable to the recent global fall in lithium prices, raising questions about how it will meet its target.

At the same time, concern is growing about the environmental impact of extracting lithium ore from lepidolite, which has already led Yichun authorities to shut some plants, further challenging the country's drive for self-reliance.

Monthly output in Yichun has fallen by about a third after China moved to rein in a chaotic rush into the sector, while Beijing also slashed EV subsidies, which hit lithium demand and hammered prices.

"Many investments in Yichun are now at risk after prices fell this year," said Yang Yaohua, an analyst at Guosen Futures.

With global lithium demand forecast to grow 76% to 1.57 million metric tons LCE between 2022 and 2025, according to Australian bank Macquarie, and China dependent on imports for 55% of its lithium, Beijing wants to boost domestic output.

Yichun, a city of 5 million people surrounded by forest-covered mountains rich with lepidolite, is leading that push.

By the end of last year, 202 companies, including battery giants CATL and Gotion High Tech, had invested in the city's smelters and mines, according to Yichun's website.

For battery materials makers, Yichun's location is its main attraction. Its mines are more accessible than the brine lakes on China's western plateaus and the spodumene rock in southwestern Sichuan province.

To draw investment, the city has rolled out a raft of sweeteners in recent years, targeting 500,000 metric tons a year of lithium carbonate production from lepidolite and other sources.

It has supported mine development by taking stakes in mining companies to help battery materials makers that do not have mines overseas like those owned by China's top lithium producers Ganfeng Lithium, and Tianqi Lithium.

By comparison, development in other lithium-rich regions is far behind.

"There are very few battery precursor makers in Qinghai, and the brine lake production in Qinghai and Tibet plateau areas can be very limited during extremely cold winter weather," said Arena Yang, a Shanghai-based battery metals analyst at CRU.

However, Yichun faces a big cost disadvantage. Separating lithium from lepidolite can cost as much as 100,000 yuan per metric ton, compared to 40,000-50,000 yuan for brine and 50,000-60,000 yuan for spodumene, analysts said.

The cost difference was manageable until lithium prices plunged after Beijing cut EV subsidies this year.

"The higher costs are concerning, especially if lithium prices remain on a downtrend," said Yang, the Guosen analyst.

He sees lithium prices falling to 100,000 yuan as soon as next year from 320,000 yuan currently because of a looming global surplus.

Further dimming the outlook for lepidolite, environmental damage is a growing concern.

Along the road to the Baishi mine, red banners implore: "Unite to crack down on natural resources chaos".



Lepidolite extraction and smelting produces toxic by-products like thallium and tantalum that cause severe water pollution, said Wu Wei, an assistant professor at Xiamen University.

Yichun authorities have already found toxic substances in the Jin River, according to media reports.

Eric Norris, president of Energy Storage at the world's top lithium miner Albemarle Corp (ALB.N), said miners in the U.S. would never be allowed to do the kind of processing seen in China for lepidolite.

"It comes at a huge environmental cost," Norris told Reuters in an interview.

In December, Yongxing Special Materials Technology (002756.SZ) said production at a subsidiary's plant in Yichun was suspended for 10 days while authorities investigated abnormal water quality found in the Jin River.

Around the same time, Chinese media outlet The Paper said Yongxing's plant was among four Yichun factories that suspended output after high levels of thallium were found in water samples from the river, a main source of water supply in the area.

Reuters has not independently confirmed the pollution incidents. Yongxing did not respond to emailed questions. Yichun government's news department did not answer several calls. Jiangxi provincial government's news department did not respond to a request for comment.

By 2025, if Yichun reached its target of 500,000 metric tons a year of lithium carbonate output, it would produce about 10 million tons of tailings, said Lv Jun, director of Yichun's lithium battery new energy industry development centre.

That would be more than ten times the current tailings handling capacity in Yichun, said Ma Jun, director at the Institute of Public & Environmental Affairs (IPE), a non-profit organisation in Beijing, citing public information.

"Previously, local environmental supervision was not strict. As it gets stricter now, lithium resources in Yichun will lose their competitiveness with the higher costs for environmental protection," Ma said.

For now, many companies are forging ahead, while seeking better control over costs, said Vicky Zhao, senior analyst at Fastmarkets.

But questions linger over Yichun's ambitions.

UBS analysts see China's supply of lithium from lepidolite tripling to 280,000 metric tons, or 13% of global supply, between 2022 and 2025, well short of Yichun's target.

"Unless lepidolite producers find a way to solve the environment and costs issues via technology innovation and industry upgrade, it will remain a second choice to spodumene," said Li Qi, an analyst at British consultancy Benchmark Mineral Intelligence.

Leader Hails Recent...

FROM PAGE 1

The Leader congratulated the Islamic Jihad on its historic triumph against the occupying entity early last month and stressed that the current status of the Israeli regime is "much different" compared to 70 years ago.

"The Palestinian Islamic Jihad did well in the test of the recent battle of Gaza, and now the conditions for the Zionist regime have changed compared to 70 years ago, and the Zionist leaders have the right to worry about not seeing the regime's 80th year," Ayatollah Khamenei noted.

"Today, the Zionist enemy is in a position of passivity and reaction, and this situation shows that the Palestinian Islamic Jihad and resistance groups have correctly identified the path and are following it," Ayatollah Khamenei said.

Stressing that achieving great goals requires taking great risks, the Leader said, "Today, by the grace of God, the strength and credibility of the Palestinian resistance groups and Islamic Jihad is increasing day by day, and the Zionist regime's recent defeat in the five-day war confirms this."

The Leader said that the Islamic Jihad and other Palestinian resistance groups have discovered the main "key" to fight the Israeli regime. "The growing power of the resistance groups in the West Bank is the key to bringing the Zionist enemy to its knees, and this path must continue."

Ayatollah Khamenei appreciated the Palestinian combatant groups' initiative for their unity in the political and battlefield arena, describing it as "very important". He underscored the continuation of the Islamic Republic's support for the Palestinian people and combatant groups.

Nakhleh, for his part, expressed his gratitude for Iran's constant support of the Palestinian people and their struggles while reporting on the recent developments in the occupied Palestinian territories.

"The Islamic Jihad emerged victorious from the Gaza war and we hope to soon witness the final victory and the liberation of al-Quds," he added.

Oman FM Says...

FROM PAGE 1

Albusaidi did not confirm Oman's involvement, but said his country has "offered in good faith our offices to help both sides, be it here or anywhere else."

Albusaidi said there is a "positive atmosphere" surrounding the nuclear issue, adding that Muscat believes Iran is serious about reaching an agreement.

"As long as the other side also reciprocates in good faith, they're willing to do this," he said.

New Iran Nuclear...

FROM PAGE 1

Even after secret talks in Oman a decade ago bore fruit and led to the signing of the JCPOA, the US, and European signatories began violating their commitments "from day one," according to Marandi, slowing the pace of sanctions relief, and the US even increasing the scope of sanctions. The JCPOA mechanism ultimately fell into disrepair after the Trump administration unilaterally pulled out in May 2018.

"So the Iranians are saying that if we are going to restart a nuclear deal, we have to make it foolproof so that the Americans and the Europeans can no longer violate it so that they can no longer tear it up without consequences. And so the talks, the negotiations that we had last year in Vienna were basically to provide a framework of protection for the 2015 nuclear deal so that there will be no ambiguities so that there would be no loopholes, so that everyone would have to abide by the commitments. We came close, the text was almost ready, but the Americans got cold feet, and ever since, we've been waiting to see if the Americans find the political will to sign the deal," he explained.

Marandi said the deal outlined in 2022 revolves around forcing all parties to commit to sequencing – that is, step-by-step implementation of the agreement to ensure that both sides are sticking to its terms.

"The other aspect of the talks that were held was that since the Americans had torn up the deal and since [former US president Barack] Obama had violated the deal, a lot of damage was done to Iran."

"So since the United States was not going to compensate financially for all the damage that they did to the Iranian people (they killed cancer patients and people vulnerable people), the Iranians said okay, then those technological advances and the new infrastructure that Iran had created after restarting its nuclear program after Trump tore up the deal – those have to be preserved. So Iran's advances had to be taken into account, Iran's new infrastructure had to be taken into account, and also a framework had to be created to make sure that the Americans carried out their commitments before the Iranians would reciprocate," Marandi said.

Goldman Cutting More Than 30 Asia Investment Banking Jobs



HONG KONG (Dispatches) - Goldman Sachs Group is cutting more than 30 banking jobs in Asia, two sources with knowledge of the matter said, as a challenging markets environment weighs on Wall Street banks' dealmaking and trading revenues.

The reduction in regional jobs, most of which are in the global banking & markets division, started on Wednesday, said the sources.

China-focused bankers were hit hardest, with nine equities capital markets bankers who are based in Beijing and Hong Kong being laid off, including a managing director, according to another two sources.

Goldman Sachs declined to comment.

The fresh cuts in Asia are part of Goldman's new round of layoffs globally that will see fewer than 250 jobs go in the coming weeks, according to a fifth person with knowledge of the situation.

Wall Street banks have been reducing headcounts since late last year as a slump in dealmaking weighed on their revenues.

Rival Morgan Stanley planned to eliminate about 3,000 jobs in the second quarter, in its second round of layoffs in six months, Reuters reported last month.

Citigroup is letting go 20 to 25 investment bankers in Asia, mostly junior and based in China and Hong Kong, according to a separate source familiar with the bank's plans.

At a Buenos Aires Soup Kitchen, Lines Grow Longer as Inflation Soars

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Anahí Robledo feeds 50 families each day at the community kitchen she runs in a poor neighborhood on the outskirts of Buenos Aires, struggling with the chronic inflation that has thrown four in every ten people in the country into poverty.

Argentina is battling an economic crisis which could see inflation hit around 150% by the end of the year, one of the highest rates in the world.

Robledo said the soup kitchen she works at can't keep up: it went from feeding 10 or 15 families to around 50 today.

"You can't keep count of the dishes we have to make for that amount of people," said Robledo, a 47-year-old domestic worker who volunteers on the side, as she kneaded bread.

"It makes me sad because nothing has changed and everything continues to get worse. I would like each family to have a plate of food on their table to eat with their children and not have to come to a soup kitchen," she said.

Argentina has long battled high inflation, currency weakness and indebtedness, but high global prices linked to the war in Ukraine and one of the country's worst-ever droughts have hit its ability to stabilize its economy.

Argentina's official statistics agency is set to release official inflation data for May later on Wednesday, with analysts predicting a monthly rise of 8.8%, even faster than the 8.4% jump a month earlier. The annual rate is already 109%.

To get the growing amount of food they need, Robledo goes to a large market on the outskirts of Buenos Aires to rummage through discarded fruit and vegetables and salvage what she can. "We go to the wholesale market and from there we get the vegetables. When the boys come out to throw them away, we grab them, clean them, chop them and freeze them," she said.

Israel's Policies Will...

FROM PAGE 1

If constructed, the Israeli settlement would effectively divide the West Bank in two, isolating East al-Quds from Palestinian communities and forcing residents to make even lengthier detours to travel from one place to another while allowing for settlements to expand.

Reports said the new construction plan appears to be an effort to mollify Netanyahu's hardline coalition partners after the shelving of the E1 settlement project.

Arouri said the Palestinian nation is paying the price for Netanyahu's extremist and radical efforts to maintain his ruling coalition.

Referring to the Israeli onslaught on the Gaza Strip on May 9-13, the Hamas official said Netanyahu committed the crime against Gaza and assassinated resistance commanders along with their families in a bid to improve his image in the Zionist society. "The existence of the Zionist regime poses a danger to the entire region," he noted, adding that Tel Aviv "seeks to explode the situation

in the region through its criminal plans and policies."

Israel has stepped up its settlement expansion activities since last December, when Netanyahu returned to power as the prime minister of the regime's most far-right cabinet.

In late March, a report by UN High Commissioner for Human Rights Volker Turk said 700,000 Israelis are living in 279 settlements across the occupied West Bank, including 14 settlements in occupied East al-Quds.

The international community regards the settlements – hundreds of which have been built across the West Bank since Tel Aviv's occupation of the territory in 1967 – as illegal under international law and the Geneva Conventions given that they have been constructed on the occupied territories.

The UN Security Council has condemned Israel's settlement activities in the occupied territories in several resolutions.

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

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

Lopez Appointed Tournament Director for Davis Cup Finals

LONDON (Dispatches) - Spanish veteran Feliciano Lopez, who will retire this season after 25 years on the ATP Tour, was appointed tournament director of the Davis Cup Finals.
Lopez, who has been the Madrid Open's tournament director since 2019, is a four-time Davis Cup champion and reached a career-high ranking of world number 12. The 41-year-old replaces compatriot David Ferrer in the role.

Kyrgios Admitted to Psychiatric Hospital After Wimbledon Loss

SYDNEY (Dispatches) - Nick Kyrgios will reveal in upcoming episodes of a Netflix documentary that he spent time in a psychiatric hospital after losing at Wimbledon in 2019, The Australian newspaper reported.
The 28-year-old was knocked out by Rafael Nadal in the second round of the championships that year while wearing a white sleeve to cover up his right arm. "I was genuinely contemplating if I wanted to commit suicide," Kyrgios says in an episode of the documentary Break Point to be released later this month, according to the newspaper.

Croatia Stun Hosts Netherlands To Reach Nations League Final

ROTTERDAM (Dispatches) - Bruno Petkovic and Luka Modric struck in extra time to fire Croatia into the Nations League final with a 4-2 victory over hosts the Netherlands. Zlatko Dalic's side, who reached the World Cup semi-finals last year, moved a step closer to earning their first ever trophy and demonstrated once again they are extra-time specialists. Andrej Kramaric and Mario Pasalic netted in the second half after Donyell Malen sent the Dutch ahead, but Noa Lang snatched a 96th-minute equaliser to force an additional half hour. However Petkovic got away from Frenkie de Jong and drilled home from outside the box to decisively put Croatia ahead eight minutes into extra time, and Modric wrapped up the win with a penalty.
The Nations League represents one of the last chances for Croatia's elder statesmen, including Real Madrid midfielder Modric, to taste international triumph.
"It's a victory for the Croatian people, we beat the Netherlands in front of their fans, Croatia has one more medal -- it's impossible, unreal, but she deserves it," Croatia coach Dalic told his country's Nova TV.
"Nothing upset the team, they know what they are playing for, above all, Croatia. You endure everything for Croatia."
"This is one of our biggest victories, to win 4-2 on their ground, we were losing, we conceded in the 96th minute."
"Surely this is a victory which will go down in history."
Croatia have only suffered one defeat in their last 16 matches, to World Cup winners Argentina, and quashed the Netherlands' bid to win their first competition since the 1988 European Championship.
Ronald Koeman's side finished as runners-up in the inaugural Nations League against hosts Portugal in 2019, while France triumphed in 2021.
"We fought like lions, but unfortunately it was just not good enough today," Netherlands captain Virgil van Dijk told Dutch broadcaster NOS.



The match started sluggishly in the evening heat, both sets of players tired after a long season with the World Cup wedged in the middle.

After a tidy team move Feyenoord's Mats Wieffer, playing in his club's stadium De Kuip, fed Malen, who slotted past Dominik Livakovic -- Croatia's World Cup hero on their run to third in Qatar.

Croatia came out stronger in the second half, with Kramaric cutting inside from the left and firing wide of the far post.

Soon they were level, when 37-year-old Modric, earning his 165th Croatia cap, cleverly robbed Gakpo on the edge of the area, with the forward pulling him back to concede a penalty. Kramaric stroked his spot kick down the middle as Justin Bijlow dived to his right to delight Croatia's travelling contingent.

Further celebrations were in order when Luka Ivanusec crossed for Atalanta midfielder Pasalic to stab home from close range after 73 minutes.

Dutch defender Nathan Ake, who featured in Manchester City's Champions League final win just five days ago, came close with an acrobatic effort before Lang pounced on a loose ball to level.

Croatia, who have beaten Brazil, Japan, England, Russia and Denmark in matches which have gone to extra-time at the last two World Cups, were nonplussed.

The Netherlands could not maintain parity for long, with Petkovic beating Bijlow at his near post. Lang fired into the side netting when he might have equalised and Netherlands paid the price when Tyrell Malacia fouled Petkovic in the area and Modric converted the penalty to seal the win.



Man City Join £100m Transfer Battle Declan Rice

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester City are considering Declan Rice as Pep Guardiola may revamp the Champions League winners' midfield.

Rice is Arsenal's top target in the summer transfer market, with Mikel Arteta reportedly having an £80 million offer rebuffed, but while Bayern Munich have abandoned their interest in the England international, the Gunners could face competition from City.

The treble winners have not submitted a bid for the 24-year-old, who West Ham value at over £100m.

Hammers chairman David Sullivan confirmed that Rice will be allowed to leave the London Stadium if a suitable offer comes in.

He has rejected an offer of a contract worth £200,000 a week and, while he has two years left on his current deal, the Europa Conference League final - when Rice captained West Ham to their first trophy in 43 years - is likely to be his last game for the club.

City may need a replacement for Captain Ilkay Gundogan, who is out of contract this summer. Guardiola wants to keep the German but Arsenal and Barcelona are also interested.

Kalvin Phillips' future is also uncertain after only starting two league games in a difficult first season with City, while Bernardo Silva has wanted to leave in previous summers.

Brazil Forward

Vinicius Jr to Lead

New Anti-Racism Committee

BARCELONA (Disptches) - Real Madrid's Vinicius Jr will lead a special FIFA anti-racism committee made up of players who will suggest stricter punishments for discriminatory behaviour in football, president Gianni Infantino told Reuters.

Brazil forward Vinicius was racially abused by fans when Madrid played Valencia in May, the 10th such incident involving the 22-year-old that LaLiga has reported to prosecutors this season.

Infantino told Reuters that as well as applying disciplinary and competition punishments, FIFA will also pursue legal action against abusers in countries where racism happens in football matches.

"There will be no more football with racism in it. The games should be stopped immediately when it happens. Enough is enough," Infantino said on Thursday, after meeting Vinicius and the Brazil national team, who play Guinea in Barcelona on Saturday as part of an anti-racism campaign led by the Brazilian FA (CBF).

"I asked Vinicius to lead this group of players that will present stricter punishments against racism that will later be implemented by all football authorities around the world.

"We need to hear the players and what they need to work in a safer environment. We are very serious about it.

"We will implement very blunt and strong punishments to end once and for all with the problem of racism in football. We can't tolerate racism anymore. As president of FIFA, I feel I needed to talk personally with Vinicius about it."

LaLiga and the Spanish FA (RFEF), the country's top football authorities, are under pressure to do more to combat racism after Vinicius received support from across the world following the abuse he suffered in Valencia.

Infantino, however, stressed that measures should be taken globally to eradicate discrimination in football and that political authorities and local prosecutors in every country also need to tackle racism with more determination.



Liverpool Stun Real Madrid With Opening Bid for Superstar

LONDON (Dispatches) - Liverpool have seen an opening bid rejected for highly-rated Real Madrid centre midfielder Federico Valverde, according to reports.

It's no secret that Jurgen Klopp is looking to further bolster his midfield and bringing in the 24-year-old would be a major statement of intent.

But now, it seems Liverpool must improve on their initial offer if they want to sign Valverde. Indeed, Carlo Ancelotti is a big fan of the Uruguay international, so it would take a lot to bring him in.

However, with the likes of Jordan Henderson, Thiago and Fabinho all past their prime, Klopp could do with some more long-term options.

Also, Naby Keita, Alex Oxlade-Chamberlain and James Milner will all depart the Reds

this summer. So, Klopp could do with signing a few midfielders.

The manager has already signed Alexis Mac Allister this summer. Liverpool brought in the Argentine for a bargain fee of just £35m. Now, it seems he will slot straight into the Liverpool starting XI next term.

But, Klopp is still on the hunt for more midfielders and has turned his attention to Valverde.

According to Spanish outlet El Nacional, Liverpool 'have seen a bid rejected for Valverde.' It isn't clear how much the Reds put on the table - but they would reportedly be willing to make a maximum offer of €80m (£68.4m) plus €20m (£17.1m) in addition.

In 2022/23, Valverde made 56 appearances across all competitions. In the process, he scored 12 goals and made seven assists.

A versatile player, the Los Blancos maestro has the ability to play anywhere in midfield, or as a right winger. So, he could provide cover in multiple positions for Klopp next season.

Also, despite Ancelotti being a big fan of Valverde, he could see his playing time reduced in the future.

Kubo Cracks

Whip as Japan

Thrash El Salvador

TOYOTA CITY (Dispatches) - Spain-based forward Takefusa Kubo said Japan "need to keep improving" after thrashing El Salvador 6-0 in a friendly Thursday to pick up their first win since the World Cup.

Kubo has been in impressive form for Real Sociedad this season, helping the Basque side finish fourth in Spain to qualify for the Champions League.

The 22-year-old was again to the fore as Japan made short work of El Salvador in Toyota, scoring one goal and setting up two others for the Blue Samurai.

Japan are aiming to win a record fifth Asian Cup title in Qatar in January and Kubo urged his team-mates to keep building momentum when they play Peru in a friendly in Osaka on Tuesday.

"This is the level that we're at the moment, and we need to keep improving," said Kubo, who swept home a pass from Brighton winger Kaoru Mitoma in the first half.

"Our next opponents will be stronger so we need to go again and get ready for the next game."

Japan scored twice in the first four minutes against El Salvador, which had defender Ronald Rodriguez sent off with two minutes on the clock.

Shogo Taniguchi headed home a Kubo free-kick in the first minute, before Ayase Ueda picked himself up after being fouled by Rodriguez to add a second from the penalty spot.



Bellingham Paying

Homage to Zidane With

Madrid No 5 Shirt

MADRID (Dispatches) - New Real Madrid signing Jude Bellingham said he wanted to pay homage to club great Zinedine Zidane by wearing his number five shirt, at his presentation on Thursday in the Spanish capital.

The England international, 19, sealed his move to Madrid from Borussia Dortmund on Wednesday for 103 million euros (\$112 million) plus up to 30 percent more in bonuses, on a six-year contract.

Bellingham spoke alongside Madrid president Florentino Perez and explained why he was opting to wear the number five shirt.

Defender Antonio Rudiger currently wears the number 22, which Bellingham has preferred to date through his career, as it is the sum of shirt numbers 10, eight and four, representing his versatility in midfield and wide skill-set.

"I've said in many interviews how much I admire Zinedine Zidane, the legacy he's had at the club with this number -- I'm just trying to be Jude, but it's definitely a bit of a homage to how great he was," Bellingham told a news conference.

"The number 22 has a big meaning for me, and in my heart I'm still number 22, just with the number 5 on my back."

