

Majlis Lawmakers Approved a Plan Which Permits the Iranian Gov't to Increase Its Capital in the Islamic Development Bank from 4.174,63b Islamic Dinars to 4.631,46 Islamic dinars (\$6.195b)

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Rose 6,525 Points to 2.196m on Monday as Reported, Over 7.891b Securities Worth 55.756 Trillion Rials (About \$133m) Were Traded at the TSE

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Iran 3-Month Non-Oil Trade Stands at \$26.5b

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran's non-oil trade stood at 44.1 million tons worth \$26.5 billion during the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), according to the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA).

Based on the IRICA data, the country's non-oil export reached 35.5 million tons worth \$12.5 billion, while the imports were 8.6 million tons valued at \$14 billion in the first quarter of the current year, IRIB reported.

During the mentioned period, the exports rose 24.4 percent in weight but dropped 8.84 percent in terms of value, however, the imports increased one percent in weight and 5.79 percent in value, as compared to the same period of time in the previous year.

China, Iraq, Turkey, the United Arab Emirates (UAE), and India were the top five export destinations of Iranian non-oil goods in the mentioned three months, and the UAE, China, Turkey, Germany, and India were the top five sources of import.

According to the IRICA data, corn, soybeans, sunflower seed oil, rice, wheat, and barley were the main items imported to the country. **See Page 7**

Iran Deals With Over 20K Lawsuits on Riots

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Iran's Judiciary chief says that over 20,000 lawsuits related to riots were handled in the last Iranian calendar year.

Addressing the national judiciary conference on Monday, Gholam-Hossein Mohseni-Ejei said that about 98,000 inmates have been pardoned under an amnesty granted by Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei.

He said earlier that the Iranian judiciary had separated the cases of "repentant individuals" from those of the rioters, and granted amnesty to them as per the Supreme Leader's order.

The unrest of the past year was to a large extent instigated by foreign elements, but some individuals also took to the streets without being affiliated with foreign agents, he stressed.

The unrest that took place last fall was triggered by the death of a young Iranian woman, Mahsa Amini, who died in hospital on September 16, days after she collapsed in a police station in Tehran.

Iran's Legal Medicine Organization concluded in a report back then that Amini's death was caused by prior illness rather than blows to the head, as some had alleged without any evidence.

No Safe Place For Separatists, Traitors Across Iran



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - The chief commander of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) warned that separatists and traitors will never feel safe anywhere in the country because the Iranian nation will not tolerate any schemes to undermine their independence.

Major General Hossein Salami made the remarks in the northwestern Iranian city of Urmia on Monday as he addressed members of the Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada Base of the IRGC Ground Force as well as a number of military commanders and state officials.

"The Iranian nation will not allow separatists and traitors to conspire against the independence of the country. They will not let enemies endanger security at the country's frontiers. There will be no safe place for anyone pursuing anti-Iran plots," he said.

The IRGC chief highlighted that enemies have been waging various conspiracies and seditious plots against the Iranian nation since the victory of the 1979 Islamic Revolution, emphasizing that they want Iranian cities to be in ruins just like those in war-ravaged Syria.

"They (enemies) want poverty and the collapse of the economy and security. This is the sinister scheme that enemies have been chasing in Muslim countries, and of course, have failed to accomplish until now," Salami said.

The IRGC chief commander also pointed to the hegemonic powers' anger at the development and progress of Muslims, saying they employ all their political and strategic means as well as divisive and destabilizing mechanisms in order to keep Muslim nations divided and underdeveloped.

"This is the plot that arrogant powers, the United States and Zionists have long been pursuing. Displacement does not come to an end overnight. Our borders must be safe and secure," Salami said.

Earlier, the IRGC chief had said enemies that are infuriated by and try to downplay the Islamic Republic's achievements have resorted to evil plots to foment riots in Iran.

Addressing a conference in commemoration of martyred Iranian athletes in Tehran last October, Major General Salami said the enemies cannot tolerate the Islamic Republic's achievements and its success in overcoming the sanctions.

He warned of the hostile scenarios against Iran, saying the evil activities of the media outlets have been masterminded by think tanks in Washington, New York, and a number of European countries with the purpose of destroying Iran's achievements.

The commander also advised the Iranian youth to protect the country's glory, might, grandeur, political power in the international arena, regional clout, and strong security that have been gained with the blood of martyrs.

Encouraging Signs Begin to Emerge in Iran Economic Recovery

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran, according to Fars news agency, attracted \$6.05 billion of foreign investment between August 2021 when President Ebrahim Raeisi came to office and March 2023, up 84.3% compared to the same period in the previous administration.

The former government, contrary to its posturing, gave short shrift to this important avenue for bringing in foreign capital and technology in the belief that it was unachievable without first reviving the 2015 nuclear deal and having Iran removed from the Paris-based FATF group's blacklist.

The new administration, however, made it a policy objective to disconnect the country's lifeline from the umbilical cord of the nuclear agreement and the FATF, ordering economic and diplomatic institutions to put attracting foreign investment the centerpiece of their operations.

This policy shift espoused proactive economic diplomacy with neighboring and aligned countries with the aim of raising foreign exchange influx to Iran.

According to the statistics of the Investment and Economic and Technical Assistance Organization of Iran, 401 foreign investment projects worth \$10.7 billion have been approved since the beginning of the new administration. Out of this figure, 356 projects worth \$6.05 billion have secured funding.

Gross fixed capital formation, which reflects government and private investment, rose 7.7 percent in the machinery sector last year, signaling the revival of the economy especially in the industrial and services enterprises as well as the weakening of sanctions on Iran's access to production machinery.

Gross fixed capital formation sharply dropped, especially in the last years of the previous government, severely eroding economic growth. Capital accumulation in the Iranian years of 1400 and 1401 fell to 4.1 percent and 2.1 percent respectively.

Reports by the Central Bank and Statistical Center of Iran suggest it has started to rise again, a sign that the new government's neighbor-oriented policies are apparently paying dividends. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

U.S. Behind Any Major Terrorist Act in the World

For decades or better to say at least in the recent century all of U.S. administrations have resorted to force, plot and finally terrorist acts to tame the countries which do not obey their policy and the Islamic Revolution in Iran since its victory in 1979 has been the target of any plot and terrorist act which has been engineered by the U.S. and its allies mainly Israel.

If we have a short review of the contemporary history, we can find the trace of plots and terrorists acts in most countries which have been supported by the U.S. administrations.

Cuba, Nicaragua, Venezuela, Colombia, Iraq, Syria, Lebanon and Iran are some examples of victims of the U.S.'s plots and support of terrorist acts, and the U.S. actually has resorted to supporting terrorists in the Middle Eastern countries because Muslims are good excuse for the U.S. to use terrorists and then blame the Muslims and accusing fundamentalism as the factor behind terrorism while in fact this is the U.S. who engineers these terrorist groups either financially or politically.

Iran since the victory of the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979, the country has been the target of any plot of the U.S. and even before the Islamic Revolution, the U.S. administrations used to resort to different plots to keep Pahlavi rulers in power.

On Sunday, Iran's top human rights official said the United States is "directly" responsible for any act of terror since it was Washington that created many terrorist groups.

Kazem Gharibabadi, secretary of Iran's High Council for Human Rights, said the Islamic Republic has all the necessary documents proving the United States set up terrorist groups not only inside Iran but across the region.

"Groups such as al-Qaeda, Daesh and the al-Nusra were all created by the United States and the responsibility for the terrorist acts by these groups and their members lies directly with the US."

Gharibabadi said the U.S. and its Western allies hatched a plot after the victory of the Islamic Revolution to "disintegrate various parts of the country by creating terrorist groups."

One such group, the Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) has killed and martyred more than 17,000 oppressed Iranian people, he said, adding that Tehran has warned Western countries that the MKO would show no mercy to them.

"We have recently witnessed events in France and Albania. These countries have now come to the conclusion that such groups are fundamentally terrorist and they even threaten their host countries," Gharibabadi said. **See Page 7**

China Says Dialogue Effective Way to Unfreeze Iran Nuclear Deal

BEIJING (Dispatches) - Signaling its support to "indirect talks" between Iran and the US over the 2015 nuclear deal, China on Monday said the "effective way" to resolve the issue was to hold dialogue, state media reported.

"It is an effective way to resolve the issue to resume the full and effective implementation of the comprehensive plan (JCPOA) through dialogue and negotiation," said Mao Ning, spokeswoman of China's Foreign Ministry.

Mao said the 2015 nuclear deal, officially known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, or JCPOA, was "a significant achievement of multilateral diplomacy."

The US unilaterally withdrew from the agreement in May 2018, after which Iran gradually ramped up its nuclear enrichment activities, higher than the limit stipulated in the deal.

Talks to revive the landmark deal remain stalled since last year, but Tehran and Washington are said to have quietly resumed indirect talks. **See Page 7**

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Iran Calls Interpol for Support to Combat Organized Crimes

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian international police chief Majid Karimi has called on the global community and Interpol to support the country in dealing with organized crimes.

The Islamic Republic of Iran has always been decisive and serious in dealing with various organized crimes in the region and the world, he added. Karimi made the remarks in a meeting with Jürgen Stock, the secretary-general of Interpol, ISNA reported on Sunday. The law enforcement force of the Islamic Republic of Iran has always provided its assistance to the police of neighboring countries, but the Taliban have created problems for the Islamic Republic of Iran at the borders, leading to the martyrdom and wounding of several police forces, he stressed.

U.S. Needs to Fundamentally Change Its Behavior Toward Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has underlined the need for the United States to “fundamentally change” its hostile behavior toward the Islamic Republic as a prelude to any alternation in Tehran’s policy regarding Washington.

Speaking during a weekly press briefing in Tehran on Monday, Iran’s Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani stressed that the Iranian nation and government attach importance to Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei’s view on the US.

“Iran’s approach towards the United States is based on [Washington’s] hostile behavior. It is natural that Iran’s attitude towards the US will not change until America’s behavior changes fundamentally,” he said, hinting at speculations about an agreement with the US to revive the 2015 Iran nuclear deal.

Kanaani also said that Iran has not tied its foreign relations and national interests to any specific country or case, adding that the government is pursuing balanced ties with different states based on mutual respect.

“Iran expands its foreign relations with other countries based on national interests and mutual respect. Over the past two years, we have seen the benefits of the government’s regional convergence policy,” he said.

Meanwhile, the spokesman announced that the Iranian Foreign Ministry will publish its annual report on the situation of human rights in the United States on the occasion of the American Human Rights Review and Exposure Week (June 27-July 3).

He further said that Iran is still pursuing the release of its nationals held illegally in



US prisons and that the previous understandings in this regard failed due to Washington’s unpreparedness to decide their implementation.

“In the past and at different stages, we had understandings between Iran and the United States through intermediaries, but when it came to their implementation, the American side was not ready to make decisions and implement them,” he said.

Kanaani also emphasized that the US sanctions are illegal in principle and that the arrest and imprisonment of people under the pretext of circumventing sanctions is “twice as illegal.”

“However, the issue is still being followed up. We are pursuing the return of these people to their families through a role played by the parties that have goodwill. We have to see whether the US is ready for such a decision or not?”

Commenting on new sanctions imposed by the European Union on Iran, the spokesman said the bloc is moving in the “wrong direction” by taking the “disproportionate measure” of simultaneously calling for dialogue and slapping bans on Tehran.

“Europe should refrain from following the US footsteps and change the process of imposing sanctions against the Iranian government and nation,” he added.

Earlier on Monday, the European Council decided to impose the ninth package of sanctions on an additional 7 individuals over alleged human rights violations in Iran.

President Voices Full Support for Russia’s National Sovereignty

TEHRAN (PressTV) - President Ebrahim Raisi has expressed the Islamic Republic’s support for Russia’s national sovereignty following the aborted mutiny by the paramilitary Wagner group, according to a senior government official in Tehran.

In a Monday phone conversation, President Raisi and his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, discussed the Friday mutiny by Yevgeny Prigozhin and his Wagner group, Mohammad Jamshidi, the Iranian president’s deputy chief of staff for political affairs, said in a post on Twitter.

The Kremlin also confirmed the phone call between Raisi and Putin and said, “The Iranian president expressed full support for the Russian leadership in connection with the June 24 events.”

The mutiny started over differences between Prigozhin and Russian Defense Minister Sergei Shoigu.

According to Jamshidi, Putin briefed Raisi on the recent developments in his country and emphasized that the events failed to challenge Russia’s national sovereignty.

France Advised to Use Correct Name of Persian Gulf

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has censured France’s use of a misnomer for the Persian Gulf in a tweet, calling on the government in Paris to refrain from making meddlesome statements and leveling accusations against the Islamic Republic.

Foreign Ministry Spokesman Nasser Kanaani posted a statement on Twitter on Sunday in reaction to the tweet by the French Foreign Ministry, in which Iran was accused of being a “source of instability” in “the Gulf” and West Asia.

“If the Persian Gulf is in question, then its correct, historical and international name must be used,” Kanaani said in the Persian-language tweet.

“While France is several thousand kilometers away from the Persian Gulf region, it is advised to avoid making interventionist statements instead of accusing Iran.”

Several international scientific conferences have been held in recent years to discuss the historical roots of the Persian Gulf.

Researchers from reputable academic centers worldwide are almost unanimous in their opinion that the body of water has been referred to as the Persian Gulf throughout history.

All Border Crossings With Azerbaijan Open

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran’s Embassy in Baku has announced that all existing land and air border crossings between Iran and Azerbaijan and the Azerbaijani exclave of Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic are open to Azerbaijani nationals.

In a press release on Sunday, the embassy addressed the inquiries of Azerbaijani nationals about the current circumstances of traveling to Iran following a recent travel advisory by Baku and suspension of visa services for Iranians at airports in Azerbaijan.

“We would like to inform you that all land and air borders of the Islamic Republic of Iran with the existing checkpoints between the Republic of Azerbaijan and the Nakhchivan Autonomous Republic are open to our Azerbaijani brothers and sisters, and the previous regulations on the cancellation of visa requirements for them are still in effect” it said.

In recent days, Azerbaijan’s Foreign Ministry had announced the suspension of issuing flight permits for Iranian citizens at international airports in Azerbaijan.

Iran, Pakistan to Enhance Security Ties through Naval Collaboration

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Top commanders from Iran and Pakistan engaged in discussions on bolstering bilateral cooperation in education, student exchange, and the exchange of naval delegations.

During a visit to Karachi, the head of the Iranian military delegation joined the graduation ceremony and parade of the Pakistan Navy.

Rear Admiral Arya Shafqat Rudsari, the Commander of Imam Khomeini Naval University of Noshahr as the head of the Iranian military delegation, attended the graduation ceremony and parade of Pakistan’s navy. He also held talks with Rear Admiral Mohammad Khalid, the Commander of the Pakistan Naval Academy, to explore avenues for expanding educational cooperation between the two countries.

In their meeting, both sides stressed bilateral cooperation in education, student exchange programs, and the exchange of naval delegations.

The Commander of the Pakistan Naval Academy commended the presence of the Iranian military delegation at the naval officers’ graduation ceremony and troop parade. He described it as a testament to the deep friendship between the two countries and their shared commitment to maintaining maritime security and stability.

Over recent years, the relationship between Iran and Pakistan in the fields of defense, military, and security, including naval exchanges, has made notable strides.

Martyr Beheshti Architect of Iran’s Judicial System

TEHRAN (IP) - President Seyed Ebrahim Raisi called martyr Beheshti as the architect of Iran’s judicial system and served as the face of the Islamic revolution.

Raisi addressing the national conference to mark Iran’s national Judiciary Week, said: “The efforts of the judiciary show that these judicial staff have put all their efforts to administer justice.”

“While supervising the implementation of the law, the judicial system should also pay attention to the necessity of courage in the actions of managers” Raisi further explained

He added: We are on the eve of the anniversary of the martyrdom of 72 companions of the Imam and the revolution. Martyr Dr. Beheshti, although he was the head of the Supreme Court for a year and a half, within this short time, he acted as the architect of the judicial system of the Islamic Revolution. Sincerity, faith, knowledge, and organizational outlook were formed in him before taking responsibility and flourished during his tenure.

The president said: Mr. Beheshti served as the face of the revolution and the leader though he was misgauged at the time of the seditions.

Martyr Mohammad Hosseini Beheshti was an Iranian jurist, philosopher, cleric, and politician who is considered to have been the primary architect of Iran’s post-revolution constitution, as well as the administrative structure of the Islamic republic.

Beheshti also served as the Secretary General of the Islamic Republic Party and was the head of the Iranian judicial system. He further served as Chairman of the Council of Islamic Revolution, and the Assembly of Experts.

Beheshti was assassinated on 28 June 1981, in the Haft-e Tir bombing by the People’s Mujahedin of Iran (MEK), along with more than 70 members of the Islamic Republic Party, including 4 cabinet ministers and 23 members of parliament.

Meanwhile in the event Majlis Speaker said that the name of Martyr Beheshti is associated with the name of Iran’s Judiciary.

Mohammad Baqer Qalibaf said: “Whenever the name of the Judiciary is mentioned, all our people immediately remember the name of Martyr Beheshti, one of the martyrs of the 7th of Tir (June 28), and we know the Judiciary by the name of Martyr Beheshti, even for a few years, which is a source of pride for all of us.”

He continued: “Martyr Beheshti was an embodiment of the balance of science and practice, and in every sense, he was an example of sincere faith and efforts for the well-being of the people. We consider Martyr Beheshti a myth; we think him to be the patient among mishaps, taunts, and conspiracies.”

He stated: “We know him for his humility and discipline. He sacrificed his reputation to promote the values of the revolution and remained silent for unity in society.”

He further emphasized: “He proved to our young generation that the way of progress does not conflict with a commitment to religious issues, and he taught us all about appreciating the importance of time.”

Qalibaf reminded us: “Martyr Beheshti taught us that with minimum commonalities, we could work for the progress of the revolution and that independence requires us to use the capacity of the whole nation, and our victory lies in unity.”

Future of Iran-UAE Relations Promising

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iranian envoy to Abu Dhabi said the future of relations between Iran and the United Arab Emirates is promising and in line with the interests of both nations.

“The two countries intend to find ways to have warmer and closer relations in light of developments in the region and the world,” Reza Ameri said.

Ameri, who has just been appointed as Iran’s new ambassador, said Tehran-Abu Dhabi relations had seen a period of downturn, but have now been reactivated and seeing signs of progress every day.

“I see the future very bright and full of hope given the potential of both sides for the development of ties,” he said.

The Iranian foreign minister’s recent visit to the UAE is an indication of the government’s special attention to relations with the Arab country as part of broader policy of enhancing ties with neighbors, according to Ameri.

During a tour of Persian Gulf states, Hossein Amirabdollahian traveled to Abu Dhabi on Thursday, where he met President Sheikh Mohamed bin Zayed Al Nahyan.

The two officials discussed bilateral relations and ways to enhance cooperation.

Ameri described the meetings as fruitful, saying the Iranian side had expressed its readiness for unlimited improvement of relations with the UAE in all sectors, particularly economic and trade cooperation and further participation of the two countries’ private sectors.

“To achieve a level of active and beneficial cooperation, we need coordination and careful planning; we have great plans ahead of us which will hopefully be realized thanks to serious efforts of both sides,” he said.

The foreign minister’s trip to the UAE followed stops in Qatar, Kuwait and Oman, the latest in a flurry of diplomatic moves by Tehran to improve relations with neighbors and secure the region.

Tehran, Baku Can Resolve Existing Problems in Their Relations

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Iranian foreign minister says Tehran and Baku are capable of resolving the existing problems in their relations without intervention of third parties.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks in an early Monday phone call with his Azerbaijani counterpart, Jeyhun Bayramov.

During the conversation, Iran’s top diplomat said, “Relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Republic of Azerbaijan are such that they can resolve the existing problems in their ties in a bilateral manner and put them on the right track.”

He also touched upon the most important regional and international developments, stressing the necessity of continued and close consultations between the two neighboring countries.

The Azeri foreign minister, for his part, lauded



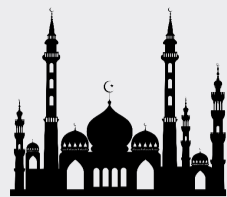
Amirabdollahian’s “constructive efforts” toward settling the existing tensions in the two countries’ relations.

Bayramov described his conversation with the Iranian foreign minister as positive, expressing hope

that bilateral relations would further expand following the resolution of a number of outstanding issues in the near future.

The two foreign ministers also discussed other issues of mutual interest, including the North-South Transport Corridor as well as future cooperation within such regional and international organizations as the Economic Cooperation Organization and the Non-Aligned Movement.

During an earlier telephone conversation in June, the foreign ministers had emphasized the need for the two neighbors to resolve the existing misunderstandings in the best interest of their mutual ties.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:07
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:45
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:04
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:50

90. Except those who join a group between whom and you there is a treaty (of peace), or those who approach you with hearts restraining them from fighting you as well as fighting their own people. If Allah had pleased, He could have given them power over you, and they would have fought you: Therefore if they withdraw from you but fight you not, and (instead) send you (Guarantees of) peace, then Allah Hath opened no way for you (to war against them).

Surah 4. Women (90)

Iran's Barter With Sri Lanka Not Limited To Only Tea

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



TEHRAN - Executive Manager of Iran's Tea Factories Syndicate says the trade barter with Sri Lanka is not limited only to tea and Sri Lanka will barter 4 to 8 more products for repaying its oil debts.

Speaking to ILNA, Mohammad Sadeq Hasani said that last year a delegation from Iran's Trade Promotion Organization visited Sri Lanka and the outcome of the visit was an MoU that Sri Lanka accepted to pay its oil debts to Iran through bartering 4 to 8 products and tea was one of them and raw material for producing tire was another product.

Reacting to recent report that Sri Lanka will give tea to Iran in exchange for its oil debts, Hasani said that tea is not the only product of Sri Lanka which will be sent to Iran for its oil and 8 products have been agreed to be sent to Iran, adding that this mechanism of imports will be in favor of producers because the product are imported with suitable price.

He went on to say that domestic tea product does not meet the demands of the domestic market and therefore import is inevitable and last year 110,000 tons of tea was imported which was unprecedented in the history of the country. He noted that 67% of the required tea was imported from India, 16% from Sri Lanka, 7% from the UAE and 3% from Turkey and India.

Hasani reiterated that importers should pass many hurdles in the sanctions era to success in importing their products but bartering tea from Sri Lanka creates the possibility of direct export to Iran and there is no need to give the official rate forex to importers to import tea.

He added the country needs a new formula for balancing the real tea consumption in the country, adding that two years ago 75,000 tons of tea was imported and last year the figure rose to 110,000 tons and added that it seems getting the Nima-rate forex has boosted incentive for imports.

Hasani reiterated that the quality of Sri Lankan tea should be confirmed by Iranian supervisory authorities, adding that barter of tea from Sri Lanka is nothing new to surprise people.

He further said that the price of Indian and Sri Lankan tea is lower than what is registered in the custom office and importers register it with prices higher than their purchase. On exports of Iranian tea, he said that Iran Custom Administration statistics show the figure is 10700 tons but it is strange and it seems this amount of tea has not exited the country, admitting mafia group in this industry since the Pahlavi Regime exists and continues its activities.

He admitted that people have lost their purchasing power and it can be seen in the amount of tea sales that tea factories announce.

Threats for Iran Bitumen Exports in 1402



By: Dr. Masoud Esfandiar,
University Teacher and Economic Analyst

The vacuum batum production capacity of Iran is 12m tons per year that 5m tons of it is for fuel oil and over 6m tons of it is allocated for producing bitumen that out of this figure, 4m tons of bitumen is exported and 2m is consumed domestically. In other words, out of 100% of bitumen production, 70% is exported and remaining 30% is consumed in the country to meet domestic demands. By the way Iran ranks seventh and fourth in production and export of bitumen in the world respectively and its importance is prevailed when of the country's forex source of revenue during the oil sanctions is bitumen. According to the statistics, the value of Iran's annual bitumen export stands at \$1.5b and Iran Custom Administration's report for 10 months last year shows that bitumen was Iran's tenth exporting item in this short period while national bitumen market is challenging with many problems. Pricing vacuum batum, issue of bartering bitumen and impacts of sanctions (shipping, insurance and transfer of forex) are of the most important challenges ahead of this industry in the current Iranian calendar year 1402 which we will go through them.

One of the important challenges ahead of national bitumen industry is the price of vacuum batum feed, and 7 refineries produce and offer it on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) and bitumen producing companies are in tough competition for the base price and it leads to increase in the final price of bitumen. The rise in the number of vacuum batum producers has caused decline in the quality of the production and it needs more monitoring from the officials because it will affect the quality of bitumen production.

Sanctions and new global rivals are the other challenges ahead of Iran's bitumen industry. The UAE, Oman, India, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Kenya, China and Bangladesh are major buyers of Iran's bitumen and despite \$100 difference in the price with East Asian products, some factors have caused East Asian buyers not to show interest in buying Iran bitumen and by the way pressures of sanctions has caused buyers do not accept the risks of transport and transit of big ships. In between, Singapore and South Korea due to tax exemption and low transport cost have won the Asia-Pacific markets. By the way bad pricing of Iran bitumen can create arbitrage opportunity of bitumen to Iran's exporting markets from Turkey, Azerbaijan and producers of East and South Europe who likely take advantage of Russian cheap light and heavy crude oil.

Currently those countries can maintain the international exporting markets that they sell their products with lower price, better quality and long-term payment while Iranian bitumen producers are currently challenging with shortage of liquidity, fluctuation in the forex market, rise in the cost of transport, rise in the price of feed, banking sanctions and rise in the production cost and the government should not impose more costs on them.

By the way some issues like increasing the purchase in cash of vacuum batum on the Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME), dumping of bitumen by some companies, approval for mandatory sale of exporting bitumen on the IME, upgrading the refineries, price of crude and fuel oil, lack of ships and inflicting expensive costs for winning new markets and new rigid environmental regulations and laws should be taken into consideration.

On the whole Iran due to its relative advantage and strong potentials in the field of bitumen can play a role as a pricing hub of bitumen as well as balancing the demand-and supply of provided that it is supported by the company and producers remain integrated. By the way sale of bitumen to benchmark due to its 50 to 100 dollars of profit margin per ton can be used as an efficient CFR strategy.

Tehran-Ankara Trade Hits Nearly \$2.2b



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The trade exchanges between Iran and Turkey in the first five months of 2023 were about \$2.2 billion, showing a 20 percent decline compared to the same period of last year.

According to the latest figures released by the Turkish Statistical Institute (TURKSTAT), Iran's trade with the neighboring country hit \$2.190 billion from January to May 2023.

The institute put the value of trade between the two countries at \$2.740 billion in January-May 2022.

According to TURKSTAT, Turkey's export to Iran from January to May 2023 reached \$1.152 billion, recording a four percent decrease compared to last year's corresponding period.

Turkey had exported over \$1.204 billion worth of products to the Islamic Republic in the first five months of 2022.

Turkey's imports from Iran also registered a 32 percent decline and reached from \$1.536 billion in January to May 2022 to \$1.38 billion in the first five months of 2023.

According to a report by the Statistical Center of the European Commission (Eurostat), Iran exported more than three billion cubic meters of natural gas to neighboring Turkey from January to May 2023.

Based on the data previously released by the Turkish Statistical Institute, the value of Iran's exports to Turkey increased by 19 percent to reach \$3.35 billion in 2022.

Turkey had imported over \$2.82 billion worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic in 2021.

Based on the mentioned data, Iran's imports from the country also marked an 11-percent rise to hit \$3.07 billion in the past year, in comparison with 2021, when the figure was \$2.77 billion.

According to the Turkish Statistical Institute, the trade between the two countries has registered a 15-percent rise in 2022 compared to 2021.

The value of trade between the two neighbors reached \$6.42 billion in 2022, while the figure stood at \$5.59 billion in the preceding year.

Iran's trade balance with Turkey has been \$280 million positive in favor of Iran in the past year.

Iran, Qatar Sign Agreement on Skilled Worker Program

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Iranian and Qatari ministers have signed an agreement to cooperate on a skilled workforce program that will enable Qatar to recruit Iranian experts and technicians in various economic and industrial projects.

The signing ceremony was held in Tehran on Monday with the participation of Iranian Minister of Cooperatives, Labor and Social Welfare Soudat Mortazavi and Qatari Minister of Labor Ali bin Samikh Al Marri.

Mortazavi said after signing the agreement that members of Iranian and Qatari delegations have held good meetings since Sunday as he stressed the importance of implementation of mutual agreements between the two countries.

Mahmoud Karimi Beyravnand, an Iranian deputy minister of labor also said after the meeting that the memoranda of understanding between Iran and Qatar will focus on various areas including hoteling, medicine, and maritime industry.

He went on to say that the Qatari side has demanded the dispatch of a skilled workforce from Iran to respond to job demands in those sectors.

Also, Mohammed Hassan Al-Obaidly, Assistant Undersecretary at the Qatari Ministry of Labor, announced in the meeting that a permanent joint taskforce had been formed to follow up on the implementation of labor agreements between Iran and Qatar.

Rice Imports Down 60% y/y in April-May

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Figures by the Iranian customs office (IRICA) show that rice imports into the country fell significantly in April-May compared to the same period last year.

IRICA figures cited in a report by the IRIB News showed that Iran had imported over 171,000 metric tons (mt) of rice worth over \$212.5 million in the two months to May 21, down 50% and 60% in volume and value terms, respectively, from the same period in 2022.

Iran had imported nearly \$535 million worth of rice in April-May last year, showed the figures.

India remained largest supplier of rice to Iran in the two months to late May with 89,000 mt of exports worth \$101 million, followed by Pakistan at 73,000 mt worth \$92 million, said IRICA.

It said Iran's rice imports from the United Arab Emirates and Thailand reached \$12 million and \$1 million, respectively, in April-May, adding that nearly \$6.5 million worth of rice had been imported from Iran's free and special economic zones over the same period.

Iran's increasing rice imports from India and Pakistan had helped it expand trade with those countries in recent years.

However, an oversupply of domestically-grown rice reported in recent months has caused prices of some premium varieties to fall significantly in the Iranian market while forcing importers to reduce their orders from India and Pakistan.

Iran to Launch Its Only Titanium Mine Until March

TEHRAN (PressTV)- Iranian authorities say the only titanium mine in the country will come on line until March 2024 as the government continues offering more support and funding to the mining and metals companies to help boost exports from the sector.

A local official of the Iranian Ministry of Industry, Mine and Trade (MIMT) in the southeastern province of Kerman said on Sunday that the titanium processing factory in the city of Kahnuj will come on line after more than 30 years of works on the project by government and private companies.

Moslem Moravveji made the announcement in a briefing with reporters about latest MIMT projects in south of Kerman, an area which is rich in precious metals, including copper, chromite, magnesite and gold.

The MIMT and Iran's state company IMIDRO agreed in 2019 to award the project to develop titanium mine in Kahnuj to a private investor to provide the technology and investment needed to expand the mine.

The reserve contains some 150 million metric tons (mt) of titanium with some estimates putting the figure at nearly 400 million mt.

The mine can produce 130,000 mt of titanium concentrate and some 70,000 mt of slag per year. The planned launch of the titanium mine comes amid programs by the Iranian government to expand the country's mining and metals sector as it seeks to reduce its reliance on oil revenues and to create more jobs for Iran's youth.

Experts say the policy has paid off as Iran had reported significant increases in its metals and mining export revenues in recent years.

Housing Developers Leave Iran For Turkey, Georgia

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iran's Real Estate Consultants Association says a significant number of housing developers have migrated to Turkey and Georgia, warning of the impact on the local economy.

"The more we boost the property market of foreign countries, the same amount of dollars will leave our country, and this is very dangerous for our country in the future," Vice President of the Association, Davoud Beiginejad, said. Housing developers, who rely on the construction industry for their livelihood, have been hit particularly hard by problems. With no end in sight to the problems, many developers are looking for greener pastures abroad.

On the contrary, official figures in Turkey indicate a boost to the construction industry as well as rising sales of housing to foreign citizens.

Despite the strong earthquake of February this year in Turkey, which killed more than 50,000, during the first five months of this year, 16,779 residential units were sold to foreign citizens, 14 percent of whom were Iranians.

Jihadists Kill Five Civilians in East Kenya

NAIROBI (Dispatches) - Al-Shabaab jihadists have killed five civilians, some by beheading, in eastern Kenya, a witness and a police source told AFP.

The attack occurred on Saturday around 7:30 pm (1630 GMT) in the villages of Juhudi and Salama in Lamu county, close to the Somali border, the source said.

"Five people were killed. The victims had their throats slit and there are others who were beheaded."

One resident, Hassan Abdul, said that "women were locked in the houses and the men ordered out, where they were tied with ropes and butchered".



One Dead, 7 Hurt as Rollercoaster Derails in Sweden

STOCKHOLM (Dispatches) - A rollercoaster derailed at a Swedish theme park, killing one person and injuring seven, police and the park in Stockholm said.

A carriage of the Jetline rollercoaster broke away and fell from a great height, taking several people with it, according to a correspondent for Swedish television SVT at the Grona Lund theme park.

The ride, launched in 1988, travels at around 90 kph (56 mph).

"One person unfortunately died," Grona Lund spokeswoman Cecilia Bjorling told AFP. Stockholm police confirmed that seven people were injured and taken to hospital.



Exit Polls in Greek Election Project Landslide Win for New Democracy Party



ATHENS (Dispatches) - An exit poll from Greece's second election in five weeks indicates the conservative New Democracy party has won by a landslide, gaining enough parliamentary seats to form a government for a second four-year term.

The poll projects Kyriakos Mitsotakis' party gaining 40-44% of the vote, with his main rival, the left-wing Syriza party suffering a crushing defeat with just 16-19% projected support, even worse than his 20% in the last elections in May.

Sunday's vote came just over a week after a migrant ship capsized and sank off the western coast of Greece, leaving hundreds of people dead and missing and calling into question the actions of Greek authorities and the country's strict migration policy. But the disaster, one of the worst in the Mediterranean in recent years, did not affect the election, with domestic economic issues at the forefront of voters' minds.

The exit poll projects Mitsotakis' party will a comfortable majority of Parliament's 300 seats, allowing him to form a stable government thanks to a change in the electoral law that grants the winning party bonus seats. The previous election in May, conducted under a proportional representation system, left him five seats short of a majority despite winning 41% of the vote.

Greeks headed to the polls for the second time in less than two months on Sunday, with the conservative party in power a strong favorite to win with a wide majority after a campaign focused on economic growth and security.

The vote is overshadowed by a major shipwreck just over a week ago that left hundreds of migrants dead or missing off the coast of western Greece. But the disaster is unlikely to significantly affect the overall outcome as Greeks are expected to focus on domestic economic issues.

Conservative leader Kyriakos Mitsotakis, 55, is eyeing a second term as prime minister after his New Democracy party won by a huge margin in May elections — but fell short of gaining enough parliamentary seats to form a government. With a new electoral law now favoring the winning party with bonus seats, he is hoping to form a strong majority in the 300-member parliament.

His main rival is Alexis Tsipras, 48, who leads the left-wing Syriza party and served as prime minister from 2015 to 2019 — some of the most turbulent years of Greece's nearly decade-long financial crisis.

The final turnout at the previous election was 61.1%.

Tsipras fared dismally in the May elections, coming a distant second, 20 percentage points behind New Democracy. He has since been trying to rally his voter base, a task complicated by splinter parties formed by some of his former associates.

Speaking after voting in a western Athens neighborhood, Tsipras seemed to accept his party would be in opposition for the next four years.

"This crucial election is not only determining who will govern the country, it is determining our lives for the next four years, it is determining the quality of our democracy," Tsipras said. "It is determining whether we will have an unchecked government or a strong opposition. This role can only be played by Syriza."

Sunday's vote comes after hundreds of migrants died and went missing in southern Greece when an overcrowded fishing trawler heading from Libya to Italy capsized and sank. The shipwreck drew criticism over how Greek authorities handled the rescue, as well as over the country's restrictive migration policy.

But the disaster, one of the worst in the Mediterranean in recent years, has done little to dent Mitsotakis' 20-point lead in opinion polls over Tsipras, with the economy at the forefront of most voters' concerns. As Greece gradually recovers from its brutal financial crisis, voters appear happy to return to power a prime minister who delivered economic growth and lowered unemployment.

Russian Mercenaries Return to Bases Under a Deal

VORONEZH (Dispatches) - Heavily armed Russian mercenaries withdrew from the southern Russian city of Rostov overnight under a deal that halted their rapid advance on Moscow but left unanswered questions about President Vladimir Putin's grip on power.

Ending their mutiny, fighters of the Wagner group headed back to their bases in return for guarantees for their safety. Their leader, Yevgeny Prigozhin, will move to Belarus under the deal mediated by Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko.

U.S. Secretary of State Antony Blinken suggested the turmoil in Russia might not be over and could take months to play out, while Italy's foreign minister said it had shattered the "myth" of Russian unity.

Putin has not made public comments since the deal was struck to de-escalate the crisis.

State television released excerpts on Sunday of an interview in which Putin said he was giving top priority to the conflict in Ukraine. However the interview appeared to have been recorded before the mutiny and he made no reference to Saturday's events.

State television also said Putin would attend a meeting of Russia's Security Council this coming week, without elaborating.



Guatemalans Go to Polls for Electing a New President

GUATEMALA CITY (Dispatches) - Guatemalans went to polls to elect a new president and vice president as well as fill all congressional seats and hundreds of local posts after one of the most tumultuous electoral seasons in the Central American nation's recent history.

A little more than 9 million people were registered to vote, but many Guatemalans expressed disappointment with their presidential choices after three opposition candidates were excluded by authorities. A large number of null ballots were expected, and experts said it could depress turnout. With none of the 22 presidential candidates polling near the required 50% threshold for winning outright, a second round of voting on Aug. 20 between the top two finishers was almost certain.

At the Mixed Urban School No. 2, a combined elementary and middle school in Sumpango, voters began lining up outside its muralled wall an hour before voting was scheduled to begin at 7 a.m. local time. The town of about 37,000 sits in the mountains less than an hour west of the capital. Voting appeared orderly.

Walter Alfredo Hernández, a 61-year-old lawyer and notary from Sumpango, was one of the first to vote Sunday. He was in and out in about 20 minutes.

He drew a clear line between how he thinks things are going in his town — pretty well — and nationally — a disaster.

Guatemala "is immersed in misfortune, in corruption," Hernández said, before going on to list the co-opted institutions, especially in the country's justice system.

"The citizen wants to lift himself up and he can't. The rich have our heads," he said, demonstrating his foot pressing something to the ground. "The powerful, the military officers and the business people, they are the ones who have us on our knees and don't allow us to develop."

Marleny Cabrera, a 29-year-old elementary teacher at another school, said she was looking for a change in the direction for the country. "I believe a less stable emphasis has been given to education and health," she said. "In my case I'm looking for the good for the children of our community and I came to choose Guatemala's well-being."

Prigozhin, 62, was seen leaving the district military headquarters in Rostov - hundreds of miles south of Moscow - late on Saturday in a sport utility vehicle. His whereabouts on Sunday were not known.

Prigozhin, a former Putin ally and ex-convict whose forces have fought the bloodiest battles of the 16-month war in Ukraine, said his decision to advance on Moscow was intended to remove corrupt and incompetent Russian commanders he blames for botching the war.

Western leaders have expressed concern over the turmoil in Russia, which has the world's largest nuclear arsenal.

"We've seen more cracks emerge in the Russian facade. It is too soon to tell exactly where they go, and when they get there. But certainly, we have all sorts of new questions that Putin is going to have to address in the weeks and months ahead," Blinken told NBC's "Meet the Press" program on Sunday.

Blinken also said the United States remained focused on "resolutely and relentlessly" helping Ukraine to defend itself and recover territory seized by Russia over the past 16 months.

Largest Hajj Pilgrimage in History Begins in Saudi Arabia

RIYADH (Dispatches) - The pilgrimage of Hajj has begun as crowds of Muslims donning white robes circle the Kaaba, the cubed structure at the epicentre of Islam's holiest site, their prayers ringing through the air.

The annual pilgrimage began on Sunday in Mecca, Saudi Arabia with the tawaf, the circling of the Kaaba, in an event that is expected to break attendance records.

"This year, we will witness the largest Hajj pilgrimage in history," said an official at the Saudi Ministry of Hajj and Umrah. More than 2.5 million Muslims are expected to take part, as coronavirus pandemic restrictions in place since 2020 have been fully relaxed.

That year, just 10,000 people were permitted to participate; 59,000 in 2021; and last year there was a cap of one million people.

"I am living the most beautiful days of my life," Abdelazim, a 65-year-old Egyptian who saved for 20 years to pay the \$6000 cost he needed to attend, told the AFP news agency at the site.

On Sunday evening, the pilgrims began making their way to Mina, about 8km (5 miles) from Mecca's al-Masjid al-Haram, or the Grand Mosque, before they gather at Mount Arafat, where Prophet Muhammad is believed to have delivered his final sermon.

This year's Hajj is a challenge, taking place in the nearly 45-degree-Celsius heat, the date for the pilgrimage dependent on the lunar calendar.

Saudi authorities said more than 32,000 health workers and thousands of ambulances are on standby to treat cases of heatstroke, dehydration and exhaustion.

The Islamic ritual is obligatory for every able-bodied Muslim adult who has the financial means to take part, forming one of the five pillars of the religion.

The physically and emotionally challenging experience is meant to cleanse followers of sin and bring them closer to God.

This year, Hajj is held between June 26 and July 1, with the celebration of Eid al-Adha taking place on June 28.

While an expensive ritual, the journey of Hajj often inspires hope for many, even if they hail from parts of the world besieged by war, poverty or occupation. Many save what little money they have for years, to be able to afford it.

Four groups of pilgrims left Gaza last week. Meanwhile, pilgrims from northwestern Syria streamed through border crossings with Turkey. And Yemenis boarded the first direct flight to Saudi Arabia since 2016 for the pilgrimage.



Afghan Supreme Leader Says Women Saved From Oppression by Taliban

KABUL (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's supreme leader said Sunday the country's women were being saved from "traditional oppressions" by the adoption of Islamic governance and their status as "free and dignified human beings" restored.

In a statement marking this week's Eid al-Adha holiday, Hibatullah Akhundzada -- who rarely appears in public and rules by decree from the Taliban's birthplace in Kandahar -- said steps had been taken to provide women with a "comfortable and prosperous life according to Islamic Sharia".

The United Nations expressed "deep concern" last week that women were being deprived of their rights under Afghanistan's Taliban government and warned of systematic gender apartheid.

Since returning to power in August 2021, Taliban authorities have stopped girls and women from attending high school or university, banned them from parks, gyms and public baths, and ordered them to cover up when leaving home.

They have also barred them from working for the UN or NGOs, while most female government employees have been dismissed from their jobs or are being paid to stay at home.

However, Akhundzada said "necessary steps have been taken for the betterment of women as half of the society".

"All institutions have been obliged to help women in securing marriage, inheritance and other rights," his statement read.

Akhundzada said a six-point decree issued in December 2021 guaranteed women their rights.

Among other things, the decree outlawed forced marriages and enshrined the right to inheritance and divorce.

"The negative aspects of the past 20-year occupation related to women's hijab and misguidance will end soon," Akhundzada said.

A report to the UN's Human Rights Council last week by Richard Bennett, the special rapporteur for Afghanistan, said the plight of women and girls in the country "was among the worst in the world".

"Grave, systematic and institutionalized discrimination against women and girls is at the heart of Taliban ideology and rule, which also gives rise to concerns that they may be responsible for gender apartheid," Bennett said.



Skin Moles That Grow Hair May Offer a Treatment For Baldness

LONDON (Dispatches) - Unightly skin moles may offer a possible avenue to treat hair loss, according to a study published this week in the journal Nature.

For nearly a decade, scientists at the University of California, Irvine have been studying skin moles to understand why they produce such long hairs. Their new paper shows that such moles contain particular molecules that promote hair growth.

"Nature gave us clues in those hairy skin moles," said Maksim Plikus, the study's lead author and a professor of developmental and cell biology at UC, Irvine.

People normally shed between 50 and 100 hairs per day, then generate new hair from the stem cells in hair follicles. But in individuals with baldness or pattern baldness — what doctors call alopecia or androgenic alopecia — the stem cells lie dormant, so new hair can't grow.

In experiments involving mice, Plikus and his research team demonstrated that a molecule called osteopontin, which is especially prominent in hairy skin moles, could activate hair follicle stem cells that were previously dormant.

The researchers tested this by grafting human skin samples onto mice, then giving the animals three injections of the molecule, spaced one day apart. Within days, the injections helped the mice grow new hairs that are around 1 centimeter long.

To verify that the osteopontin was responsible for the hair growth, the researchers also injected a neutral protein in a different spot on the skin, but that injection site did not sprout new hair.

Plikus said that unlike studies that focus on mouse fur, his findings are more applicable to humans because the experiment used human skin samples and tested a molecule found in human moles.

"The mechanism that they identify in mice seemed to be applicable to understand hair follicle growth in humans. That is a remarkable part of the study," said Mayumi Ito, a professor of dermatology and cell biology at NYU Langone Health, who wasn't involved in the research.

Plikus hopes that his research could eventually lead to an outpatient procedure to promote hair growth — perhaps performed in a dermatologist's office, similar to a cosmetic procedure like Botox. The molecule would take the form of a gel and get injected or administered through a process called microneedling, which rolls tiny needles over the skin, he said. In theory, Plikus said, people could then see their natural hair grow back as it was before they experienced baldness.

"Your pre-existing dormant hair follicles will awaken and they will start growing again," Plikus said. "Once they start growing, they will naturally produce hair that has qualities that you kind of remember when you were 18. It will be the same thickness, length. It will be straight or curly."

Plikus is the co-founder of Amplifica, a biotech company that is licensing his research and advancing it to clinical trials. Started in 2019, the company expects to begin its first human trial in the coming months to test the safety of a compound designed to deliver osteopontin to the body. The compound will be administered through injections in the scalp, according to Frank Fazio, CEO of Amplifica.

The company also plans to conduct a subsequent trial to evaluate the safety of a synthetic version of osteopontin. "We will certainly be studying throughout our clinical program both men and women," Fazio said.

The Food and Drug Administration has approved two treatments for hair loss: the drugs commonly sold under the brand names Propecia and Rogaine. Propecia is a prescription pill, while Rogaine is a liquid or foam applied directly to the skin.



Can Japanese Plum Juice Help Heart Health?

TOKYO (Dispatches) – In a mouse study, researchers discovered that Japanese Plum or "Ume" juice, a supplement used in Japan for centuries, may offer significant cardiovascular benefits.

Since the 18th century, people in Japan have used the juice of the Japanese Plum to promote health. However, because raw Japanese Plum fruit contains toxins, it's usually processed into juice that's safe to consume. This fruit juice concentrate, called bainiku-ekisu, is thought to prevent heart disease.

Though studies are limited, some evidence has emerged that supports these claims.

For example, research using smooth muscle cells in blood vessels has shown that plum juice positively impacts a circulatory hormone associated with high blood pressure called angiotensin II.

Recently, a new study published in Hypertension Research found more evidence that bainiku-ekisu may offer cardiovascular and anti-hypertensive health benefits.

To further investigate the potential benefits Japanese Plum juice may have on blood pressure, researchers from Japan gave mice angiotensin II to induce hypertension. Then the rodents were given either plain water or water infused with bainiku-ekisu.

After two weeks, the scientists examined the mice and found that rodents given bainiku-ekisu did not develop high blood pressure. What's more, when the team conducted tissue analysis on these mice, they found that the juice protected the vascular structure against the effects of angiotensin II.

For example, the rodent's aortas showed minimal growth and enlargement, while mice given plain water had significant aortic hypertrophy.

In addition, the juice concentrate appeared to reduce the infiltration of inflammation-inducing immune cells associated with hypertension.

The researchers also found that bainiku-ekisu prevented the cellular shift from aerobic metabolism to glycolysis associated with inflammation, vascular system stiffness, and cardiovascular disease development.

However, because the investigation used mice and not humans, more research is needed to determine if people would benefit from bainiku-ekisu. Nonetheless, the team plans to investigate these findings further and identify the specific compounds in Japanese Plum juice responsible for the beneficial cardiovascular effects observed in rodents.

In a press release, senior investigator Satoru Eguchi, M.D., Ph.D., FAHA, from Lewis Katz School of Medicine at Temple University, explains, "There may be two or three compounds working together, which could explain why the infused juice concentrate of Ume is so popular as a health supplement. Multiple compounds working together would produce additive or synergistic effects that might be lost in a pharmaceutical preparation."



How to Kill a Star? Astronomers See a Demolition Derby Scenario



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Astronomers have spotted an immensely energetic explosion emanating from an ancient galaxy, apparently triggered by a type of star destruction hypothesized for decades but never before observed. You might call it stellar death by demolition derby.

Researchers said the gamma-ray burst they observed may have been caused by the collision of two compact stars in the densely packed and chaotic environment near a supermassive black hole at the center of this elliptically shaped galaxy. They suspect the two doomed stars were neutron stars, which pack roughly the mass of our sun into a sphere only the size of a city.

"In order to explain the gamma-ray burst, it has to have been a compact star, so not one like the sun," said astronomer Andrew Levan of Radboud University in the Netherlands, lead author of the research published this week in the journal Nature Astronomy.

"Gamma-ray bursts are the most powerful explosions in the universe. They release more energy per unit time than any other known cosmic phenomena. So they are really superlative in their properties. Their name comes from the first type of light that we see, gamma-rays, but they actually emit across the electromagnetic spectrum," said astrophysicist and study co-author Wen-fai Fong of Northwestern University in Illinois.

Immense gravitational forces exerted by the black hole at the galactic centre may wreak havoc, perturbing the motion of nearby stars and other objects and increasing the chances of collisions — akin, the researchers said, to a demolition derby.

Discovery of Fossils Shows Humongous Sea Creature Decapitated by Dinosaur Predator

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The researchers said that the discovery of Tanystropheus fossils provide the first concrete evidence that their necks had been severed, with clear bite marks on some of the vertebrates.

Unlike myriad modern-day marine reptiles, Earth once was home to a 20 feet (6 metres) long reptile. About 240 million years ago, such long-necked creatures used to roam around the blue planet, but their population was short-lived as they would often fall prey to their predators.

Tanystropheus's first appearance was recorded during the Triassic Period when the Earth was witnessing its worst mass extinction. It used to thrive across the northern hemisphere for 10 million years.

It is said that Tanystropheus was a distant relative of the dinosaurs and feasted on fish and squid in what was a tropical lagoon during the Middle Triassic (247 to 237 million years ago). For two centuries, scientists had suspected that such prehistoric marine reptiles possessing long necks were highly vulnerable to ambush attacks.

Recently, they unearthed fossils of Tanystropheus in a Switzerland mountain called Monte San Giorgio and found that their life was suddenly and violently ended after being decapitated by a powerful predator.

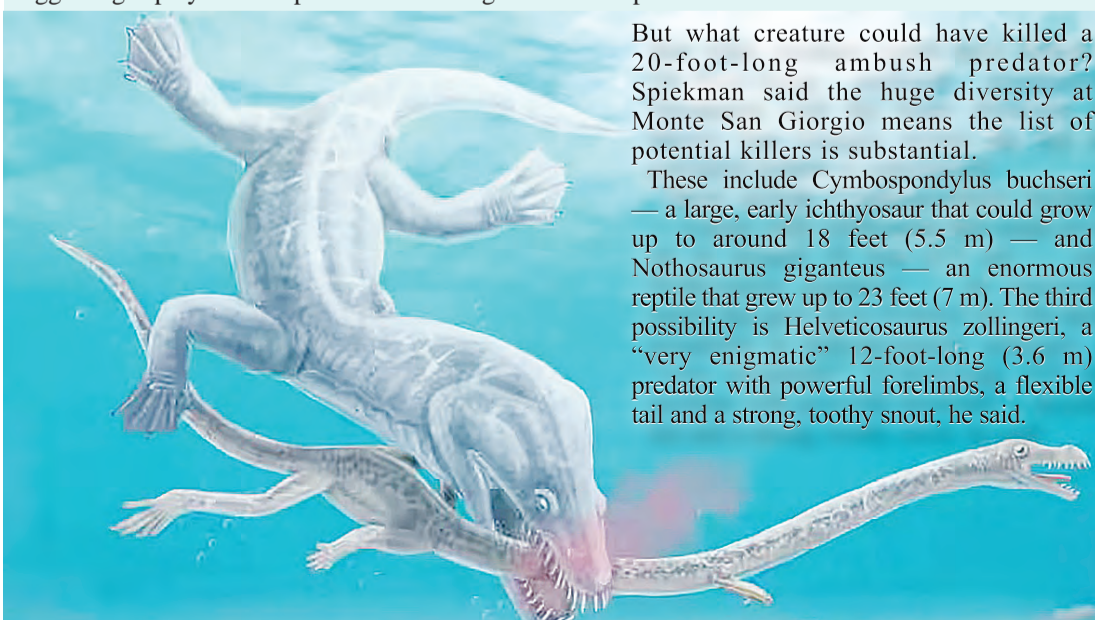
In a new study published on Monday (June 19) in Current Biology, the researchers said that the discovery of fossils provides the first concrete evidence that their necks had been severed, with clear bite marks on some of the vertebrates.

"We found two tooth punctures exactly where the neck is broken, and the neck is broken in a single, diagonal plain," the author of the study, Stephan Spiekman, told Live Science.

Stephan Spiekman, a vertebrate palaeontologist at the State Museum of Natural History Stuttgart, in Germany, was studying two Tanystropheus specimens as part of his doctoral work at Switzerland's Paleontological Museum of the University of Zurich.

"This suggests that the neck was bitten off in a single bite," he said.

He added there may have been a few preliminary bites that did not hit the bone, but "it is very plausible that a large predator bit [off] the neck in one go, especially considering the large predators that were around in that environment." Though Tanystropheus' long necks were a weak point, the researchers said that these reptiles persisted with stiff, long necks for around 175 million years, suggesting it played an important role during the Triassic period.



But what creature could have killed a 20-foot-long ambush predator? Spiekman said the huge diversity at Monte San Giorgio means the list of potential killers is substantial.

These include Cymbospondylus buchseri — a large, early ichthyosaur that could grow up to around 18 feet (5.5 m) — and Nothosaurus giganteus — an enormous reptile that grew up to 23 feet (7 m). The third possibility is Helveticosaurus zollingeri, a "very enigmatic" 12-foot-long (3.6 m) predator with powerful forelimbs, a flexible tail and a strong, toothy snout, he said.

NASA Working Towards Making Spacecrafts Talk to Astronauts



LONDON (Dispatches)- In a first, a ChatGPT-style interface is being developed by the engineers working in NASA which can ultimately make spacecraft talk to their astronauts and help mission controllers hold conversations with artificial intelligence-powered robots, which are exploring moons and distant planets, according to an exclusive report published by The Guardian.

As per the plan, an early incarnation of the AI will soon be deployed on Lunar Gateway, which is NASA's planned extraterrestrial space station and part of the Artemis programme, as per the engineer developing the technology.

"The idea is to get to a point where we have conversational interactions with space vehicles and they [are] also talking back to us on alerts, interesting findings they see in the solar system and beyond," said Dr Larissa Suzuki, a visiting researcher at NASA, while speaking to The Guardian. "It's really not like science fiction anymore," she added.

While addressing a meeting being held on next-generation space communication at the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) in London, Suzuki emphasised interplanetary communications network which will have inbuilt AI to detect, and also fix glitches and inefficiencies as and when they occur.

"It then alerts mission operators that there is a likelihood that package transmissions from space vehicle X will be lost or will fail delivery. We cannot send an engineer up in space whenever a space vehicle goes offline or its software breaks somehow," she said. A natural language interface will also be inbuilt in the system which will allow mission control and astronauts to talk to it and will save them from scouring technical manuals for finding relevant information. Suzuki expressed hope that astronauts will in future be able to seek advice on how to perform complex manoeuvres or space experiments.

Pakistan PM Requests IMF Release \$1.1b Tranche

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The government of Pakistan has made yet another appeal to the International Monetary Fund (IMF) to release the \$1.1bn tranche, pending since November last year, as the \$6.5bn loan program nears its scheduled expiry at the end of June.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met IMF's managing director Kristalina Georgieva in Paris and said the country has completed all the requirements asked for by the lender.

Sharif added that Pakistan was "fully committed" to fulfilling its obligations, according to a statement issued by the prime minister's office.



German Economy Bids Goodbye to Years of Plenty

BERLIN (Dispatches) - On his many visits to semiconductor factories and electric car plants, Germany's Chancellor Olaf Scholz bangs the drum for an economy at the forefront of an industrial transformation.

But the picture painted by business leaders and experts is less rosy, predicting hard times to come for Europe's largest economy.

Having dipped into recession at the beginning of the year, Germany looks set to finish the year in the red -- and at the back of the pack among its eurozone competitors. The government is the only one left still predicting GDP will grow this year, while the main economic institutes and the IMF are looking at a drop of 0.2 to 0.4 percent.

Soaring inflation, painful interest rate rises, a sluggish recovery in its key export market China, and high energy costs are all weighing on activity.

The malaise might be more than temporary, some analysts warn.

"We currently see the country faced by a growing mountain of challenges," said Siegfried Russwurm, head of the influential BDI industry lobby.

A growing number of businesses, including small and midsize companies, are working on "moving part of their activities out of Germany", Russwurm said at the BDI's annual conference.

In the newspapers, the spectre of Germany as the "sick man of Europe" is back, harking back to the period before 2000 when the country struggled to compete on international markets and faced high levels of unemployment.

Scholz, who became chancellor in late 2021, prefers to point to a different economic era.

In an interview with German media in March, he said the push to achieve climate neutrality by 2045 would bring back "levels of growth like in the 1950s and 1960s", the age of West Germany's postwar "economic miracle".

For the Social Democrat chancellor, the massive spending needed to install new wind turbines, build electric vehicles, make steel production less polluting or produce heat pumps will create a virtuous economic circle.

But the vision of a new economic golden age thanks to the transition to green energy leaves some experts sceptical.

The switchover will first of all see billions of euros sunk into "replacing the existing stock" of fossil-fuel technologies with renewable ones "with significantly elevated costs", Russwurm said.

"That will not lead to extra economic growth in the short term."

"We will only reap the reward of this investment in the distant future, when we have effectively managed to reduce greenhouse gas emissions," Timo Wollmershaeuser of the economic think-tank the Ifo institute told German media this week.

Relatively sluggish growth of less than one percent awaits Germany over the next few years, the country's main economic institutes predict.

"Growth could be significantly weaker over this decade than in the 2010s, years of supposed prosperity," said Marcel Fratzscher, head of the DIW think-tank.

Aramco and TotalEnergies Award Contracts for \$11b Amiral Project

RIYADH (Dispatches) - Aramco and TotalEnergies have awarded engineering, procurement and construction contracts for the \$11 billion Amiral complex, a future world-scale petrochemicals facility expansion at the Kingdom's SATORP refinery.

A signing ceremony took place in Dhahran attended by Amin H. Nasser, Aramco president and CEO, and Patrick Pouyanne, TotalEnergies chairman and CEO.

Won Hee-ryong, the minister of land, infrastructure and transport in South Korea; government officials from Saudi Arabia, France and South Korea; and company executives from Aramco, TotalEnergies and EPC firms also attended.

The award of EPC contracts for main process units and associated utilities marks the start of construction work on the joint petrochemical expansion, following the final investment decision in December 2022.

Integrated with the existing SATORP refinery in Jubail, the new complex aims to house one of the largest mixed-load steam crackers in the Gulf, with a capacity to produce 1,650 kilotons per annum of ethylene and other industrial gasses.

This expansion is expected to attract more than \$4 billion in additional investment in a variety of industrial sectors, including carbon fibers, lubes, drilling fluids, detergents, food additives, automotive parts and tires. It is also expected to create around 7,000 local direct and indirect jobs.

The EPC contracts were awarded to: Hyundai Engineering and Construction Co. Ltd.; Maire Tecnimont; Sinopec Engineering (Group) Saudi Co. Ltd.; Gulf Consolidated Contractors Co.; Mohammed Ali Al-Suwailem Trading and Contracting Co.; Mofareh Marzouq Al Harbi and Partners Co. Ltd.; and Mobarak M. Al-Salomi and Partners for Cont. Co.

Nasser said: "Today we are taking a major step forward in further strengthening the partnership between TotalEnergies and Aramco, with the SATORP expansion project being the latest in a long-standing history of collaboration of almost five decades between both companies.

"As part of Aramco's growth strategy, the project is anticipated to contribute to value-addition opportunities in the Kingdom's downstream ecosystem, and we thank the Ministry of Energy and the Ministry of Investment for their tremendous support via the Shareek program to make this multi-billion-dollar project a reality."

Pouyanne said: "This landmark opens a new page in our shared history with Aramco, which we are delighted to be associated with once again.



Bangladesh Formally Applies To Join BRICS

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh has become the latest country to express interest in joining the BRICS economic group, with reports on Monday (June 19) revealing that Dhaka has sent a formal request to become a member. The issue is expected to be discussed at the BRICS summit scheduled to take place in South Africa in August.

News of Bangladesh's expected request came through discussions held between Bangladeshi Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina and South African President Cyril Ramaphosa in Geneva last Wednesday. South Africa currently holds the BRICS Presidency. Other members include Brazil, Russia, India and China with multiple countries also holding the unofficial title 'Friend of BRICS'. Bangladesh's Foreign Minister AK Abdul Momen has since confirmed the move.

Over the 18 months, numerous countries have shown increased interest in joining the BRICS group, with our full overview of the countries involved here. Interest has risen amid the West's leveraging of international financial systems against Iran and Russia, and a tariff war with China that is being seen in the wider global context of creating a culture of unreliability of Western backed trade and financial systems. Hence the development of an alternative bloc that would seek to coordinate its own systems without US or EU interference.

Russia's deputy foreign minister, Sergey Ryabkov, stated at the recent SPIEF 2023 summit that there are currently over 20 countries that are considering joining the bloc. Arab countries such as Algeria, Egypt, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE have all expressed interest in greater ties with the group, as have Iran, Argentina, Mexico, Bahrain, Indonesia, and Nigeria.

Meanwhile, Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov suggested on Friday that the reason so many countries are interested in joining the bloc is due to the effectiveness and authority of the BRICS alliance.

"This is not the effect of Russia's ongoing policies, it is the effect of the prospects for the development of such an integration association as BRICS," Peskov said. He stressed that the

group is "an association of countries that share a common approach aimed at developing relations based on benefit and mutual respect and not lecturing each other on how to live, on whom to rely and whom to follow."

He also stated that new BRICS members would enrich the multipolar foundations of the group noting that decisions on accepting requests must be made by consensus among existing members.

India's Foreign Minister, Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, also said on June 2, following a meeting of the BRICS Foreign Ministers in Cape Town that "BRICS is no longer an 'alternative,' it is an established feature of the global landscape. The message of reform that BRICS embodies must permeate the world of multilateralism."

U.S. Businesses Encouraged to Increase Investment in Iraq

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Aiming to step up energy security and usher in a new era in regional cooperation, Prince Saud bin Nayef bin Abdulaziz, the governor of the Eastern Province of Saudi Arabia, inaugurated an electrical interconnection project between the (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council Interconnection Authority and Iraq.

Saudi Arabia's Energy Minister Prince Abdulaziz bin Salman said the connection was a dream turned reality, in an interview with Al-Arabiya. He said this landmark deal could achieve tangible economic benefits and enhance energy security.

The announcement was made during a ceremony in Dammam that was witnessed by Prince Abdulaziz, Prince Saud and Eng. Ziyad Ali Fadel, the Iraqi minister of electricity, as well as a number of Persian Gulf Arab ministers of electricity, Persian Gulf ambassadors to the Kingdom and several officials from both the Persian Gulf and Iraq.

The power grid interconnection project with Iraq entails the implementation of a dual-circuit transmission line connecting the northern city of Afar in Saudi Arabia to Yusufiya in western Baghdad and will offer an initial capacity of 1,000 megawatts and augment its capability to respond to the growing electricity demands of the Iraqi population in future years.

"The launch of the Iraq electrical interconnection project has thrown open abundant prosperity as well as extensive advantages to the entire region," said Prince Saud during the launch of the historical project. "Additionally, this project serves as a catalyst for a new era, ushering in broader horizons and expanding market opportunities."

The GCCIA aims to begin exporting electricity to southern Iraq by end of 2024. The project intends to support the Iraqi electrical grid and enhance energy security.

Indian Economy Is Humming Along Even With Still-High Rates

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India's economic activity continued to expand in May thanks to buoyant domestic demand, assuring policymakers that rates can be kept higher for longer though the biggest risk now is heat waves and below-normal rains.

The needle on a dial measuring the so-called Animal Spirits stayed at six for a second month even as some indicators such as exports and tax collections showed signs of weakness. While four of the eight high-frequency indicators compiled

by Bloomberg showed improvement, three worsened slightly and one was little changed.

Robust demand and moderating raw material costs are helping the South Asian nation grow faster than most major economies in the world. It's giving room to the Reserve Bank of India to keep borrowing costs higher until inflation is firmly under control.

The central bank, which left its benchmark rate unchanged this month, expects the economy to grow 6.5% in the current financial year, but professional forecasters expect a slower rate of expansion on the uneven monsoon.

Here are more details from the animal spirits barometer, which uses a three-month weighted average to smooth out volatility in single-month readings:

Purchasing managers' surveys showed manufacturing activity hit a 31-month high in May, "backed by record expansion in input stocks," according to S&P Global Inc. Although services activity slowed from a near 13-year high in April, it was still faster than any other month and keeps the composite index at a high for a second straight month.

The data was a "compelling testament to prevailing demand resilience," said Pollyanna De Lima, economics associate director at S&P Global Market Intelligence. But inflation remains a challenge and "long-awaited cuts to interest rates — which could aid business strategies, budgeting and investment plans — appear more distant," she said.

Outbound shipments continued to remain a drag on the economy, falling for a sixth month. Sluggish demand from buyers overseas dragged down exports by 10.3% in May, while imports fell 6.6%, taking the trade deficit to a five-month high. The slowdown reached India's booming services sector too, with export growth slowing to 0.7% from 7.4% in April. Moderating services export growth "could result in weaker urban consumption demand, due to slower information technology hiring, but the balance of payments impact is manageable," Nomura Holdings Inc. economists Sonal Varma and Aurodeep Nandi said after the trade data was released last week.

Vietnam's Economy Struggles as Exports and Investment Plunge



HANOI (Dispatches) - Vietnam's economy is facing a tumultuous period marked by a decline in exports and investment, casting doubts on the nation's growth prospects. The first quarter of 2023 witnessed a significant drop in exports, plunging by 11.9% year-on-year. Distressingly, the decline deepened in April, with exports falling by 17.1% compared to the previous year. This downward trend in exports has triggered a substantial slowdown in Vietnam's GDP growth rate, which registered a mere 3.32% in the first quarter, falling far short of the anticipated 4.8%. This figure stands as the second-lowest first-quarter data in the past twelve years.

The export situation in April exacerbated Vietnam's economic woes. Exports plummeted by 17.1% year-on-year to reach USD 27.5 billion, while imports experienced a parallel decline of 20.5% year-on-year, amounting to USD 26 billion. During the January-April period, exports declined by 11.8% year-on-year to USD 108.6 billion, with imports also dropping by 15.4% to USD 102.2 billion. Industries heavily reliant on exports, such as textiles and footwear, suffered severe setbacks, with orders plummeting by 70%-80%. The electronics sector also witnessed a 10.9% decline in shipments compared to the previous year.

Vietnam had celebrated its achievement of exceeding USD 400 billion in GDP for the first time in 2022, accompanied by an annual growth rate of 8.02%, the highest in twelve years. Nevertheless, the current economic landscape is posing intricate challenges, potentially hampering further growth. The Vietnamese government's initial target of 6.5% annual GDP growth seems increasingly unattainable given the mounting complexities.

Vietnam heavily relies on its export-oriented economy, particularly as one of the world's major exporters of clothing, footwear, furniture, and electronic products. Regrettably, the harsh global economic climate has taken its toll, causing a substantial reduction in export orders for textiles and electronics. Year-on-year, Vietnam's electronic product exports have declined by 10.9%, while textiles have suffered an even more significant blow, experiencing a 16.6% decrease.

Iran's Esmailnezhad Joins Calzedonia Verona

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iran international opposite spiker Amin Esmailnezhad joined the Italian volleyball club, Calzedonia Verona. Esmailnezhad has an outstanding performance during the 2023 Volleyball Nations League (VNL) with Team Melli. His show at the VNL drew attention from multiple foreign clubs, and finally, Esmailnezhad chose to play in the Italian Serie A1 Volleyball League with Calzedonia Verona. Calzedonia Verona is a professional volleyball team based in Verona, Italy. The club plays in Serie A1 of the Italian Volleyball League.



Investors Lament Lost Opportunity After Unconvincing Turkish Rate Hike

LONDON (Dispatches) - Foreign investors hoping for a game-changing rate hike from Turkey's newly appointed central bank chief said Thursday's disappointing move to a key rate of just 15% could keep some money on the sidelines.

The appointment of U.S.-trained banker Hafize Gaye Erkan to lead the bank boosted expectations that it would rapidly raise rates to unravel years of unorthodox policies as quickly as possible.

But the 650 basis point hike - to 15% - was well below the median rate expectation in a Reuters poll of a rise to 21%, leaving some fretting that Erkan might have limited room to aggressively tackle inflation.

"They lost one perfect chance to demonstrate that they mean business," said Viktor Szabo, emerging markets investment director with Abrdn. "Whether it's because they have political constraints, or they're afraid for the banking system, it's not great. It's not a great message."

Newly re-elected President Tayyip Erdogan, a self-described enemy of high interest rates, for years directed a heavily managed economic system, with a tightly controlled lira, rate cuts in the face of galloping inflation and plentiful credit for local borrowers.

Amidst tumbling reserves and fleeing investors, his choice of Erkan at the central bank, and investor darling Mehmet Simsek as finance minister, prompted bets for a quick turnaround to unravel some of these policies.

But analysts said that after Thursday's decision, Erkan and Simsek would need to work even harder to prove the country had indeed shifted course.

"They look less credible now," Eric Fine, portfolio manager of emerging market debt at VanEck, said of the central bank, adding: "They need to hike rates to whatever level prevents the need for currency interventions using reserves. They haven't."

Turkey's lira suffered a second consecutive day of declines on Friday, hitting a fresh record low of 25.74 to the dollar before retracing, while the country's international bonds eked out small gains after tumbling on Thursday.

Already in the week to June 16, foreign investor holdings of Turkish government bonds had fallen by \$16.2 million.

"For now, it's not enough, probably, for long-term investors. Because of the magnitude of some of the problems in the economy," said Marek Drimal, a lead strategist at Societe Generale.

Still, many, including Drimal, saw positive signs, and noted that even Simsek had repeatedly said that gradual rate moves were more likely.



Simsek also promised predictable, market-based economic policies and an inflation-targeting model would enable capital inflows.

"I think investor disappointment should be tempered," said Dan Wood, portfolio manager at William Blair, adding that the bank also signalled that it will keep hiking rates until inflation improved.

"It is clearly positive that a return to a more orthodox economic policy has been signalled."

The associate director of ratings agency Scope Ratings and a sovereign analyst at ratings agency Fitch also said the hike itself was positive - but the core question would be whether Erdogan allows Erkan to stay the course with continued rises.

"I don't think investors will throw in the towel just yet because I think there is still expectation there is more to come in the coming months," said Kaan Nazli, portfolio manager at Neuberger Berman.

"The market is very cautious - so to regain confidence, that will take a long time. I would think that you would need to maintain tight policy for a considerable amount of time for significant, more long-term inflows to come in."

Canada Clamps Down on Cruise Liners Dumping Sewage



OTTAWA (Dispatches) - Canada banned cruise ships from dumping sewage and dirty water close to shore, and said it would impose fines of up to C\$250,000 (\$190,000) for offending vessels.

A range of anti-pollution measures introduced on a voluntary basis in April 2022 will become obligatory with immediate effect, Transport Minister Omar Alghabra said in a statement.

Environmental groups said Ottawa had ignored the largest source of liquid pollution from cruise ships: the water used to clean exhaust gas cleaning systems, or scrubbers, that remove sulfur from ships' fuel.

"Cruise ships are an important part of our economy and tourism sector, but they need to operate in a more sustainable manner," Alghabra said. Cruise ships generate more than C\$4 billion a year for the economy, he added.

The rules ban the discharge of sewage and so-called greywater - the drainage from sinks, laundry machines, bathtubs and showers - within three nautical miles of Canadian shores.

Additionally, ships in non-Arctic waters will have to strengthen the treatments of sewage and greywater dumped between three and 12 nautical miles from shore. Separate rules regulate cruise ship pollution in Arctic waters.

Environmentalists say cruise ships traveling to and from Alaska alone dumped 31 billion liters (8.2 billion U.S. gallons) of inadequately treated pollution into Canada's Pacific waters in 2019.

In statements, the West Coast Environmental Law and stand earth green groups both welcomed Alghabra's announcement but called for regulations on scrubber water, which accounts for over 90% of the liquid waste from cruise ships. Activists say it is particularly acidic.

They also called for inspectors to be put on board vessels.

A spokeswoman for Alghabra said the government would work with the shipping industry to find a feasible way of reducing or eliminating discharge of scrubber water.

Iran, Qatar Can Become Gas, Energy Hubs in Region

TEHRAN (MNA) - The cooperation between Iran and Qatar in the field of energy can turn the two countries into gas and energy hubs in the region, the Iranian Vice-President said.

The government of the Islamic Republic of Iran is pleased with the stability and internal and international progress of the government of Qatar, the Iranian Vice-President, Mohammad Mokhber said in a meeting with Qatar's labor minister, Ali Bin Samih al-Marri in Tehran on Monday.

Religious, cultural, and historical commonalities between the two neighbors and nations require serious planning for the development and promotion of relations, Mokhber said, adding, "The fields of cooperation between the two countries are extremely large, but the level of economic exchanges in the past years was not commensurate with the high level of political relations."

Mokhber stressed the need to solve the banking, financial, and monetary issues between the two countries.

There is no reason for two neighboring countries with a common culture, and religion to carry out their trade exchanges with the currency of a third country, he noted.

Referring to the cooperation between Iran and Qatar in the field of energy and especially gas, he noted, "The cooperation between Iran and Qatar in this sector can turn the two countries into gas and energy hubs in the region."

The government and people of Qatar will never forget Iran's position amid problems and crises, Qatar's labor minister said for his part. The meetings between the President of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Emir of Qatar show the interest and will of the two governments to develop mutual relations and coordination in various fields of trade and investment, he said.

Encouraging Signs Begin to...

FROM PAGE 1

Among the projects, 600 anonymous investment packages have been compiled and prepared for investors in special free economic zones. Because of the sanctions, the government is usually discreet about divulging the details of foreign involvement in development projects.

Hydrocarbon, agricultural, and service sectors characterize Iran's economy, along with a noticeable state presence in the manufacturing and financial services. Iran ranks second in the world for natural gas reserves and fourth for proven crude oil reserves.

Intensified sanctions pressures have forced the oil exporting country to relatively diversify, but economic activity and government revenues still rely on volatile oil revenues.

The shock from sanctions and commodity price volatility caused a decade-long stagnation that ended in 2020. The sharp drop in oil exports strained government finances and drove inflation to over 40 percent for four consecutive years.

Sustained high inflation led to a substantial reduction in households' purchasing power and left the large pool of young and educated entrants to the labor market with little prospects, belying the US government's contention that the sanctions did not target the Iranian populace.

According to the World Bank, Iran's economy has started to rebound, supported by a recovery in services post-pandemic, increased oil sector activity, and accommodating policy action. Economic activity has also adjusted to sanctions, including through exchange rate depreciation which helped domestically produced tradeable goods to become price competitive internationally. The decline in oil exports has prompted additional processing of crude oil and hydrocarbons that have then been exported as petrochemicals.

Based on several reports including from the International Energy Agency, Iran's crude oil shipments have increased to their highest level in nearly five

years. They topped 1.5 million barrels per day in May, the highest rate since 2018.

Iranian oil exports could surge in the coming months, particularly to China, as Russian domestic demand will increase in the coming summer and that could lower Russian exports.

Under sanctions, Iranian trade has pivoted further towards neighboring countries and China, and bilateral currency exchange, barter, and other indirect payment channels are increasingly used to settle international transactions.

Based on World Bank projections, the current account balance is forecast to remain in surplus, supported by higher oil prices and non-oil exports.

The fiscal balance is projected to benefit from the gradual upward trend in oil exports, but the budget deficit coupled with inflationary expectations, foreign exchange pressures, and deficit monetization are expected to keep inflation elevated, albeit gradually declining over the outlook period.

This month, President Raisi unveiled the general outline of the seventh five-year development plan that will guide the annual budgets and development policies through 2028. During the presentation of the document to parliament, head of the Planning and Budget Organization Davoud Manzour said the plan is problem solving-oriented and aims to resolve the country's economic imbalances.

One key plank of the document is to credit all hard currency revenues from petroleum exports to the National Development Fund. The government's objective is to reduce the annual budget's dependency on petroleum export revenues to zero by the end of the plan.

It also projects an average 80 percent annual economic growth, 22.6 percent growth in gross capital formation, 3.9 percent growth in employment and an average inflation rate of 19.7 percent.

U.S. Behind Any Major...

FROM PAGE 1

Iran insists the terrorist nature of the Western-backed MKO will always remain a threat to the security of its host countries.

MKO members spent many years in Iraq, where they were hosted and armed by the former Iraqi dictator Saddam Hussein.

They sided with Saddam during the 1980-88 imposed war against Iran and then helped him quell domestic uprisings in various parts of the Arab country.

Gharibabadi said while Iran has effectively worked to uproot terrorist groups in the region, the United States assassinated the top Iranian anti-terror commander Lt. Gen. Qassem Soleimani and his companions.

General Soleimani, commander of the Quds Force of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), and his Iraqi fellow Abu Mahdi al-Muhandis, the second-in-command of Iraq's Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), were martyred along with their companions in a US drone strike on January 3, 2020.

The two anti-terror commanders were tremendously revered across the region for their instrumental role in fighting and decimating the Daesh Takfiri terrorist group in the region, particularly in Iraq and Syria.

"Illegal unilateral" sanctions are among the principal crimes committed by Washington against Tehran, the official said, in reference to the United States' numerous crimes against Iran.

"The U.S. has committed a humanitarian crime against the Iranian nation. Washington has imposed the most extensive and cruel sanctions against the people of Iran."

The top Iranian rights official said the U.S. has imposed unilateral sanctions on over 25 countries but still claims to defend human rights.

Gharibabadi further said the United States' record is replete with crimes against Iran and numerous other countries including Cuba, Mexico, Nicaragua, Iraq and Afghanistan.

So what Mr. Gharibabadi mentioned is just simple evidences for proving the crimes of the U.S. and its support of terrorism in countries. We have not forgotten yet the crimes of MKO in Iran who took the lives of many people because of bomb blasts and they have been given shelters in the U.S. or pro-U.S. countries.

Therefore we recommend the U.S. to stop blaming Iran, other countries and groups for terrorism and baseless claim of supporting terrorism because the U.S. is itself the main supporter of terrorism which is used to materialize the goals of Washington in its target states and the Islamic Republic of Iran has been itself the victim of terrorism and its fight against terrorism is real and not for fooling others like what the U.S. does.

Iran 3-Month Non-Oil...

FROM PAGE 1

As previously announced by the spokesman of the Trade Development Committee of the Iranian House of Industry, Mining, and Trade, the value of Iran's non-oil export rose 10 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

According to Ruhollah Latifi, 122.056 million tons of non-oil commodities worth \$53.166 billion were exported in the previous year.

China with the purchase of \$14.584 billion of commodities (no change), Iraq with \$10.238 billion (15 percent growth), Turkey with \$7.459 billion (23 percent growth), the United Arab Emirates (UAE) with \$5.767 billion (28 percent growth), and India with \$2.146 billion (18 percent growth) were the first five export destinations of Iranian goods in 1401, the official stated.

Latifi further announced that 37.18 million tons of non-oil commodities valued at \$59.655 billion were imported to the country during the past year, with a 10 percent drop in weight, and a 13 percent rise in worth, year on year.

The UAE with sales of \$18.395 billion (11 percent growth), China with \$15.744 billion (24 percent growth), Turkey with \$6.99 billion (15 percent growth), India with \$2.019 billion (80 percent growth), and Germany with \$2.019 billion (five percent growth), were the first five countries supplying goods to Iran in 1401, he stated.

The official went on to say that the country's non-oil trade reached 159.236 million tons worth \$112.821 billion in the previous year, with an 11.2 percent growth year on year.

China Says...

FROM PAGE 1

The efforts to salvage the agreement got fresh impetus after Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei earlier this month said a deal on Iran's nuclear program was possible if the country's nuclear industry infrastructure remained untouched. "China has maintained close contact with all relevant parties and urged them to step up diplomatic efforts to bring the comprehensive plan back on the right track soon, safeguard the international nuclear non-proliferation system, and promote peace and stability in the Middle East," Mao said in Beijing.

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Kvitova Takes German Open Title

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Two-time Wimbledon champion Petra Kvitova beat Donna Vekic of Croatia 6-2 7-6(6) to lift the German Open title and confirm her form on grass just over a week before the Grand Slam in London. The 33-year-old Czech, who also beat Vekic en route to victory at the Miami Open this year, earned her 31st career title. The left-hander looked completely at ease on the surface as she captured her sixth title on grass, more than any other active WTA player, in a warning to her rivals ahead of Wimbledon.

Han Clinches First Asian Tour Win

CHEONAN (Dispatches) - U.S. golfer Seungsu Han clinched his first Asian Tour title at the Kolon Korea Open, winning by six shots after leading from the opening round. The 36-year-old finished the final round with an even-par 71 for a tournament total of six-under-par 278 at the Woo Jeong Hills Country Club. "This is such a great honour," said Han, who was born in Incheon, South Korea, but moved to the United States when he was 13.

Alcaraz Claims Queen's Title and Top Ranking

LONDON (Dispatches) - Spain's Carlos Alcaraz fired a Wimbledon warning as he comfortably beat Alex de Minaur 6-4 6-4 to claim the Queen's Club title and return to world number one.

In baking temperatures, the 20-year-old had too much firepower for his wily Australian opponent as he claimed his first grasscourt title in impressive fashion.

It was only Alcaraz's third tournament on grass, but the way he marched through the draw augurs well for his prospects at Wimbledon, where he will be seeded number one.

De Minaur, the first Australian to reach the London final since Lleyton Hewitt in 2006, had chances for a break of serve when leading 4-3 in the opening set but could not take them.

Alcaraz then broke serve in the following game before wrapping up the set on serve.

De Minaur double-faulted to hand over a service game early in the second set and there was no way the muscular Spaniard was going to pass up the opportunity to notch his fifth title of 2023.

Alcaraz is the fourth Spanish player to win the prestigious pre-Wimbledon tournament and will now hope to emulate Rafa Nadal who triumphed at Queen's in 2008 before going on to win Wimbledon for the first time a few weeks later.

"So many legends have won here so to see my name on the trophy surrounded by great champions, it's amazing," reigning U.S. Open champion Alcaraz said on court.

In the semifinals, Alcaraz beat unseeded American Sebastian Korda to reach the Queen's Club final.

The 20-year-old lost his opening set at Queen's earlier in the week but has since looked ominously good and proved too powerful for Korda, winning 6-3 6-4.

Meanwhile De Minaur who had beaten Danish second seed Holger Rune 6-3 7-6(2). Korda, 22, was at full stretch to try to keep Alcaraz at bay in the opening set but still

dropped serve twice, although he did also manage to break the Spaniard.

While Novak Djokovic remains the favorite to retain his Wimbledon title, Alcaraz will be the top seed at the tournament, where he reached the fourth round last year.



The way he has taken to grass, winning 10 sets in succession after losing his first of the week at Queen's, should make him a serious contender at the All England Club.

"I started the week not too well, but I adapted my movement and I ended the week with a lot of energy," he said.

As well as Nadal, several other players in recent times have gone on to win Wimbledon after conquering Queen's Club, including Andy Murray in 2013 and 2016, Pete Sampras in 1995 and 1999, and Lleyton Hewitt in 2002. Boris Becker, then a teenager, also did the double in 1985 as a teenager.

Even 22-time Grand Slam champion Nadal took a while to adapt his game to grass, but the speed at which Alcaraz has looked at ease on the surface is astonishing.

De Minaur is one of the craftiest lawn players in the world but he could do nothing as Alcaraz showed great lawn skills, notably an impressive sliced backhand when required and a confidence around the net.

His forehand, meanwhile, was simply devastating, regularly clocking 90mph and drawing gasps from the crowd.

Bublik Defeats Rublev To Claim Halle Title

HALLE (Dispatches) - Kazakhstan's Alexander Bublik defeated third seed Andrey Rublev in three sets to win the biggest title of his career at the Halle Open. Bublik won 6-3, 3-6, 6-3 in the final of the traditional Wimbledon warm-up tournament in Germany.

The Kazakh took the first set after breaking Rublev in his opening service game.

Rublev responded by winning the second set in similar fashion but Bublik raced 3-0 ahead in the decider before clinching his second ATP title.

"This means the world to me, I've been struggling for a year and a half now. It was hard work," he said of his 95-minute triumph.

The 48th-ranked Bublik faced a difficult path to the final, making his way past Borna Coric, Jan-Lennard Struff and Jannik Sinner, before downing home favourite Alexander Zverev in the last four.

"I was walking through the little hall of fame here before entering the court for the very first time," recounted the 26-year-old.

"I was like 'wow, the different names, a lot of guys I'm familiar with."

"But I could not even imagine I would win this tournament. I'm really, really happy."

CONCACAF Suspends Four U.S., Mexico Players

LONDON (Dispatches) - CONCACAF has suspended United States duo Weston McKennie and Sergino Dest and Mexico defenders Cesar Montes and Gerardo Artega for "on-field player misconduct" during last week's Nations League semi-final clash.

McKennie and Montes are suspended for four matches by the governing body for soccer in North America, Central America and the Caribbean, while Dest and Artega are banned for three — including an automatic one-match ban.

Montes was sent off before the United States were reduced to 10 men when midfielder McKennie was red-carded following a melee.

The game spun out of control, with Dest and Artega being sent off and the match being paused due to homophobic chants in the crowd. The United States emerged victorious thanks to a Christian Pulisic double that helped secure a 3-0 win over Mexico.

McKennie and Dest are not part of the United States squad for the forthcoming Gold Cup, while Montes and Artega are included in Mexico's roster.

It was not immediately clear if McKennie and Dest missing the games will count toward their suspension. Reuters has contacted U.S. soccer for a comment.

CONCACAF also sanctioned the football federations of the two countries.

Sri Lanka Thrash Ireland In World Cup Qualifying

BULAWAYO (Dispatches) - Sri Lanka powered into the Super Six stage of the Cricket World Cup qualifying tournament with a crushing 133-run win over Ireland that eliminated their opponents.

Scotland also made it three wins from three in Group B as they beat Oman by 76 runs, with both teams joining Sri Lanka in reaching the next round.

Opener Dimuth Karunaratne made a run-a-ball 103 and Sadeera Samarawickrama hit 82 as Sri Lanka compiled an imposing total of 325 all out off 49.5 overs after being put in to bat in Bulawayo.

Bagnaia Wins Attritional Dutch MotoGP



ASSEN (Dispatches) - Francesco Bagnaia took another step towards defending his world MotoGP title, winning the Dutch MotoGP at Assen to extend his lead in the championship. Pole-sitter Marco Bezzecchi took second with Brad Binder in third only for KTM's South African rider to pick up a penalty for exceeding track limits that knocked him off the podium.

Demoted to fourth Aleix Espargaro was the beneficiary of Binder's misfortune with the hapless South African suffering exactly the same fate in Saturday's sprint.

Bagnaia takes a 35-point lead over Jorge Martin into the summer break, with racing resuming in early August at the British Grand Prix in Silverstone, with Bezzecchi a further point behind.

"It's fantastic! It wasn't easy, they were pushing a lot behind," said the Ducati factory race winner.

"I was on the limit."

"I love this track, this crowd - Assen, you are fantastic!"

Bagnaia became the first back-to-back winner of the Dutch MotoGP since his Italian

compatriot and mentor, Valentino Rossi, in 2004-2005.

Bezzecchi bemoaned a poor getaway.

"I lost time at the start, then it took me a while to pass Brad, but overall I'm really happy," he said.

A full house with 105,000 fans at a sweltering hot 'Cathedral of Speed' - one of the jewels in MotoGP's crown - watched Binder get a blistering start.

The KTM rider surged into the lead at turn one past a trio of Ducatis - Bezzecchi, world champion Bagnaia and Luca Marini.

Binder's teammate Jack Miller made an early exit, the Australian crashing out at the end of the opening lap.

He was quickly followed by a crash between French duo Johann Zarco and Fabio Quartararo, as up front Bagnaia nicked the lead off Binder.

The race lost a fourth rider with only three laps completed when Maverick Vinales parted company with his Aprilia.

Binder was keeping close tabs on Bagnaia, with Bezzecchi in hot pursuit as Enea Bastianini slipped out of contention.

As the midway point of the 26-lap race approached Miguel Oliveira was forced to retire his Aprilia.

Messi Calls Adapting to PSG Very Tough

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Lionel Messi has called his start at former club Paris Saint-Germain "very tough", dubbing two successive failed Champions League bids a "massive disappointment".

"I came to Paris because I liked the club, because I had friends in the dressing room... it seemed easier for me to adapt rather than another destination I could have gone to," Messi told beIN Sports in an interview broadcast Sunday.

"In reality, it was a very tough adaptation, much harder than I expected... with a new gameplan, new teammates, a new city."

"I arrived late, I didn't have a pre-season. The start was difficult for me, my family."

Messi, 36, signed for PSG in the summer of 2021 after 17 seasons at Barcelona, but will now head Stateside to Inter Miami in the MLS after quitting the French capital.

Messi's first season, during which he scored 11 goals in 34 games for PSG, was made harder after he contracted Covid during the winter break back in Argentina, meaning he was sidelined for a month.

"It took me time to refine my physical form," he admitted, adding that the 2022 World Cup in Qatar -- which Messi won with Argentina -- also took its toll.

"It's not an excuse but the World Cup played a big role. Some came back later than others, some were injured, like Neymar."



Arteta Wants Stronger Arsenal Squad to Challenge Man City

LONDON (Dispatches) - Arsenal manager Mikel Arteta believes the Gunners have to strengthen in the transfer market if they are to topple Manchester City as Premier League champions next season.

Arteta's men topped the table for much of last season, but faltered down the stretch after suffering injuries to key players.

City went on to seal their fourth Premier League title in five years and complete the treble by winning the FA Cup and Champions League.

Both clubs are reportedly in a bidding war for West Ham captain Declan Rice, while Arsenal are also set to land Kai Havertz from Chelsea.

"That is our ambition," Arteta told Marca on his hopes of winning the title.

"We know the difficulty: it's the best league in the world and next season is going to be the toughest league in Premier League history."

"Why? It already was last year. I've been here for 22 years and I've never seen a competitive level like that. So much quality, so much organization, so many resources, so many good coaches "That's the level and to win the Premier League you have to be the best. That's why you have to strengthen."

Few expected Arsenal to even pose a title challenge having finished out with the top four for the previous six seasons.

