

Iranian Steelmakers Produced a Total of 6.31m Tons of Semi-Finished Products During the First Two Months of the Current Fiscal Year, 7.4% More Than in the Previous Year's Corresponding Period

IRAN NEWS

The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Forces Announced They Have Discovered and Neutralized an Explosive Device in A Waste Dump in Hashtgerd City In the Northern Province of Alborz

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2 DOMESTIC

Resistance Revealed Israel's Deterrence Power Not Real



> SEE PAGE 2

2 DOMESTIC

Resolving Banking Issues a Prerequisite for Expanding Tehran-Dhaka Ties



> SEE PAGE 2

4 INTERNATIONAL

Xi, Blinken Agree To Stabilize U.S.-China Relations in Beijing Talks



> SEE PAGE 4

8 SPORTS

Verstappen Takes Red Bull's 100th Win in F1



> SEE PAGE 8

20 Foreign Intelligence Agencies Behind Last Year Riots in Iran

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The head of the Intelligence Organization of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) has revealed that as many as 20 foreign intelligence agencies played an active role in last year's Western-backed riots in Iran.

Brigadier General Mohammad Kazemi made the statement in an exclusive interview with the official website of Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei published on Monday as he expounded on the various aspects of the violent riots triggered by the death of 22-year-old Mahsa Amini in September last year.

Kazemi said the riots broke out after American authorities realized that their foreign policies towards Iran had failed after President Joe Biden took office, and that they needed to ramp up the Trump-era's so-called pressure campaign against the Islamic Republic.

"After the Biden administration came to power, the Americans reached this strategic conclusion that they had faced failure in many foreign cases, and the reason for that was the actions of Iran and the management of its Leader; these failures had caused America's international position to be overshadowed; so, Iran must pay the price," Kazemi said in the interview. **See Page 7**

Tehran Eyes Balanced Trade Exchange With New Delhi



BY: F. TAHERPOOR

TEHRAN - Caretaker of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mehdi Zeyghami says the total trade between Iran and India was \$510m in the first quarter of 2023 and reiterated India is one of the main priorities of Iran for broadening its trade.

Speaking in the conference on introducing opportunities and capacities of presence in the Indian market, Zeyghami said that India is one of the main priorities of Iran for broadening trade, adding that the approach of TPO has been the increase of exporting goods and technical and engineering services so that India has an important stand for Iran.

He first pointed to the cultural and historical commonalities and trade between the two countries, adding that the current government in Iran has positive approach for boosting relations with India and for this reason India is one of the priorities of the current government.

He went on to say that Iran's trade with India has been favorable but sanctions have decreased this trade but last year bilateral trade was \$5b. He noted that the total trade exchange of India with Iran in the first quarter of 2023 has been \$510m, and the oil products, fruits and raw material for paint production have been the three major exporting of Iran to India. He added that rice, fruit and tea have been the major imports of Iran from India.

Zeyghami then stated that despite high potentials of both countries for broadening economic and trade relations, it is required Iranian traders to get acquainted with opportunities and capacities of this market and holding conferences can help a great deal for introducing this market.

He added that the trade balance in this period has been \$188m in favor of India, noting that Iran in recent months has been complaining about the high negative trade balance with India and has called for making the bilateral trade balanced and 29% decrease in India's exports to Iran in the first four months of 2023 has been because of this.

Zeyghami also urged Iranian traders to facilitate exports of dried fruits from Iran to India.

He reiterated that India has zero custom tariffs for some countries and it has led to the rise in smuggling of Iranian goods to India from other neighboring countries and expressed hope both sides can boost direct trade.

He said that Iran is determined to finalize preferential trade agreement with India and expressed hope it would be signed very soon.

Zeyghami then pointed to the banking and financial hurdles between the two countries, stating that some ways have been planned to broaden trade ties and PTO has on its agenda increasing the presence in the exhibitions in its target countries and it supports dispatch of trade delegation. He reiterated that without active presence of Iranian and Indian businessmen, broadening of ties is unimaginable.

Then Ambassador of India to Tehran Rudra Gaurav Shresth, for his part, said that India is working hard to reduce the banking problems despite sanctions, adding that by the way India is keen to increase its trade level with Iran in the non-sanctioned areas.

He then pointed to the importance of interactions between the private sectors of both countries, adding that accordingly economic activists of both countries are exchanged in the form of trade delegations to see broadening of ties.

He added that political problems of Afghanistan and India created challenges for export of dried fruits to India and it seems Iran can enter and have some share of dried fruits in India.

Shresth added that custom tariff of India for some countries is low, adding that this will be also solved for Iran and in terms of logistics, there are good capacity in Chabahar Port in different fields that it can restore trade ties with Indian ports.

Then Hadi Talebian Moghaddam, Head of TPO Indian Subcontinent Office, for his part, last year Iran's exports to India was some \$2.146b which showed 18% growth comparing to the preceding year.

He added that last year bilateral trade of Iran and India was \$5b and because of high potentials it is necessary potentials of Indian market to be introduced to Iranians and holding such a conference will help it.

He said that India's imports from Iran in the first quarter of 2023 grew 6% comparing to the same period in the preceding year which was \$257 while India had imported \$242b of goods in the first quarter of in the same period in the preceding year.

Talebian Moghaddam stated that despite exporting grounds for agro products some important and infrastructural trade issues can be in the trade between the two countries like preferential trade agreement, joint investment and developing infrastructures and Chabahar Port facilities for developing regional and international transit and transport.

Meanwhile Iran's Ambassador to India Iraj Elahi, for his part, said that once the trade volume between the two countries was \$18b which declined because of sanctions but fortunately it is bouncing back through some actions taken by both sides.

He said India is one of the top five trade partners of Iran and reiterated that Indian market is good for exporting Iranian goods in Asia and the world and close distance between the two countries has caused both sides to have more cooperation.

He reiterated Iran is in talks with India for issuing e-visa for Iranians and both sides are talking for holding their joint economic commission.

Iran Able to Reach New Heights With Nuclear Program

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran has been able to reach new heights with its nuclear program, despite various pressure, Vice President of Iran and Chief of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), Mohammad Eslami said.

He made the remark at a meeting with the board members of Iran's Khajeh Nasir Toosi University of Technology University.

"Despite all this, Iran has developed a nuclear industry and allowed its citizens to benefit from the opportunities created by the nuclear industry," he said.

According to Eslami, the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran, in mutual cooperation with Iran's Khajeh Nasir Toosi University of Technology University, will take fundamental steps to train specialists needed in the nuclear industry.

"The AEOI is trying to speed up the process of turning ideas into final products in the nuclear industry," he also pointed out.

He added that the country's scientists have managed to expand all radioactive generating systems during a process of design and production. **See Page 7**

UNDP Supports Iran's Plan To Deal With SDSs

TEHRAN (MNA) - Kanni Wignaraja, UN Assistant Secretary-General and United Nations Development Program (UNDP) Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific, has said the United Nations supports Iran's plan to deal with sand and dust storms.

She expressed hope that UNDP could play a useful and effective role in the issue of water and the environmental problems that exist between neighboring countries, IRNA reported.

He made the remarks in a meeting in Tehran on Tuesday with Department of Environment chief Ali Salajeqeh.

Referring to the long-term cooperation of the UN office with Iran, she said: "Our relationship has always been strong and no external factor can prevent the continuation of this cooperation."

Wignaraja went on to say that the policy of UNDP is to support the prosperity and development of countries along with the protection of natural resources and the environment.

"In this line, we are cooperating with Iran in three areas of water, waste, and wetlands." **See Page 7**

Iran Only Nation Daring To Openly Declare Support For Palestine

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Chief of the Palestinian Islamic Jihad resistance movement has hailed Iran's unwavering support for Palestinians, insisting that the Islamic Republic remains the sole nation across the globe to openly advocate for Palestine and the anti-Israeli resistance.

Iran dares to declare that it supports the Palestinian people and Palestinian resistance. No other country in the world takes such a stance so explicitly," said Islamic Jihad's Secretary-General Ziad al-Nakhaleh during a Monday interview with the Tehran-based al-Alam Arabic language TV News network.

Nakhaleh, who led a Palestinian delegation to Iran last week, also pointed to a meeting in Tehran earlier in the day between senior officials of the Palestinian Hamas and Islamic Jihad resistance movements and the Quds Force of the Islamic Revolution's Guards Corps (IRGC) as "a testament to Tehran's support for the Palestinian resistance factions" that also "highlights [persisting] strong ties between Islamic Jihad, Hamas and the Islamic Republic." **See Page 7**

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Illegal Migration to West Rooted in West's Wrong Policies

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman has censured the United States and Europe for adopting wrong policies, which have led to illegal migration from Asian and African countries to the West.

Nasser Kanaani made the remarks through a Twitter post on Tuesday while referring to the sinking of a boat carrying hundreds of refugees, including women and children, in the Mediterranean Sea off the coast of Greece. The West cannot be irresponsible in the refugee crisis, Kanaani wrote adding that most of the migrants move from Africa and Asia to the West due to the US and Europe's incorrect policies. In his remarks, the spokesman described the boat tragedy that occurred about a week ago off the coast of Greece as a sad and painful incident, expressing sympathy with grieving families.

Resistance Revealed Israel's Deterrence Power Not Real

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



that the only possible way to face it is resistance, Raisi said.

Today, no one has the slightest trust in the Zionist regime and its supporters, and this is another great achievement for the Resistance, he further said.

The most important issue of the Islamic world is the liberation of Al-Quds, he said, adding that any attempt to normalize relations with the Zionist regime is a betrayal of the Palestinian cause and a backstabbing of the Resistance movement.

Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh, for his part, said that Resistance has achieved advanced levels of strength and endurance.

He expressed gratitude for the continuous support of the Islamic Republic of Iran for the cause of the liberation of Al-Quds.

He added that the Resistance Front is expanding not only in Gaza and the West Bank but also in the occupied territories of 1948 and even among Palestinians outside of Palestine.

Heading a high-ranking delegation, Hamas Political Bureau Chief Ismail Haniyeh arrived in Tehran on Monday morning.

The trip is being held at the invitation of the Islamic Republic of Iran.

TEHRAN - The victories of the Resistance Front have revealed and proved that the image that the Zionists tried to portray of their alleged deterrence power is not real, the Iranian president said on Tuesday.

The victories of the Resistance Front showed that the claim of the Zionists about their power of deterrence is not true, President Ebrahim Raisi said in a meeting with the Hamas delegation in Tehran.

The Resistance Front is changing the balance of power not only in Palestine but in the region and the international arena, Raisi said.

Today, the signs prove that Resistance is stronger than ever and its enemies are in a weaker position than ever before, he noted.

Even those who once sought to normalize ties with the Zionist regime and its supporters have deeply concluded that it is useless to negotiate with this regime and

Nikbakht, New Agriculture Minister



TEHRAN (MNA) - Lawmakers in the Iranian parliament on Tuesday gave a vote of confidence to Mohammad-Ali Nikbakht as the country's new Minister of Agriculture Jihad.

In an open session of the parliament on Tuesday, legislators cast 198 votes in favor and 40 against Nikbakht's appointment as agriculture Jihad minister, while 10 lawmakers were abstentions.

The former minister, Javad Sadatinejad, was dismissed on April 11 after President Ebrahim Raisi conducted a partial reshuffle of his cabinet.

A ministerial nominee needs 50 percent plus one vote to win the vote of confidence from the Parliament.

Iran Becomes World's 3rd Largest Energy Subsidizer

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran is the third-largest worldwide provider of subsidies for energy consumption, according to a new report by the World Bank.

A Monday report by the IRNA cited figures from the World Bank's newly-released report, which has been compiled based on statistics from 2020, showing that the Iranian government had disbursed \$41.72 billion in energy subsidies to its citizens in that year, trailing only behind Russia and Saudi Arabia.

Electricity received the largest share of the subsidy payments provided by the Iranian government in 2020, at some \$26.51 billion.

An additional \$15.21 billion was allocated to gasoline and other oil products in that year, and \$10.44 billion to consumer subsidies for diesel.

In total, five countries; Iran, Russia, Saudi Arabia, India and Venezuela, accounted for nearly half of the world's total energy subsidies.

They collectively allocated \$211 billion in subsidies for fuel consumption to their citizens, equivalent to almost half of the world's explicit subsidies.

HOSCO Moves Ahead in Alignment With Strategies of MSC

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The CEO of Mobarakeh Steel Company (MSC) during his visit from developmental projects of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) said that HOSCO as the biggest affiliate companies of MSC with its record-breaking in the recent two years has shown that it moves ahead neck-no-neck and aligned with defined strategies by MSC for its affiliate companies.

The CEO of MSC Mr. Yaser Tayyebnia visited the developmental projects of HOSCO and also met with its CEO Mr. Araollah Maroufkhani as well as the senior officials and managers of the company.

In the meeting, Tayyebnia thanked the performance of the CEO of HOSCO and all staff and managers for registering qualitative or quantitative records last year and added that last year some main strategies were defined for the subsidiary companies of MSC and the first strategy was to make most of the existing capacities and fortunately all subsidiary companies witnessed materialization of the strategy. He added that HOSCO also could advance movement of maximum use of existing capacities and this strategy is also being pursued this year and its outcome is successive records being set in the first two months. He reiterated that the records show that HOSCO group act in accordance with MSC and some good achievements have been achieved in this regard.

Tayyebnia also hailed the management of HOSCO for rapid decision-making in some cases and said that implementation of the ongoing developmental projects of HOSCO should be accelerated.

Resolving Banking Issues a Prerequisite for Expanding Tehran-Dhaka Ties

TEHRAN - The newly elected Head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) Hossein Selahvarzi met with the Ambassador of Bangladesh in Tehran Manjural Karim Khan Chowdhury on Tuesday to discuss ways of expanding trade ties between the two countries.

In the meeting, Selahvarzi underlined resolving banking and transportation issues as a prerequisite for boosting the economic exchanges between Iran and Bangladesh, the ICCIMA portal reported.

Referring to the close religious, cultural, and historical relations between Iran and Bangladesh, the ICCIMA head said that despite Bangladesh's great market and Iran's strategic position, the two countries have not been able to use each other's economic capacities well.

He further mentioned some of the potential areas for cooperation between Iran and Bangladesh, saying: "Cooperation in the fields of construction materials, minerals, agricultural products, industrial items, and petrochemical products can lead to the development of trade relations between the two countries."

Selahvarzi pointed to the need for the formation of a joint committee between the businessmen of the two countries as one of the necessary measures for increasing the trade exchanges between Iran and Bangladesh and added: "Within the next two

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



months, an Iran-Bangladesh Joint Economic Committee will be formed in Iran and we hope that the corresponding institution in Bangladesh will also be established soon."

Stating that Iran and Bangladesh are members of a number of multilateral economic organizations including the D8, Selahvarzi emphasized the necessity of using this capacity and said:

"Iran Chamber of Commerce will make the necessary arrangements with Bangladesh Chamber [of Commerce] for the exchange of business delegations between the two countries."

Chowdhury, for his part, congratulated Selahvarzi on his election as the new head of the ICCIMA, and reminded of the very close, historical and cultural relations between the two countries and said: "Unfortunately, the level of trade relations between Iran and Bangladesh is not in coordination with the level of political relations."

He stressed that the governments of the two countries also want to increase trade relations, saying: "In this regard, we should try to facilitate the relations between the businessmen of the two countries as much as possible. Unfortunately, there is no direct transportation between Iran and Bangladesh, and the trade is mostly done through third countries."

Iran, Burkina Faso Urges Bolstering Economic Ties

TEHRAN (MNA) - Acting Head of Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mehdi Zeyghami and the deputy foreign minister of Burkina Faso Issa Borro in a meeting on Tuesday called for enhancing trade relations between the two countries.

Emphasizing exchanging trade delegations and participating of the two sides at the exhibitions of the two states, Zeyghami expressed Iran's readiness to provide technical engineering services and nanotechnology-related technologies to Burkina Faso.

He suggested the two countries hold a business opportunities conference to expand trade ties. Issa Borro, for his part, welcomed the exchange of business delegations, calling the idea of holding a business opportunities conference as a great step in getting businesspersons to know each other.

He expressed his country's readiness to issue visas for Iranian businesspersons for traveling Burkina Faso.



Iran Envoy Announces End of Mission in Turkey

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Mohammad Farazmand, the Iranian ambassador to Turkey, has announced the completion of his mission in Ankara.

In a message posted on Twitter on Monday, Farazmand said he had held a "farewell meeting" with Turkish Deputy Foreign Minister Yasin Ekrem Serim earlier in the day.

"I expressed my gratitude for the constructive support and cooperation of the officials at the Turkish Ministry of Foreign Affairs in facilitating my mission and promoting friendly relations between the two governments and peoples," the ambassador wrote.

Some reporters have suggested that Mohammad Hassan Habibollahzadeh, the current director of Mediterranean and Eastern Europe department of the Iranian Foreign Ministry, is likely to replace Farazmand as Iran's envoy to Ankara.

Habibollahzadeh has previously served at Iranian embassies in the United Kingdom and Norway.



Qatar Seeks Comprehensive Development Of Ties With Iran



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Emir of Qatar Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani says that Iran is an important country in the region, calling for comprehensive development of relations between Tehran and Doha.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Iranian Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian in Doha on Tuesday.

During the meeting, Amirabdollahian conveyed the warm greetings of the Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to the Emir of Qatar and hailed the effective role of Doha in resolving regional problems in recent years.

Considering the upcoming meeting of the two countries' joint economic commission as a favorable opportunity for accelerating economic and trade cooperation, the top Iranian diplomat called for expanding the political and economic relations between Tehran and Doha.

Regional peace and stability, as well as the developments in Afghanistan and Palestine, were other issues discussed between Amirabdollahian and Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani.

The Emir of Qatar, for his part, asked the Iranian foreign minister to convey his greetings to President Raisi and dubbed the Islamic Republic of Iran an important country in the region.

Saying that Iran and Qatar are enjoying strong relations, the Qatari Emir called for the development of economic relations between the two countries. He added that Qatar seeks comprehensive development of relations with Iran.

Amirabdollahian also held talks with the Qatari foreign minister and Prime Minister Mohammed bin Abdulrahman bin Jassim Al Thani.

Iranian foreign minister is scheduled to visit Oman's capital city of Muscat following his talks in Qatar.

Referring to Amirabdollahian's visit to Qatar and Oman, Foreign Ministry Spokesperson Nasser Kanaani in a tweet on Tuesday wrote that the region is witnessing positive developments as its countries increase interaction and dialogue.

Upon Amirabdollahian arrival in Doha, he considered the continuation of the all-round development of relations with neighbors as one of the fundamental axes in the Iranian government's balanced foreign policy doctrine.

He emphasized that Iran's neighbors benefit from important economic, commercial and political capacity.

Amirabdollahian said that in order to further develop relations and follow up on the approvals of the previous bilateral visits of high officials, he has left for Qatar and Oman.

The CEO of Binalood Green Power Generation Co. Explains Solution to Reduce Cost of Building a Renewable Power Plant

These days, the government is involved in electricity consumption management programs to safely pass the summer peak; the officials of the Ministry of Energy believe that although they have transferred the shutdowns from the domestic sector to the industry, with proper management, they have prevented the reduction of production, while the industry sector provides statistics of the decline in production in summer compared to other months of the year. Apart from the opinion of which of these two groups is closer to reality, the problem is the lagging behind of the development and consumption of the electricity industry, which has been neglected by the authorities in the last decade and has caused an imbalance of 10,000 megawatts of electricity in the country. A figure that is increasing due to the 5% annual increase in electricity consumption and on the other hand the drop in investments in this industry, and with the continuation of these conditions and the emphasis on consumption management, the government should think about shutting down industries for the summer season. Experts believe that the commanding economy of the electricity industry and excessive cheapness of this infrastructure product have caused the funds to fly to other markets

and to witness the lowest amount of electricity production; Even in cases where, due to the problem of supplying gas to power plants, protective laws such as Article 12 of the Law on Removing Obstacles to Competitive Production have come to help the construction of renewable power plants, we have seen the government's indifference in the field of implementation, so that today only about 1000 megawatts of electricity in the country are produced from renewable energy sources. In such a situation, energy-intensive industries, which for years did not have much concern in terms of electricity supply in the summer, on the one hand see the impact of electricity imbalance in their business, and on the other hand, according to Article 16 of the Knowledge-Based Production Surge Law, they must supply 1% of their energy consumption annually through renewable energies. to reach 5% within 5 years; Otherwise, 1 to 5% of the electricity consumed by these industries will be calculated at the renewable rate and applied to their bills; A solution that may lead to the acceptance of renewables by some industries, but due to the lack of necessary incentives and not considering the implementation mechanisms, it will definitely not lead to the desired result.



In this regard, the CEO of Binalood Green Power Generation Company says: After the notification of Article 16 of the Knowledge-Based Production Surge Law, we have announced several times to the energy industries of Khorasan provinces that there is no need to build renewable power plants in industrial towns and you can build the power plant next to the power plants and install them close to the current renewable energy power plants and in this way reduce the costs of operation, connection to the grid, purchase of land, etc., and on the other hand, due to being located next to a larger power plant, receive operation and repair services at a lower price from these power plants; In fact, instead the industry leaving its specialized field, as an investor and owner of a renewable power plant, it receives services from other existing power plants at a lower price. We wrote to the Ministry of Energy and other institutions and finally received this license, but to our surprise, they said that this law is only for power plants that are built after the notification of this directive, and older power plants cannot sell electricity to cryptos. In addition, only 9 companies that entered the circuit from last year and the beginning of this year were allowed to sell electricity in the energy exchange, because Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency Organization (SATBA) buys electricity at a cheaper price from power plants and prefers to use the same energy itself and to sell it in the stock market and benefit; This is despite the fact that if we, as the largest wind power plant in the east of the country, had offered electricity at a more realistic price in the energy exchange, we could have encouraged the owner to increase the capacity. In order to analyze the causes of the imbalance in electricity production, we arranged an interview with Amir Talebi-Torqabeh, the CEO of "Binalood Green Power Generation Company" as follows:

This year, the issue of electricity restrictions has been raised as in previous years, and the transfer of blackouts to the industrial sector has led to many reactions from the producers. In what cases should we look for the root of the discrepancy between electricity production and consumption?

One of our main challenges has been that we have not looked at the issue of energy comprehensively and the lack of management has caused an imbalance between production and consumption in winter and summer; Therefore, with the cutoff of gas and electricity in industries in winter and summer, reducing the production volume of companies has become a problem; The lack of this comprehensive view can be seen even in the energy supply of power plants, and today some power plants are forced to use fuel oil in the summer when there is no gas supply problem; In addition to the lack of a unified view of energy, the unbalanced expansion of the electricity industry is also the reason; For example, today we have many thermal power plants that have not been converted into a combined cycle, and on the other hand, the issue of renewable energy has been neglected. In addition to these cases, the command economy and cheap purchase of electricity has led to a decrease in investment in the electricity industry, which has led to the exhaustion of the production sector and a decrease in efficiency, and I believe that regardless of this point, even if we build a new power plant, the imbalance will not be resolved. The proof of my claim is that the installed capacity of our power plants is 84,000 megawatts, but we produce 54,000 megawatts, and this has its roots in mandated pricing and reducing the power plants' financial ability to buy parts and carry out optimization projects. The important point is that, contrary to the statements of some experts, even in the sector we do not see favorable prices for renewables, and while some in the thermal sector of the Ministry of Energy buy renewable electricity at a high rate from power plants, which a simple calculation based on the information of 1400 shows that the cost of producing each kilowatt of thermal electricity with fuel rate, energy conversion rate, emission rate, etc. is 4800 Tomans, while electricity Renewables are purchased by the government at a much lower average rate than power plants; Therefore, there is no correct view of energy, and on the other hand, the energy portfolio has not been expanded at the same time, and due to mandated pricing, we are witnessing a flawed economy and lack of liquidity for repairs and overhaul of power plants and reduced efficiency.

Do you consider a role for industries in creating the current crisis?

I believe that the industries are not blameless in creating this situation, and it is not possible to blame all the blame on the government; Energy-intensive industries such as steel, when they paid a very low price for electricity and exported their products at global rates, should have thought about this cheap electricity so as not to have problems in the future; We have seen such a view in European countries, and the people of Sweden did not vote yes to the cash subsidy a few years ago because it was inflationary. In

addition, large industries should seek renewable and clean energy supply by setting up self-sufficient power plants because this action could even solve the problem of winter gas supply. Because the main consumption of the country in the winter season is the domestic sector and thermal power plants, and the gas deficit can be met by launching renewable energy sources by industries. In addition, industries can receive fuel remittances from the government by using the capacities of Article 12 of the Law on Removing Obstacles to Competitive Production; Therefore, industries are not blameless in this regard, but today some industrial managers still say that the Ministry of Energy is responsible for supplying us with electricity!

Unlike the industry sector, the government claims that during the peak of consumption last year, not only did production decrease, but we have even witnessed the growth of production in many sectors. To what extent can this claim be confirmed?

Unfortunately, despite the problems caused by electricity restrictions, the Ministry of Energy claims that the production of industries has increased in most sectors, while such a claim is not true, and if the Ministry of Energy also mentions the gross national product in the statistics, the effects of electricity restrictions will be clearly visible. ; Statements like this, along with the facts of the electricity industry, show that the government has forgotten electricity production by emphasizing consumption management, and an important reason for the government's inattention to the development of the electricity industry is that, unfortunately, there are production sector experts at the top of the pyramid of the Ministry of Energy. They don't, because with the formation of privatization, capable managers were attracted to the private sector and those who are currently making decisions are mainly those who have worked in the distribution sector, and naturally their programs are limited to consumption management because they do not have expertise in the field of production; Of course, we should remember that there are legal obstacles for the production and development of the electricity industry; Although, according to principle 44, the government should own 20% of the electricity sector and give 80% to the private sector, but with the current rates, the private sector does not want to invest in this field.

Based on Article 16 of the Knowledge-Based Production Leap, industries with a consumption of more than one megawatt are required to provide renewable electricity. How effective do you think this law is?

At the same time as the 13th government took office, the issue of producing 10,000 megawatts of renewable electricity was raised by the Ministry of Energy, and the industries were required to supply 1% of their energy consumption from renewable sources in different ways, so that within 5 years, this amount would reach 5% . ; Otherwise, the government calculates electricity costs at the price of renewable electricity. Although this law was drafted with positive goals, it also has shortcomings and problems; For example, although some industries have taken this path, some large industries such as petrochemical and steel, knowing that their electricity will not be cut off by the government, do not take any action in this regard. Another point is that if punishment has been planned for the wrongful industries, encouragement should also be provided, but we have seen that the ultimate encouragement is that companies that produce renewable electricity are placed in the last priority of power cuts and they cannot even prevent their power from being cut off in time. Limits are sure; Therefore, the government should consider incentives such as tax exemption or reduction of customs fees to encourage the establishment of renewable power plants.

To what extent have government incentives for renewable power plants been implemented?

For a long time, we wrote letters to the Ministry of Energy and other institutions to sell electricity to cryptocurrency miners, and finally we received this license, but to our surprise, they said that this law is only for power plants that are built after the notification of this directive, and older power plants cannot supply and electricity in cryptocurrencies. In addition, only 9 companies that entered the circuit between last year and the beginning of this year were allowed to sell electricity in the energy exchange, because "SATBA" buys electricity at a cheaper price from power plants and prefers to use the same energy itself. sell the stock market and benefit; This is despite the fact that if we, as the largest wind power plant in the east of the country, had offered electricity at a more realistic price in the energy exchange, we could have encouraged the owner to increase the capacity, but when this privilege is revoked, it means that the order economy is still in place and look The main thing is that renewable electricity is expensive.

How should industries enter the field of renewable power plant construction considering that they do not have expertise in this industry?

Despite the notification of Article 16 of the Knowledge-Based Production Surge Law to industries, so far energy industries have not sought to hold meetings with the Renewable Energy Association to use existing experiences, and even some companies want to enter this field by choosing consultants who specialize in thermal electricity. Despite this, we have announced several times to the energy-intensive industries of Khorasan provinces that there is no need to build renewable power plants in industrial towns and that you can install the power plant next to the current renewable power plants and thereby reduce the costs of operation, connection to the grid, land purchase, etc. and, on the other hand, due to being located next to a larger power plant, receive operation and repair services at a lower price from these power plants; In fact, instead of the industry leaving its specialized field, as an investor and owner of a renewable power plant, it receives services from other existing power plants at a lower price; For example, Binalood wind tunnel has a capacity of about 3500 megawatts of renewable power plant with 2.5 MW turbines, and energy industries can use the capacity available in Binalood wind power plant for consulting, purchasing, installation, operation and repairs and many processes to Leave power plants with experience like ours in other provinces; Despite this, none of the industries has approached the Renewable Energy Association or the Binalood power plant, and we hope that the industries will continue to use the existing capacities to avoid mistakes and reduce costs.

Guard Fatally Stabbed Outside Brazil Embassy in Tunisia

TUNIS (Dispatches) - An attacker fatally stabbed a security guard outside Brazil's embassy in Tunis before being shot and arrested, the Tunisian Interior Ministry said.

The guard "was wounded by a sharp object" wielded "by a person he was questioning over the reason for his presence in the perimeter of the embassy", the ministry said in a statement.

He died at a hospital shortly after, interior ministry spokesman Faker Bouzghaya told AFP.

"This is a criminal act unrelated to terrorism," by a suspect who was "mentally troubled", he added.

Security forces fired at the suspect, wounding him in the leg, before taking him into custody, according to the ministry.



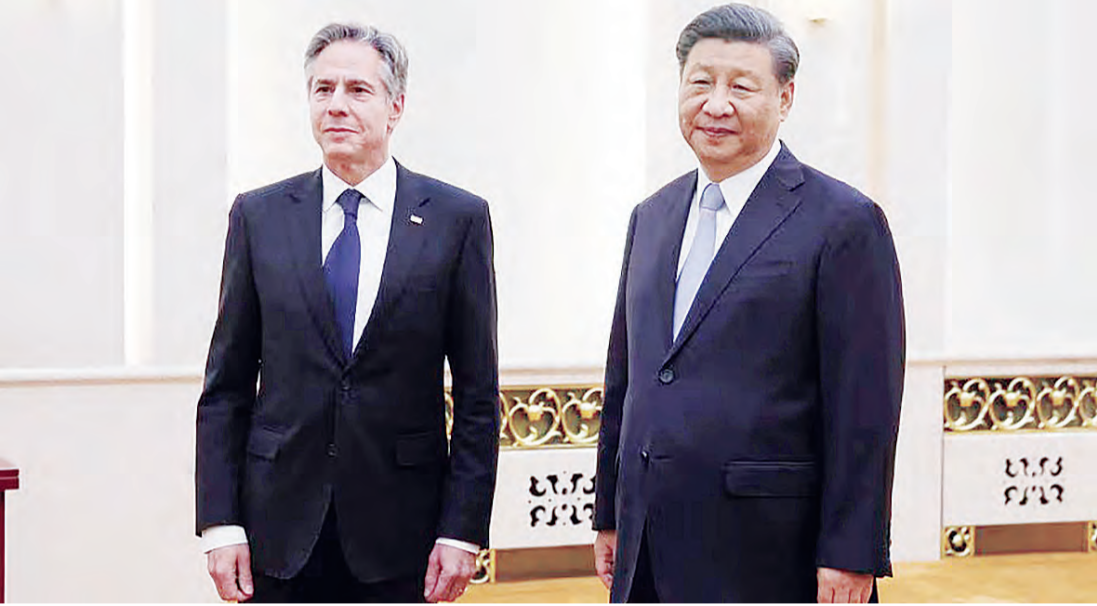
Thailand Justifies Talks With Myanmar

BANGKOK (Dispatches) - Thailand justified hosting talks aimed at re-engaging with Myanmar's shunned military, saying dialogue was necessary to protect its border with the strife-torn country, even as top diplomats of key Southeast Asian neighbors stayed away.

Myanmar's generals have been barred from high-level meetings of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) since they seized power in a 2021 coup and unleashed violence on those who challenged their takeover. But Thailand's outgoing military-backed government invited ASEAN foreign ministers, including that of Myanmar, to discuss a proposal for the bloc to "fully re-engage Myanmar at the leaders' level", according to an invitation seen by Reuters and verified by sources.



Xi, Blinken Agree to Stabilize U.S.-China Relations in Beijing Talks



BEIJING (Dispatches) - China and the United States agreed to stabilize their intense rivalry so it doesn't veer into conflict but failed to produce any major breakthrough during a rare visit to Beijing by U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken.

Chinese President Xi Jinping welcomed "progress" after shaking hands with Blinken at the Great Hall of the People, a grand venue usually reserved for greeting heads of state.

The top U.S. diplomat and Xi both stressed the importance of having a more stable relationship, as any conflict between the world's two largest economies would create global disruption.

However, China refused to entertain Washington's bid to resume military-to-military communication channels and cited U.S. sanctions as the obstacle. The two sides appeared entrenched in their positions over everything from Taiwan to trade, including U.S. actions toward China's chip industry, human rights and Russia's war against Ukraine.

At one of the most significant U.S.-China exchanges since President Joe Biden took office, it was not clear how they would overcome their differences, but they agreed to continue their diplomatic engagements with more visits in the coming weeks and months.

At a news conference concluding his two-day trip to Beijing, the first by a U.S. secretary of state since 2018, Blinken said Washington had achieved its objectives for the trip, including raising its concerns directly, trying to set up channels for dialogue and exploring areas of cooperation. The trip was postponed in February after a suspected Chinese spy balloon flew over U.S. airspace.

But he said progress was not straightforward.

"The relationship was at a point of instability, and both sides recognized the need to work to stabilize it," Blinken said before leaving the country.

"But progress is hard. It takes time. And it's not the product of one visit, one trip, one conversation. My hope and expectation is: we will have better communications, better engagement going forward."

U.S. officials have been playing down the prospect of a major breakthrough in talks, but they hoped Blinken's visit will pave the way for more bilateral meetings in coming months, including possible trips by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen and Commerce Secretary Gina Raimondo.

It had been hoped that it would even pave the way for a summit between Xi and Biden later in the year.

Biden and Xi last met on the sidelines of the G20 summit in Bali, Indonesia in November, pledging more frequent communication, although ties since then have deteriorated over Taiwan, espionage accusations and other concerns.

"The two sides have also made progress and reached the agreement on some specific issues. This is very good," Xi told Blinken across a long table bedecked with pink lotus flowers.

Blinken responded by saying the two countries have a responsibility to manage their relationship and that the United States was "committed to doing that."

His meetings in Beijing, including talks with China's top diplomat Wang Yi and foreign minister Qin Gang, had been "candid and constructive," Blinken added.

It was not clear from Xi's remarks what progress he was referring to, although he told Blinken that China "hopes to see a sound and steady China-U.S. relationship" and believes that the two countries "can overcome various difficulties", according to a Chinese readout of the talks.

Ukraine Says Eight Villages Retaken From Russian Forces in Two Weeks

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said it had driven Russian forces from an eighth village in its two-week-old counteroffensive, a settlement on a heavily fortified part of the front line near the most direct route to the country's Azov Sea coast.

A Russian-installed official said on Sunday that Ukraine had taken control of the village, Piatykatky, in the southern Zaporizhzhia region. He later said Moscow had pushed them out and on Monday morning he said Ukraine was attacking again.

Ukraine's Deputy Defence Minister Hanna Maliar said Ukrainian forces had not only retaken Piatykatky but had advanced by up to seven km (4.3 miles) into Russian lines in two weeks, capturing 113 square km (44 square miles) of land.

"In the course of two weeks of offensive operations in the Berdiansk and Melitopol directions, eight settlements were liberated," Maliar said on Telegram, referring to two cities on the Russian-occupied coastline.

The reported capture of the villages reflects incremental gains for Ukraine that highlight the challenge of breaking through lines Moscow has spent months strengthening. Piatykatky is significant, however, as it lies around 90 km from the coast.



North Korea Says Botched Satellite Launch Was Gravest Failure

SEOUL (Dispatches) - An unusually candid North Korea has said the botched launch of a military satellite last month was the "gravest failure" but it vowed it would soon succeed in its quest, state media reported.

North Korea's ruling party made the assessment of its May 31 launch at a three-day meeting that ended on Sunday, ordering workers and researchers to analyze the mission that ended with the rocket and its spy satellite payload plunging into the sea, and to prepare for another launch soon.

Officials "who irresponsibly conducted preparations" for the failed launch were "bitterly criticized" at the meeting, the KCNA state news agency reported.

The rocket failed "after losing thrust due to the abnormal starting of the second-stage engine", North Korea said at the time.

Nuclear-armed North Korea had earlier said it would launch its first military reconnaissance satellite to boost monitoring of U.S. military activities, another step in a military programme that has raised fears of war.

South Korea's navy last week recovered a large, cylindrical part of the rocket, raising it from the sea off the west coast, which experts said could provide clues to the North's rocket development.

The North's state media said the ruling Workers' Party Central Committee also discussed bolstering nuclear capabilities and stepping up production of nuclear weapons.

Leader Kim Jong Un attended the meeting, KCNA said, but it made no mention of whether he made a speech or delivered a report, as he usually does at such important policy-making sessions.

A spokesperson for South Korea's Unification Ministry, which handles relations with the North, said the absence of a report of a speech by Kim was "extremely rare". That and the blaming of low-ranking officials for the failure of the launch could indicate a loss of confidence, the ministry said.

The party also discussed ensuring sufficient food supplies.

Int'l Donors Pledge \$1.5b in Sudan Aid

GENEVA (Dispatches) - International donors on Monday pledged close to \$1.5 billion in humanitarian aid to Sudan and the broader region, responding to a call by the United Nations to boost aid amid a conflict that has forced some 2.2 million people from their homes.

The United Nations said \$3 billion was needed this year for humanitarian relief inside Sudan and for refugees fleeing the country, only a fraction of which had been funded.

"I'm pleased to say that today, donors have announced close to \$1.5 billion for the humanitarian response to Sudan and the region," U.N. aid chief Martin Griffiths told a fundraising conference hosted by Germany, Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Egypt and the United Nations.

"This crisis will require sustained financial support and I hope that we can all keep Sudan at the top of our priorities."

Germany announced on Monday that it was pledging 200 million euros (\$218 million) to Sudan and the region until 2024, the United States pledged \$171 million, and Qatar pledged \$50 million. The U.N. said it was allocating an additional \$22 million to address priority needs.

The war between Sudan's army and its paramilitary Rapid Support Forces (RSF) began in mid-April amid tensions over an internationally-backed plan for a

transition towards elections under a civilian government.

It has left more than 3,000 people dead, turned the capital Khartoum into a war zone and triggered deadly violence in the conflict-scarred western region of Darfur as well as other parts of the country.

Monday is the second day of a 72-hour ceasefire brokered by Saudi Arabia and the United States at talks in Jeddah, the latest of a series of truce deals that have allowed for the delivery of some humanitarian aid but have failed to prevent the conflict from intensifying.

Residents in Khartoum say the truce has bought a lull in fighting since Sunday, though looting by RSF forces and armed gangs has spread as battles have subsided.

U.N. Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said he was especially concerned by ethnic violence in Darfur and reports of gender-based and sexual violence. U.N. human rights chief Volker Turk said his office had received reports of sexual violence against at least 53 women and girls, saying that some 18 to 20 women were raped in a single attack.

Turk said the RSF had been identified as the perpetrator "in almost all cases" and also named them in relation to lootings, large-scale attacks in West Darfur and enforced disappearances, in a speech praised by Khartoum's envoy to the U.N. in Geneva Hassan Hamid Hassan.



Macron Ally Causes Stir With Proposal to Abolish Presidential Term Limit

PARIS (AFP) - One of French President Emmanuel Macron's closest political allies caused a stir on Monday by backing constitutional changes to enable the head of state to seek a third term in office.

Former MP and parliamentary speaker Richard Ferrand told the right-wing Figaro newspaper on Monday that he was against the constitutional limit of two terms that means Macron must step down in 2027.

"In my personal view, I'm against everything that restricts the expression of the popular will," he said, provoking a rash of headlines and criticism from political opponents.

Ferrand criticised the presidential term limits as well as new rules introduced in 2014 that prevent MPs and senators from also serving as mayors or heads of regions.

"All of that puts a straightjacket on our public life with rules that limit the free choice of citizens," he added.

"Let's change it all, while keeping the bicameral system and the Constitutional Council, the guardian of our republican principles and public liberties."

Critics on both the left and right accused Ferrand, one of Macron's earliest political backers, of copying the tactics and language of authoritarian leaders.

"Changing the constitution to stay in power... the last two people to do it are called Xi Jinping and Vladimir Putin," said right-wing senator Alain Houpert, referring to the Chinese and Russian leaders.

Mathilde Panot, the parliamentary head of the hard left France Unbowed party, said Ferrand was the "face of authoritarian drift under Macron".

France regularly urges African leaders to respect term limits with attempts to cling to power causing crises in countries from Burundi to the Democratic Republic of Congo in recent years.

Ferrand issued a new statement on Monday saying it was "worrying to see social networks and lazy media getting worked up about a stupid proposal that I didn't make in my interview with the Figaro".

He added in an interview with Sud Radio that he was not suggesting a change before the next scheduled presidential elections in 2027.



Hit by Russian War, UNESCO-Listed Czech Spas Seek Restart

PRAGUE (Dispatches) - UNESCO-listed Czech spa towns are hunting for new clients following a dramatic decrease in their foreign clientele due to the Covid outbreak and Russia's war on Ukraine.

While the anti-pandemic measures shuttered spa facilities temporarily, Russia's invasion of Ukraine and subsequent sanctions imposed on Russia by the European Union slashed the number of big-spending Russian clients virtually to zero.

The western Czech spa towns of Karlovy Vary, Mariánské Lázně and Františkovy Lázně saw a glimmer of hope when UNESCO placed them on its World Heritage List, alongside eight other towns in Western Europe, in 2021.

They were still reeling from the pandemic that had crimped tourism across the globe a year earlier.

But their joy was short-lived, as Russia invaded Ukraine in February 2022 and the Czech Republic, an EU member of 10.8 million, joined the sanctions.

"Our spas lost 80 per cent of their clients from one day to the next," said Andrea Pfeffer Ferklova, the mayor of Karlovy Vary, which became a hit among Russian investors and tourists following the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991.

In 2019, Czech spas registered 880,000 visitors. The number then fell to just over 500,000 in 2020 and 2021 before rising again to 840,000 last year.

But foreign client numbers fell from nearly 400,000 to fewer than 300,000 between 2019 and 2022, and the share of Russians tumbled from 61,000 to just a few thousand.

"The average Czech tourist spends around 700 koruna (RM147) a day. Russian-speaking clients spend over 3,500 koruna a day," said Jan Herget, director of the state agency CzechTourism.

"So the total numbers are not so different, but financially it's a slump."

Clients from western neighbour Germany, the most frequent foreign guests at Czech spas, making up around one-quarter of the total, spend around 2,000 koruna a day, Herget added.

Russian tourists also tended to stay for several weeks, while Czechs prefer weekend sojourns.

"We can see a tendency to switch from spa treatment stays to wellness and short-term stays. We're living in fast times," Pfeffer Ferklova said.

Spas are also grappling with a lack of staff, who are difficult to recruit with Czech unemployment hovering down around 3.5 per cent for the past two years.

Another problem is inflation, which is only slowly decreasing from a record-high 18 per cent in September last year, making Czechs reconsider their spending.

Eduard Blaha, head of the Czech Healing Spa Association, said it was a mistake to focus on Russian clients.

"We need to pamper local clients and offer them all options from treatment to tourism and wellness," he said.

CzechTourism is planning to woo clients from the Middle East and from former Soviet Union countries such as Azerbaijan or Kazakhstan.

"We need to make up for the drop in Russian guest numbers, because it's obvious that they are not coming back," Herget said.

Local spas could also treat patients suffering from the effects of Covid-19 from European countries with no spas, said Martin Plachy, deputy head of the Czech Healing Spa Association.

The western Czech spas are also planning joint promotion with other UNESCO-listed spa towns from Austria, Belgium, Britain, France, Germany and Italy.

"We would like to use UNESCO for a joint campaign for instance in the United States," Herget said.



Study Finds Human Biomarkers in Retinal Vitreous Linked with Alzheimer's Disease

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - According to a recent study from the Boston Medical Centre, there is a connection between biomarkers found in the vitreous humour of the eye and pathologically confirmed cases of Alzheimer's disease (AD) and Chronic Traumatic Encephalopathy (CTE) in post-mortem brain and eye tissue.

The findings of the study were published in IOS Press, this exploratory study indicates that biomarkers in the vitreous humor may serve as a proxy for neuropathological disease.

The prevalence of dementia such as Alzheimer's disease is increasing. Alzheimer's disease affects 6.2 million North Americans over the age of 65 as of 2021, with the number expected to rise to 13.2 million by 2060.

Both AD and CTE are diagnosed based on symptoms, clinical exam results, and cognitive tests, but the diagnoses are not confirmed until a post-mortem study of the brain is performed.

Because neuropathological changes in Alzheimer's disease begin decades before symptom onset, the therapeutic efficacy is sometimes restricted by the time a patient is diagnosed. A major focus of AD research is on biomarkers that can predict disease and be evaluated before symptoms appear.

Patients with eye disease have an increased risk for developing neurodegenerative disease, and several studies have established a link between neurodegenerative diseases and ophthalmic conditions like glaucoma, diabetic retinopathy, age-related macular degeneration, and cataracts.

Patients with these eye conditions are known to have an increased risk of developing AD, so investigating biomarkers in this at-risk population is important in order to study their role in early diagnosis.

"To our knowledge, this is the first study to investigate the role of vitreous fluid biomarkers and link it to confirmed post-mortem brain tissue pathological examination of AD. In addition, this is the first study to find a link between vitreous fluid biomarkers and confirmed CTE. Our findings provide further evidence to support the potential role of vitreous biomarkers in early diagnosis and prognostication of diseases like AD and CTE," said Manju Subramanian, MD, an ophthalmologist at Boston Medical Center and an associate professor in ophthalmology at Boston University Chobanian & Avedisian School of Medicine.

Researchers in this study found a link between biomarkers, including total Tau and neurofilament light-chain (NFL) with pathologically confirmed AD and CTE. Alterations of these neurodegenerative proteins in the vitreous fluid confirm that the eye reflects neuropathological changes in the brain and further support investigations into the eye's potential role in the diagnosis of these diseases.

The findings of this study build on the authors' previous work that biomarkers in the vitreous fluid are linked to cognitive function in live patients with both normal cognition and mild cognitive impairment.

These findings are also foundational for future studies to continue investigating the role of biomarkers and other eye fluids in diagnosing, prognosticating, and managing diseases such as AD and CTE.



Researchers Get New Insights Into Human Gut-brain Connection



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A study led by Laureate Institute for Brain Research researchers has made significant progress in understanding the mysterious gut-brain connection, a complex relationship that has long baffled scientists due to the difficulty of accessing the body's interior.

The study was published in the peer-reviewed scientific journal 'Nature Communications.'

The researchers were able to successfully have participants swallow a minimally invasive vibrating capsule in order to measure neural responses during gastrointestinal stimulation, providing a novel approach to studying this intricate connection. The capsule was designed by Vibrant Ltd. Healthy adult male and female volunteers ranging in age from 18 to 40 took part in the study. According to the researchers, the volunteers detected stimulation of the vibrating capsule under two conditions: normal and enhanced. The improved stimulation condition resulted in improved perceptual accuracy, faster stimulation detection, and reduced variability in reaction time, indicating that this method has the potential to be studied in various clinical populations. This is a significant breakthrough because it shows that this novel approach to studying gut feelings is viable.

The researchers also discovered the "gastric evoked potential," a late neural response induced by capsule stimulation in specific brain areas. The amplitude of these neural responses increased with stimulation intensity and was significantly related to perceptual accuracy. This finding opens up new possibilities for measuring and understanding the neural processes that govern the gut-brain connection.

Syrians Turn Plastic Waste Into Rugs to Make a Living

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

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

Braving the stench, insects and risk of disease, 39-year-old Behlal hacks through the rubbish pile with a scythe and his bare hands. He and two of his six children earn a living sifting through the refuse in Idlib province's village of Hezreh, earning US\$7 to US\$10 a week each.

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

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

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

Hunched over to collect pieces of plastic or metal, he throws everything into a bag to sell to a nearby scrap facility. Syria's conflict has killed more than 500,000 people, and around half of the country's pre-war population has been forced from their homes since fighting broke out in 2011.

More than four million people, most of them dependent on aid, live in areas controlled by jihadists and Turkish-backed groups in Syria's north and northwest.

In a large scrapyards next to agricultural fields, workers sort plastic junk loosely into piles according to color. They then cut it up and crush it into small pieces that are washed and melted into plastic pellets.

Farhan Sleiman, 29, is among those who handle the material brought in from the landfill.

"We buy plastic from roaming trash-picker trucks and children," said Sleiman, originally from Homs province. He expressed fear of the risk of contracting "cholera or chronic illnesses" from working with the rubbish.

Elsewhere in northern Idlib province, workers at a factory making mats and rugs churn out brightly colored plastic thread while large weaving machines click and clack.

Factory owner Khaled Rashu, 34, says rug-making is a family tradition.

"We have more than 30 employees" at the factory, he boasted as a significant feat in a region where many are jobless. Large mats featuring geometric designs, some made with striking red or purple plastic thread, emerge from the weaving machines and are stacked into piles.

Shop owner Mohammed al-Qassem, 30, is among those selling the mats, which he says are a hit in an area where many people are displaced and live in basic tents or makeshift dwellings.

The mats made from recycled plastic cost between US\$5 and US\$15, while traditional Persian-style rugs are around US\$100. "In summer, demand for plastic mats increases" because they retain less heat, Qassem said from his shop in Maaret Masrin, a town in Idlib province.

But "they can also be used in winter and are less costly", he added.



Snakes as Therapy Animals: Reptiles Help Heal in Brazil



SAO PAULO (Dispatches) - A yellow-and-brown boa constrictor wraps itself around David de Oliveira Gomes's neck like a scarf, but the 15-year-old Brazilian with autism is fascinated, not afraid.

For him, this is therapy.

"His name is Gold. He's cold. He eats mice," Gomes tells his therapist at a treatment center in Sao Paulo, gently holding the large snake as it slithers around him.

That is exactly the kind of sentence his therapist, Andrea Ribeiro, is trying to elicit.

She specializes in treating people with disabilities, autism or anxiety, using an unusual method: reptile therapy, which she says helps patients relax and improve their communication, motor skills and other abilities.

"He's working on speech and memory formation," the 51-year-old language-speech therapist says of Gomes, sitting at a table with him and the large snake.

Ribeiro has pioneered this method over the past decade at the treatment center, which features an open-air space where patients interact with lizards, turtles and a "jacare" — a kind of alligator native to Latin America that is common in Brazil, including in the Amazon rainforest.

The treatment is not scientifically proven.

But "it's been medically demonstrated that when people come in contact with animals, it releases neurotransmitters such as serotonin and beta-endorphins that give a sense of pleasure and well-being," says Ribeiro.

"That makes (patients) feel good and want to learn."

The reptiles "enable us to achieve better, faster results," she told AFP.

Iraq Invites Foreign Bids for 11 Gas Blocks

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq on Sunday invited foreign companies to bid for contracts to explore and develop natural gas reserves in 11 new blocks as the OPEC member seeks to produce much-needed natural gas for power stations and cut imports that weigh on the country's budget.

Eight blocks are located in western Anbar province, one in the northern city of Mosul and two others are located along province borders, including one between Anbar region with Mosul and another with Iraq's southern city of Najaf, the oil ministry said in a statement on Sunday. Iraq's oil ministry has ended preparation to launch a sixth bidding round to auction off the gas blocks, the ministry said, without setting a date for the bidding process.



Argentina Faces Crunch IMF Talks To Defuse Looming Debt Bomb

BUENOS AIRES (Dispatches) - Argentina and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) have a \$44 billion dilemma, with the two sides set to meet for crunch talks to revamp the country's huge, wobbling debt deal, key to avoiding default on billions in looming debt payments.

The South American country, a serial defaulter that has struggled for years with inflation and currency crises, struck a \$57 billion loan deal with the IMF in 2018, which failed and was replaced last year with a new \$44 billion program.

But with net foreign currency reserves estimated to be in negative territory, hit by a major drought that sunk the key soy and corn harvests, Argentina is at risk again of missing debt repayments, with \$2.7 billion due to the fund this month alone.

Economy Minister Sergio Massa is expected in Washington as early as this week to try to unlock talks to accelerate IMF disbursements and ease economic targets attached to the deal, with investors and traders watching closely.

"The fund knows that Argentina is a problem, it is its main debtor, but it seems to me that the negotiation has stagnated. One does not see significant progress," said Ricardo Delgado of Argentine financial services firm Analytica. In a sign of potential holds-ups, an economy ministry source said on Friday that Massa's trip, previously briefed to happen in the next few days, could be delayed depending on how virtual talks progressed.

"Until everything is sealed, no one travels. When everything is ready, they'll travel to put things on paper. And when everything is written, Massa will travel," the source said.

On the streets of Buenos Aires pressure is rising. Inflation has hit 114%, hurting salaries and spending power, reserves have tumbled and one-in-four people is in poverty, with many blaming - not for the first time - austerity linked to the IMF.

"We must change these economic policies, we must break with the dependence on the IMF," said Hugo Godoy, a union leader marching on Friday in Buenos Aires as part of protests against the government's handling of the economy and austerity.

"Some 43% of Argentines live below the poverty line and 4.5 million, 10% of the population, suffer from hunger," he said.

The government is hoping to bring forward over \$10 billion in IMF disbursements scheduled for this year, though is reluctant to agree to tough austerity measures with an eye on October general elections where it faces likely defeat.

"Investors are paying real attention to signs from the IMF negotiations," said economist Gustavo Ber.

"Receiving fresh funds - or at least rescheduling disbursements and payments - would be crucial to reduce exchange and financial tensions at this stage."

Meanwhile Argentina has been rolling over local debt to push back peso-denominated repayments, has extended a currency swap line with China, and faces a wall of obligations with private foreign creditors next year.

The local debt exchanges and hopes of progress with the IMF have nudged up Argentina's dollar-denominated bonds from high-20 cents on the dollar in May to mid-30 cents now, though they remain mired in distressed territory.

China Bankers Told to Shun Flashy Clothes, 5-Star Hotels in Austerity Drive

HONG KONG (Dispatches) - From cutting salaries and bonuses and asking staff not to wear expensive clothes and watches at work, to reining in travel and entertainment expenses, Chinese financial firms have jumped on an austerity drive as Beijing pushes to bridge the wealth gap.

The steps come as authorities vow to clamp down on corruption in the country's US\$57 trillion financial sector and as growth in the world's second-largest economy weakens, with youth unemployment hitting a record high.

Financial professionals are among the highest-paid workers in communist China and their wealth and flashy lifestyles have often come under criticism from the public on social media as the economy slows, drawing Beijing's ire as well.

China's top graft-busting watchdog earlier this year vowed to eliminate ideas of a Western-style "financial elite" and rectify the hedonism of excessive pursuit of "high-end taste".

That has prompted a slew of financial firms, both by state-owned and private-sector, to take proactive measures to ensure they don't fall foul of the authorities, even as official rhetoric on President Xi Jinping's "common prosperity" drive has ebbed.

Among those measures, staff at a large Chinese state-owned mutual fund and a mid-sized bank have instructed staff not to show off high-end lifestyles, said employees at the firms, declining to be named due to the sensitivity of the matter.

The mutual fund has also asked staff to refrain from posting pictures of expensive meals, clothes or bags on social media, said an employee, to avoid attracting regulatory glare or public criticism.

The mid-sized bank's employees have been asked to not wear luxury brands or carry luxury bags at workplace, said a person at the lender, adding staff have also been told they can't stay at five-star hotels when travelling for work.

Senior executives at a state-owned insurance company have also been told to not wear expensive clothes to work, said another person with knowledge of the matter, also declining to be named as those instructions are confidential.

Industrial and Commercial Bank of China (ICBC) and China Construction Bank Corp (CCB) plan to cut some allowances of employees at the banks' headquarters from this year, two sources familiar with the matter said.

Allowances to be impacted include one-time summer allowances of about 1,500 yuan (RM971) to 2,000 yuan a month, which will be abolished from this month, said the sources, who also declined to be named.



Germany's Economic Model Needs Updating

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Recent data out of Germany paints a bleak near-term picture for Europe's economic powerhouse. Its economy entered a recession this year, and investor sentiment in the country recently fell at the fastest pace since the pandemic.

The OECD now expects its growth to be the lowest among major economies in 2023. Its trajectory beyond this year is, however, a greater concern. Prevailing geopolitical headwinds — from Russia's invasion of Ukraine to rising US-China tensions — have highlighted vulnerabilities in Germany's international economic model and underscored its longer-term challenges.

German chancellor Olaf Scholz has been ambitious in trying to reorient the economy — including by reducing Germany's dependence on Russian energy and in securing new supply chains for industry. The government has been moving quickly. An aim to have renewables account for 80 per cent of its power mix has raised Germany's attractiveness as a destination for green investment. Billions are being spent to boost its semiconductor industry. The economy has also shown resilience by confounding dire forecasts for a deep recession this year. But the scale of the task ahead remains enormous.

Germany has quickly cut its reliance on Russian gas. The rapid building of LNG terminals has helped to boost energy security. But the decision to phase out its last nuclear reactors in April and the slow rollout of renewables mean Germany is still reliant on imports and fossil fuels for its energy needs and remains exposed to volatile global prices.

Diversifying the economy is challenging too. Manufacturing accounts for about a quarter of its output. Automotive production, its prized industry, has been declining since 2018. Germany's specialism in combustion technologies is being challenged by the shift to electric vehicles, where China is a dominant player. De-risking ties with China — its largest trading partner for goods — will not be straightforward either, as many companies consider it a vital market and supplier of intermediate products.

Scholz has called for a new "German speed" to achieve its transformation. But he will need to remove a number of speed bumps that have long held back the German economy first. Renewable infrastructure projects, such as wind farms, have been delayed by lengthy planning procedures. Reforms are in motion. Business leaders complain that hefty bureaucracy, high energy costs and limited digitalisation also hinder dynamism; since SAP was founded more than 50 years ago, no world-class German tech company has emerged.

Labour shortages are another impediment. Germany is expected to be short of up to 7mn workers by 2035, partly due to an ageing population. There is a lack of skilled workers in the building trade, electrical engineering and professional services, which are important for the country's economic ambitions. Changes to immigration rules are in the works. Reforming the economy will also need further public investment and incentives, but demands on finances will be strained by older demographics and a commitment to raise defence spending. Spats among the coalition government have not helped either.



Foreign Investors Ditch China to Start \$9b Stock Buying Frenzy in India

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - Unimpressed with the post-Covid growth story of China, foreign institutional investors (FIIs) have been jumping ships resulting in a \$9 billion catalyst to Indian stocks in the first quarter of FY24.

With daily average buying totalling around Rs 1,400 crore, foreigners have not only been the biggest buyers of Indian equities so far this financial year but have also taken over as Dalal Street's Mr Consistent. NSDL records show that FIIs have been net sellers only on 8 days out of 51 trading sessions in FY24.

On the other hand, domestic institutional investors (DIIs) have bought stocks only worth about Rs 6,500 crore during the period against FII buying of about Rs 72,000 crore in INR terms.

With Nifty rallying 8.5% in June quarter to near all-time peak levels, insiders say China's loss is India's gain as Chinese economic rebound seen earlier this year lost momentum in the second quarter.

"The post-lockdown recovery in China turned out to be a temporary one and the resultant equity flows to Chinese markets at the beginning of the year have also normalised," said Rahul Singh, CIO of Tata Mutual Fund. India, according to him, is in a sweet spot now because if growth remains cyclically depressed in developed economies and structurally subdued in China, India's growth premium can sustain.

"Nifty50 premium to emerging markets has expanded from 45-50% to the 60-70% range. Moreover, there is very little on the horizon which can challenge this narrative with crude/energy prices and any shocks in domestic politics being the key risks," he said.

Wages Are Finally Rising in Japan

TOKYO (Dispatches) - Wages are rising in Japan more than they have in decades, at least for some workers. But so are prices, leaving many people feeling they must scrimp more than ever.

In May, the consumer price index was up 3.2% from a year earlier, well above the central bank's target of about 2%. That's great news for policymakers trying to get the world's third largest economy out of the doldrums by keeping credit super cheap to spur demand and push prices higher.

But a government survey of companies with five or more employees found real wages, taking into account higher prices, fell 3% from the a year earlier in April, marking the 13th straight month of declines.

Although all the major companies have raised wages this year, with large labor union members landing a 4% hike, the highest in 30 years, a quarter of small and medium-size businesses — employers of more than two-thirds of all workers — gave no pay raises, according to the think tank Tokyo Shoko Research.

"My wages haven't gone up at all," said Kyoko Sano, a salesclerk at a Tokyo department store.

Sano feels a bit of a jolt when a cashier rings up her purchases and angst when she checks out prices of her favorite cookies, potato chips, rice crackers and drinks. Prices have all jumped, and the usual discount offerings have disappeared. Her electricity bill keeps climbing.

Japanese workers make less across the board than their counterparts in the U.S. and Europe. A graph comparing wages for the last several years shows the line for Japan going straight across from left to right. In other nations, including the U.S., they climb gradually higher.

Average pay in Japan is about three-fourths of the OECD average of about \$51,000. Hourly rates for workers in many Tokyo service jobs average about 1,300 yen (\$9.30) an hour, up from the previous 1,000 yen (\$7.10) an hour. They're lower in most of the country.

So while a barista in New York makes about \$22,500 a year, according to Intuit, one in Tokyo makes 2.19 million yen (\$15,700), Economic Research Institute data show.

In theory, a vibrant economy is supposed to lead to higher prices and wages. But purchasing power has to keep up to sustain consumer demand. It's unclear that today's inflationary pressures, set off by the rising costs for oil and other commodities, will spur the sort of positive growth cycle Japan's been trying to achieve for years.

Youth Unemployment Soars in South Korea



SEOUL (Dispatches) - The number of young people taking time off without seeking jobs or studying is on the rise, official statistics showed Sunday, as Korea struggles to tackle the world's lowest birth rate and a rapidly aging society.

The number of employed people in their 20s declined 63,000 year-on-year in May to reach 3.83 million, marking a consecutive seven-month slump since November last year, according to Statistics Korea. The number of unemployed individuals also decreased by 67,000 compared to the previous year, reaching 241,000.

When asked about their participation in economic activity last month, 357,000 unemployed young people in their 20s reported they were taking a break without actively job hunting or preparing for work, indicating an increase of 36,000 compared to the previous year.

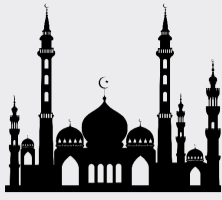
The most frequently cited reason for their job hunt hiatus was "the unavailability of jobs offering desirable wages and working conditions."

The 20s age group was the only age bracket where a significant increase was observed in individuals who reported they were unemployed and not looking for jobs.

Of those in their 20s who did not engage in economic activities, 997,000 said they were admitted to formal educational institutions, followed by 357,000 who simply rested. Some 331,000 young people said they were job hunting, and 113,000 took classes at private institutions for employment.

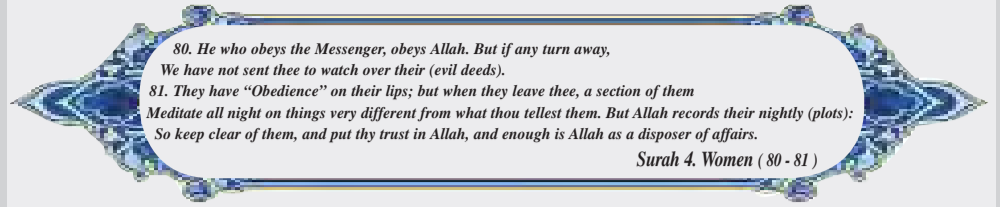
This comes as Korea has struggled with a shrinking population.

An analysis by the Korean Statistical Information Service showed the number of people in their 20s stood at 6.155 million last month, down 196,000 from 6.351 million in the same month last year. The population in their 20s has tumbled year-on-year every month since July 2021.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:06
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:44
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:02
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:49



Greece's Economic Recovery Held Back by Labor Shortages

ATHENS (Dispatches) - From tourism and hospitality to farmers and construction workers, the Greek government says more than 200,000 positions remain vacant.

It's thought many people left their jobs during the pandemic and didn't return. Many areas suffering the most are where the heart of the country's economy beats.

The neighborhood of Perama, to the south of Athens, is the heart of Greece's shipyard industry. It's here where Stefanos Stathopoulos runs his yacht repair and maintenance business, sending ships across the country.

Although he's faced many problems in recent years, including Greece's decade-long financial crisis and the COVID-19 pandemic, finding help now is proving even more difficult.

"We need an extra pair of hands and we are currently in the process of finding someone," Stathopoulos tells CGTN. "This whole area is in need. Anywhere you ask there's a job opening."

"But people tend to choose their jobs, especially after the pandemic. That's a luxury. Look, if you really need money you'll find a job. It seems that people have the luxury of a choice, and if it's not what they like, they don't work."

Visiting any island or beach resort, you'll notice that most popular tourist destinations are almost at capacity for visitors. What you won't notice is that 50,000 positions remain vacant, creating a shortage.

But other industries are suffering even more. Coming out of the pandemic, Greece joined the EU's Recovery and Resilience Facility. Its aim is to bring investments with EU funds and to create minimum wage jobs. And sure enough, jobs have been created - but no one is applying.

Of all the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, this might be the one that affects the economy the most. Thousands of Greeks are staying away from the minimum wage jobs - in retail stores, restaurants and construction. Around 200,000 low-paid positions remain empty.

"I don't mind working, as long the workplace respects me," says unemployed Neoptolemos Kremmidas. "I'll work anywhere, but I want to do it to have a life and not only survive"

"Listen, you can't ask me to work for three or four euros an hour and expect me to do it" says Spyros Mavropoulos. "I'm not skilled and say I agree to do the job, I won't get the stamps, my sick days won't be paid, and no holidays - why would I go, just to say I have a job?"

But it's not only older people that are not applying, youngsters seem dissatisfied with the conditions.



"The conditions represent the minimum wage of our country, it's simply horrible," says Maria, from Piraeus. "I feel despair. Why did I study all these years, so I can end up having a job that I would get paid the same money with someone that hasn't even finished high school? What's the point of going to university?"

Labor shortages are everywhere - from tourism and hospitality to construction. Greek authorities have been accelerating recruitment efforts, but the head of a professional body that acts as a middleman between workers and the government suggests a radical change of attitude.

"The government should change their approach and subsidize employment and not unemployment," suggests Giorgos Stasinou, head of the Technical Chamber of Greece. "So instead of collecting a welfare check for not working, to collect a check for working - to provide a motive for someone to find a job and once they do to reward them. The idea is not to create a culture of living off the state."

That might benefit both the government and the economy, but until a solution is found, the gap in low-skilled, low-paid and often unsure jobs will remain.

20 Foreign Intelligence...

FROM PAGE 1

"Therefore, they moved towards rewriting Trump's version of maximum pressure ... under the strategy of containing and limiting the Islamic Republic," he added.

Kazemi said US officials devised three steps in order for the riots to continue, which included the creation of an emotional atmosphere after Amini's death, changing protest into unrest through daily strikes and turning the atmosphere of unrest into an armed movement by activating armed groups.

He added that investigations by the IRGC's Intelligence Organization exposed the role and involvement of the intelligence services of nearly 20 countries in the last year riots.

He named more than a dozen countries that have been active in this regard, including the United States, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, France, Germany, Canada and Bahrain. He also noted that the occupying Zionist regime was also involved.

The head of the IRGC's Intelligence Organization also provided a list of some of the activities undertaken by foreign intelligence services during the riots.

1. Movements by French diplomats in Tehran to gather field information on the riots and the state of Iran's security and law enforcement apparatus and exchanging the information with an intelligence officer of a European country's embassy.

2. Attempts by the Zionist regime of Israel to raise a fund to support rioters and protesters through the initiative and financing by the United States and other countries.

3. A meeting of the ambassadors of 28 European countries at the site of a European embassy to discuss the possibility of closing European embassies, with a focus on Germany.

4. The use of non-European nationals (Afghans, Pakistanis, Iraqis) and the presence of European nationals to gather information on the riots, which led to the arrest of 40 individuals from one neighboring country, a French-Irish national in Khorasan Razavi Province, and a German national in Ardabil Province.

5. Intensification of activities and support by the US Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) in creating necessary cyberspace platforms for disseminating news of the riots, including efforts to send technical equipment, escape tools, and lifting sanctions on mobile communication devices.

6. A request by the CIA to establish a joint team with the Israeli regime's Mossad and Britain's MI6 to reactivate the project of assassinating Iranian scientists, especially in the nuclear, space, and military fields towards the end of the riots.

7. Joint periodic meetings of the intelligence services of the United Arab Emirates and the Zionist regime in an Arab country to support the riots in Iran.

Kazemi also stressed in his interview that the enemy sought to stoke mistrust among Iranian people from various social strata and political inclinations by such ploys as inducing discrimination and violation of women's rights, as well as the collapse of the Islamic Republic and the end of the Islamic Revolution.

Foreign-backed riots broke out in Iran in mid-September after the death of the 22-year-old Iranian woman of Kurdish descent. She fainted at a police station in the capital Tehran and was pronounced dead three days later at the hospital. An official report by Iran's Legal Medicine Organization concluded that Amini's death was caused by illness rather than alleged blows to the head or other vital body organs.

Iran-Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

The comments came hours after Russian Deputy Prime Minister Alexey Overchuk said a key agreement between the Russia-led Eurasian Economic Union (EAEU) and Iran to establish a free trade zone could be finalized before year's end.

The agreement can lead to a major increase in trade between Iran and Russia as well as between Iran and four other EAEU members, namely Armenia, Belarus, Kazakhstan, and Kyrgyzstan.

Iran and Russia have significantly expanded their economic and energy ties since February 2022 when Russia came under Western sanctions because of the war in Ukraine.

Iran Able to Reach...

FROM PAGE 1

He noted that despite the U.S.-led sanctions on Iran, the AEOI and the Islamic Republic's nuclear industry have made great achievements.

Eslami also described the development of managerial knowledge and skills as well as the strengthening of engineering capacity as missing links in Iran, where university graduates mostly lack these skills.

The director of the AEOI added that the problem should be resolved so that the university graduates can be attracted to the field.

Asian Spot LNG Prices Rise to at 3-Month High Tracking European Prices



SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Asian spot liquefied natural gas (LNG) prices reversed their multi-week downward trend and rose to a three-month high this week, tracking European gas gains and as high temperatures in north-east Asia increased cooling demand.

The average LNG price for August delivery into north-east Asia LNG-AS jumped by 50% from the previous week to \$13.50 per million British thermal units (mmBtu), its highest level since mid-March, industry sources estimated.

"Volatility set in mid-week with news of (Norwegian) outages which caused a rally in European prices and naturally Asian prices followed suit," said Toby Copson, global head of trading at Trident LNG.

"While spot offers might reflect that, demand still isn't there and we will see other players turn away until congruence on demand," he added.

Ryhana Rasidi, LNG analyst at data analytics firm Kpler, said that despite the increase, Asian prices are at a discount to European gas prices, which has seen prompt loading cargoes from the United States point back towards Europe. In Europe, gas prices at the Dutch TTF hub turned bullish this week, after hitting a two-year low at the start of June, on reiterated plans to close production at the Dutch Groningen gas field in October, and ongoing maintenance at the Norwegian Troll and Oseberg gas fields, which followed an extension to an outage at the Nyhamna gas processing plant.

"It is almost like seeing a re-run of last year, when spiking European prices would feed into higher Asian prices. Thursday's news about the closure of Groningen was not unexpected but appeared to feed into a mood and probably reflected an element of short-covering in European gas markets," said Robert Songer, LNG analyst at data intelligence firm ICIS.

S&P assessed its daily north-west Europe LNG Marker (NWM) price benchmark for cargoes delivered in July on an ex-ship (DES) basis at \$12.755/mmBtu on June 15, a \$0.343/mmBtu discount to the July gas price at the Dutch gas TTF hub, according to Allen Reed, managing editor of Atlantic LNG.

Meanwhile, Argus assessed the north-west Europe DES price at \$12.40/mmBtu while Spark Commodities estimated the price at \$12.543/mmBtu.

World Oil Trade Flows Undergoing "Unprecedented Sea Change"

LONDON (Dispatches) - The International Energy Agency's latest report Oil 2023: Analysis and Forecast to 2028 reveals that world oil trade is experiencing an "unprecedented sea change" due to international embargoes on Russian energy exports. These shifts are unlikely to revert to the previous status quo for the foreseeable future, according to the report.

With approximately 2.5 million barrels per day (mb/d) of Russian crude being backed out of Europe and G7 countries, and an additional 2 mb/d of products seeking new markets, global oil trade flows have been significantly disrupted.

According to the report, the implementation of embargoes on Russian crude and oil products by the European Union (EU) and G7 nations, coupled with the price cap that enabled EU maritime services to redirect Russian oil to third countries, facilitated the rerouting of oil flows and minimised production losses in the global market. As a result, European refiners successfully sought alternative crude oil suppliers, with the US and the Middle East becoming key sources. Furthermore, higher North Sea volumes remained within the region.

Previously, Russia held significant import shares of naphtha, gasoil, fuel oil in Europe, as well as feedstocks in the US. However, import replacements in these markets have emerged from further afield, including North America, the Middle East, and Asia. Russian volumes, in turn, have been redirected to Turkey, East of Suez, Latin America, and Africa. This redirection of volumes led to a significant tightening of available tanker capacity and a subsequent boost in freight rates.

Looking ahead, the report suggests that trade flows in both crude oil and products will expand over the medium term. The Atlantic Basin, excluding Russia, is projected to experience a surplus of crude oil and condensate, increasing by 4.3 mb/d to 4.5 mb/d. This surge is attributed to rising production in the US, Brazil, and Guyana, alongside a contraction in demand for transport fuels.

Meanwhile, Asia's demand for crude oil is expected to outpace increased supplies from the Middle East. The report forecasts that Asia's crude and condensate import requirements will rise by 4.8 mb/d to 28 mb/d in 2028. To meet this demand, the surplus in the Atlantic Basin will play a critical role.

Despite the loss of Russian supply, the rest of the Atlantic Basin is anticipated to shift from a rough balance in 2022 to a surplus of approximately 4.5 mb/d in 2028. This change reflects the ongoing increase in crude and condensate output, coupled with declining refinery runs. Consequently, the share of Atlantic Basin buyers in net world crude exports is expected to decrease to approximately 25% over the forecast period, with greater concentration shifting to regions East of Suez.

Iran Only Nation...

FROM PAGE 1

The remarks came as Director of Hamas Movement's Political Bureau Ismail Haniyeh also arrived in Tehran earlier in the day along with his accompanying delegation and held talks with Iran's Supreme National Security Council (SNSC), who described resistance as the most potent approach for bringing an end to over seven decades of the Israeli occupation of Palestine.

Nakhleh went on to note that more officials from other resistance groups are due to arrive in Iran in the days ahead to join them, pointing out that leaders of the resistance axis will hold a meeting in Tehran to further assess the current situation in the occupied Palestine and adopt a joint position in their efforts to end the Israeli occupation.

He also described such gatherings as "ordinary" but

emphasized that the strong presence of resistance leaders in Iran signals a "special" development.

It will relay "a message to the enemy, as well as the Palestinian nation that they [the people of Palestine] will not be left alone" in their struggle against the Israeli enemy, he added.

Nakhleh went on to note that such gatherings "highlight the unity of the resistance axis against the Israeli regime, insisting that the upcoming meeting will bring about "positive" repercussions in the region.

During his current visit to Iran, Nakhleh has so far held talks with Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei, Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi and other senior officials in the country.

UNDP Supports...

FROM PAGE 1

Wetlands are one of the sources of creating many job opportunities, while they are one of the biggest carbon absorbers and can be managed by relying on knowledge and innovation, the UN official highlighted.

The UNDP Regional Director for Asia and the Pacific touched on the termination of the European Union's financial support for the Hamoun wetland's project, saying: "If the world sees that, despite the international sanctions, UNDP continues its cooperation with Iran, maybe new financial partners can be found to support the project."

Salajegeh, for his part, emphasized that environmental cooperation should not be affected by political issues. "We expect the United Nations to work in line with its responsibility to bring countries together and solve global challenges without interfering with political issues."

Cristante Signs New Roma Deal Until 2027

MILAN (Dispatches) - Bryan Cristante has extended his Roma contract until 2027, the Serie A club announced. The Italy midfielder, whose previous deal was due to expire at the end of next season, has reportedly increased his salary to €2.8 million. The 28-year-old has been at Roma since 2018, making 228 appearances and scoring 11 times. He won the Europa Conference League under Jose Mourinho last year, before reaching this season's Europa League final.

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Joselu Returns to Real On Season-Long Loan

MADRID (Dispatches) - Real Madrid have signed striker Joselu from relegated Espanyol on a season-long loan with an option to buy, the Spanish giants said in a statement. The 33-year-old Spain international played two seasons at Real's second team "Castilla" from 2009-2012 and made two appearances for the first team before joining German side Hoffenheim. Joselu, who also had stints at Stoke City and Newcastle United in England, scored 16 goals in 33 appearances for Espanyol last season and received his first call-up to the Spanish national team in March.

Verstappen Takes Red Bull's 100th Win in F1

MONTREAL (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen won the Canadian Grand Prix from pole position on Sunday to stretch his Formula One championship lead and take Red Bull's milestone 100th victory.

The Dutch 25-year-old led every lap as he took his career tally to 41 wins, stepping up alongside Brazil's late triple champion Ayrton Senna in the record books.

Fernando Alonso finished second for Aston Martin at Montreal's Circuit Gilles Villeneuve, the Spaniard's sixth podium in eight races, with Britain's seven times world champion Lewis Hamilton third for Mercedes.

Hamilton was followed home by the two Ferraris, with Charles Leclerc taking fourth and Carlos Sainz fifth.

Red Bull have won every race so far this season and Canada was double world champion Verstappen's sixth of the campaign and fourth in a row.

As impressive as those results have been, Red Bull team principal Christian Horner took the opportunity after the race to issue a scary warning that his team is capable of winning every grand prix this season.

"Today, to win the 100th grand prix for the team that's pretty incredible," said Verstappen, who has now led more than 200 consecutive laps.

"I never expected to be in these kinds of numbers myself as well, we keep enjoying, we keep working hard but today has been a great day."

Fan Banned for Four Years For Wearing Offensive Hillsborough Shirt

LONDON (Dispatches) - A fan who wore an offensive football shirt referencing the Hillsborough disaster to the FA Cup final has been banned from attending football games for four years on Monday, Willesden Magistrates' Court in London said.

James White, 33, admitted wearing the shirt with the number 97 and "not enough" at Wembley Stadium on June 3, referring to the 97 fans who died during the 1989 FA Cup semi-final in a crush at the over-crowded Hillsborough Stadium.

"It is hard to imagine a more ... offensive reference to the 1989 Hillsborough disaster," District judge Mark Jabbitt said as quoted by the British media.

The judge added that the shirt White wore bore an "abhorrent message" and that the impact of his actions were "profound and distressing".

The image was widely shared on social media and police received a series of emails from people who saw it online, British media reported. The English Football Association welcomed the court's decision.

"(White's) actions at the FA Cup Final were reprehensible, and abuse that references Hillsborough or any football tragedy will not be tolerated at Wembley Stadium," the FA said.

"We hope that today's ruling sends a strong message that action will be taken against any perpetrators who behave in this way."

A Tottenham Hotspur fan was banned from games for three years last week after making gestures mocking the Hillsborough tragedy at the Premier League game between Liverpool and Tottenham in April.

Raducanu Sometimes Wishes She Had Not Won U.S. Open

LONDON (Dispatches) - Former U.S. Open champion Emma Raducanu said she sometimes wishes she had not won the Grand Slam due to the pressure that came with the success and instant fame.

The then 18-year-old surged out of nowhere to win the 2021 tournament in style, without dropping a single set during the nine matches she played before the final, but could not follow up on that success due to recurrent injuries.



whopping 69 points behind Verstappen who leads with 195.

There was also some disappointment in the Aston Martin garage with the team unable to deliver the double podium result owner Lawrence Stroll had asked for at his home race.

While Alonso reached the podium, the Canadian billionaire's son Lance Stroll finished ninth.

"We were hoping to challenge more the Red Bulls," said Alonso. "It was a battle with the Mercedes, we were pushing all the race so I didn't have one lap where I could relax a little bit, an amazing battle."

"It was tough, a very demanding race, almost 70 laps of qualifying."

Hamilton's third place provided more proof that Mercedes are heading in the right direction as the team looks to close the gap on the rampaging Red Bulls.

It is the second consecutive Grand Prix Hamilton has appeared on the podium while team mate George Russell had looked a threat until spinning into the wall early in the race, damaging his car. He did not finish the race.

For the second straight year Verstappen won from pole on the island circuit. He bolted away from pack at the start and was never under threat but was also unable to pull away, finishing 9.5 seconds clear of Alonso.

Driver of the day honors went to Alex Albon, who finished seventh after a great display of defensive driving on well worn tyres to give Williams a rare points finish.

Kyrgios Withdraws From Halle Tournament

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Australian Nick Kyrgios said he "tried everything" to be fit after withdrawing from the Wimbledon warm-up tournament in Halle on Monday due to a knee issue.

The 28-year-old, who lost the 2022 Wimbledon final in four sets to Novak Djokovic, had surgery to repair a meniscus injury in his left knee in January.

"I tried everything here in Halle to be fit over the past few days, but I had to make the decision to pull out," Kyrgios said on Monday.

"When I play, I want to put in a performance like I did here last year when I was in the semi-finals, but that just wasn't possible," the Australian added.

Kyrgios, ranked 31, had been due to take on Italian Lorenzo Sonego on Tuesday morning in the German grass-court tournament, one of the most important lead-up events for Wimbledon, which begins on July 3.

Kyrgios complained of restricted movement after his first-round loss to Wu Yibing in Stuttgart earlier this month.

"I feel my knee every point. I can't walk without pain," Kyrgios said during the match.

With a 37-10 record, Kyrgios played the best season of his career in 2022, chalking up a tour-leading 12 wins on grass.

His place in Halle will be taken by 45th-ranked Russian Aslan Karatsev.

Bournemouth Announce Shock Sacking of Boss O'Neil



LONDON (Dispatches) - Bournemouth have sacked Gary O'Neil as manager even though he kept the club in the Premier League last season.

O'Neil replaced Scott Parker at the end of August and led the team to a 15th place finish in the English top-flight.

Bournemouth owner Bill Foley said in a statement: "Gary's achievement last season is one I will always be grateful for."

"This has been a difficult decision, but it has been made with great consideration to best position ourselves ahead of the coming season."

The statement said the appointment of a new head coach will be announced imminently. O'Neil initially replaced Parker on an interim basis following a 9-0 hammering at Liverpool before being appointed permanently in November.

The 40-year-old took 36 points from his 34 top-flight games in charge.

"We have also identified a number of significant targets in the transfer market this summer and believe this change in direction will provide us with the best platform from which to build," Foley said. "Gary will go on to have a long career as a head coach or manager, but we feel that, at this moment in time, a change is in the best interests of this football club."

Croatia Coach Asks Modric to Postpone Retirement

ZAGREB (Dispatches) - Croatia coach Zlatko Dalic on Monday appealed to star midfielder Luka Modric to stay amid growing speculation the captain will retire from international football.

Dalic's comments came a day after Croatia lost 5-4 on penalties to Spain in the Nations League final in Rotterdam.

"We need him, this is a generation that still did not complete the job," Dalic told reporters after returning to Zagreb.

The Real Madrid player famously led Croatia to a second-place finish at the 2018 World Cup and third place at last year's tournament in Qatar.

Croatia had been chasing their first ever major trophy against a Spain team Modric, 37, knows inside out.

On Monday, front pages across Croatia ran pictures of the dejected midfielder following the nail-biting defeat.

"It was rather emotional for him yesterday," said Dalic.

"Let him rest and he will tell us what he thinks," the coach added.

On Sunday, Modric said he had already made a "clear decision" about his international career but did not elaborate, according to reports in local media.

"I will not announce it today," said Modric, while leaving the stadium in Rotterdam.

Modric has played in 166 matches for Croatia since his debut in 2006.



Rodgers Returns For Second Spell As Celtic Boss

GLASGOW (Dispatches) - Brendan Rodgers made a dramatic return as Celtic manager on Monday, four years after walking out on the Glasgow giants to join Leicester.

Rodgers agreed a three-year contract with the Scottish champions, who were searching for a new boss after Ange Postecoglou left to take charge of Tottenham.

Former Liverpool boss Rodgers had been out of work since being sacked in April by Leicester, who went on to be relegated from the Premier League.

"I am really delighted to return to Celtic and I am hugely excited by this great opportunity. When I was given the privilege of being asked to join the club again, it was a very simple decision for me and my family," Rodgers said.

"Ange has done some brilliant work across the last two years and I will be doing all I can to maintain Celtic's momentum as we face into all our domestic and European challenges."

The manner of Rodgers' exit in February 2019 infuriated sections of the Celtic support.

A banner in the first game following his departure read: "You traded immortality for mediocrity. Never a Celt, always a fraud."

However, time has been a healer, at least for the Celtic board as they have turned to the Northern Irishman to maintain the Hoops' domestic dominance. "We have enjoyed some great times at Celtic before and this will be my goal again, to deliver good football, ensure we have a team we all love to watch and ultimately bring more success to our fans," Rodgers said.

