

The Iranian Interior Minister Ahmad Vahidi Has Paid a Visit to Iraq Where He Met and Held Talks With His Iraqi Counterpart Abdul Amir Al-Shammari at the Zarbatiya-Mehran Border Crossing

IRAN NEWS

The Commander of Iran's Army Aviation Brigadier General Yousef Ghorbani Says the Unit Is the Most Empowered in the West Asian Region With the Highest Aviation Combat Readiness

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Khayyam Satellite Starts Monitoring, Mapping Land Use Changes

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The spokesman for the Iranian Space Agency (ISA) says the country's Khayyam satellite has started remote sensing for monitoring and mapping land use changes.

Hossein Daliriyan said on Saturday that the ISA and the Information Technology Organization of Iran (ITO) are exploring legal channels in order to prepare and present the first batch of satellite images to judicial authorities combating land expropriation.

He said a memorandum of understanding has already been signed between ISA and ITO after the latter requested more accurate data and observation of land surface by means of the satellite in order to resolve legal disputes between ordinary citizens and state bodies.

While data are being collected and analyzed under the agreement, the two Iranian organizations are exploring necessary legal channels so as to arrive at favorable goals and provide the first batch of satellite images to help deal with various cases of land grab and monitor land use changes.

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Tehran Urges Foreign Powers to End Military Presence in Indian Ocean

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - An Iranian diplomat at the UN warned against the threats that the military presence of extra-regional powers pose to the Indian Ocean, noting that indigenously driven regional security will benefit the entire world.

The representative of Iran to the 2021 session of the Ad-Hoc Committee on the Indian Ocean, held in New York on July 6, warned that the region faces a range of serious security challenges, from the military presence of extra-regional powers to emerging concerns like piracy, drug trafficking, and environmental degradation.

What follows is the text of the statement read by Heidar Ali Balouji:

I would like to begin by commending you for convening this meeting. I extend our thanks to the secretariat for its continuous support.

The Indian Ocean has served as a critical trade route for centuries, currently accounting for one-third of the world's bulk cargo traffic and two-thirds of the world's oil shipments. It is home to approximately 35 percent of the global population. Given the significance of trade and the vastness of its many sub-regions, the Indian Ocean holds immense importance in terms of military and strategic engagement. It acts as a vital trading hub, connecting the Middle East to Southeast and East Asia, as well as Europe and the Americas.

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Iran-Algeria Relations on Right Track



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian met on Saturday with his visiting Algerian counterpart Ahmed Attaf, saying the relations between the two countries proceed on the right track.

Amirabdollahian received Attaf earlier in the day in Tehran, where the two discussed the expansion of ties between Tehran and Algiers, among other issues of mutual interest.

In a joint press conference after the meeting, the chief Iranian diplomat said they agreed to enhance bilateral cooperation in the fields of science, technology, knowledge-based companies, agriculture, medicine and medical equipment, industry, and mining.

"The relations between the two countries are on the right track," he said. "At the political level, we have always had robust discussions and consultations at the level of high-ranking officials and presidents, prime ministers, first vice presidents, as well as foreign ministers, and we will continue this path."

He noted that the two sides agree on holding a joint follow-up commission between Iran's first vice president and Algeria's prime minister, and the foreign ministries of both countries would be in charge of the follow-up.

Amirabdollahian also said they agreed on the cancellation of political visas as the first step, which will be followed by the cancellation of regular visas as the second step.

He underlined that the two diplomats had a discussion about regional issues during their meeting, adding, "Algeria did not allow the Zionist regime to become an observer member in the African Union ... This country has always supported Palestine and also played an important role in the return of Syria to the Arab League."

Elsewhere in his remarks, the Iranian foreign minister pointed to an upcoming summit of heads of state and government of the Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) in Algeria, saying President Ebrahim Raisi will participate in the international event for diplomatic consultations with the member states at the summit.

"We are still working to neutralize the sanctions and cancel the unilateral, cruel sanctions through dialogue and diplomacy," he added.

Attaf, for his part, appreciated the warm welcome by the Iranian foreign minister and underscored the two countries' high potential to expand their bilateral relations.

"The relations between the two countries are distinguished and have the capacity for further development in economic spheres," the Algerian foreign minister said.

Pointing to the agreement on establishing a joint committee, Attaf said such mechanisms play an important role and bring about convergence between the two countries, which he said can be a good opportunity for expanding bilateral cooperation.

"The Iran-Algeria relations are extensive in various national and international spheres," the top Algerian diplomat said, adding, "The Iran-Algeria relations are historical and privileged, and there lies a bright future ahead of us."

Attaf expressed his country's satisfaction with the positive relations between the Arab countries and Iran as well as the historic agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia with the mediation of China.

"We hope that this issue will help consolidate convergence in countering the challenges faced by regional countries," he added.

Iran Crude Steel Production Accounts for 70% of Total Output in Middle East

TEHRAN (PressTV) - The Islamic Republic of Iran's production of crude steel has accounted for 70% of the total output in the Middle East region during the first five months of the current year, according to the latest data released by the World Steel Association (WSA).

Iranian steelmakers produced 13 million tons of crude steel from January to May this year, registering a 2.2% rise compared with the corresponding period of last year.

Steel producers located in the Middle East, including Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates, together produced a total of 18.7 million tons of steel during the period, up 1.1% year-on-year.

The world's 63 steelmakers produced 786 million tons of steel during the same period, down 1.2%.

Countries located in Africa, including Egypt, Libya, South Africa and Tunisia, produced 2.6 million tons of steel, up 2.6% compared with the same period last year.

The steel output of countries in Asia and Oceania, including Australia, China, India, Japan, Mongolia, New Zealand, Pakistan, South Korea, Taiwan, Thailand and Vietnam, stood at 588.4 million tons, up 0.7%.

The 27 European Union countries produced a total of 56 million tons, down 10.4%.

The states located in "Europe, Other" region, including Macedonia, Norway, Serbia, Turkey and the United Kingdom, produced 16.6 million tons of steel, down 16.3% compared with the corresponding period of the preceding year.

North American countries, including Canada, Cuba, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico and the United States, produced 45.9 million tons of steel during the period, down 3.6%.

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ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian

If Not Burned, Will Not Burn

Ever-increasing growth of inclination of the youths to Islam and to the Holy Quran in the world has baffled the West in all fields. Only in the UK, the current of inclination to Islam is not countable. Recently Russia Today News TV Channel reported the fast growth of Islam in the UK and at the same time the decline in people's inclination to Christianity in this country and this issue has been reflected in all confidential bulletins in Europe. The report says while Christian churches are struggling heavily to attract people for holding Christian ceremonies, the Islamic community of the UK is ever-increasingly blooming.

As per report, the growth of Islam is so fast and strong that some forethoughtful Islamic groups of the UK have exerted all its efforts that fast growth of Islam is not considered as a threat to the British traditions because it would force the government and the king to react against this current.

Russia Today then adds: Islam is the fastest growing religion in the UK so that its Muslim population has grown by 100 percent in the recent decade and it has been doubled. A report quoting BBC as saying that Islamic naming and the record number of naming boys has been the name of Prophet Muhammad (PBUH). The under 30 youths have been the most among Christians who have shown their interests and inclination to Islam.

According to the official statistics and data, the average age of Muslim community of the UK is 27. Russia Today further says that one of the reasons for the rise in the number of Muslim population of this country is the open climate and attractive economy of the UK for Islamic financial tools like issuing Islamic bonds and investments which are welcomed by the Muslims. The UK was the first non-Muslim country which let issuance of Islamic bonds and recently the British supervisory bodies have approved banking directives in accordance with Islamic sharia and they noted the rise in demands for Islamic financial services was the main reason for approval.

While Islam is blooming in the island, according to the latest reports of the British Office of National Statistics, the amount of inclination to the Christian churches in the UK is currently declining 15% faster than what had been predicted. According to the very report, the Christian population committed to performing religious rites in the UK, namely, people who claim they believe in Christianity, has decreased by 5m comparing to a decade ago.

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Tehran Lauds Pakistan's Initiative of Designating Day of Honoring Holy Quran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran says it "wholeheartedly" supports an initiative by Pakistan's government to designate July 7 as the "Day of Honoring the Holy Qur'an" against the backdrop of recent Western-backed provocative attempts to desecrate the sacred Muslim book.

"The decision of the esteemed government of the Islamic Republic of Pakistan to introduce and celebrate July 7, 2023 as the Day of Honoring the Holy Qur'an is a worthy, befitting and pertinent initiative," the Embassy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Islamabad said in a statement on Friday.

The statement underlined that desecrating the Qur'an, the holy book of the largest religious community in the world, or insulting any sacred symbol of divine religions, is a deplorable, ignorant, and biased act aimed at inciting public opinion and promoting misuse of freedom of expression.

"It is crucial to acknowledge that desecrating the Holy Quran represents an affront to the holy books of all divine religions," the embassy said. "We firmly believe such biased actions seek to incite public opinion, generate instability, create violence and spread hatred. Undoubtedly, this biased way of inciting public opinion through insulting the holy symbols, which are meant to destabilize the Muslim world and create human legal cases, should be countered and neutralized."

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Iraqi Minister of Labor Will Visit Tehran

TEHRAN (IP) - Mohammad Kazem Al-Sadegh, Iran's Ambassador to Iraq, met with Minister of Labour and Social Affairs Ahmad Al-Asadi and discussed the cooperation between the two countries in technical and professional, social security, welfare, and ways to develop these relations.

In the meeting, the two sides also discussed the agenda of the upcoming visit of the Iraqi Minister of Labor and his accompanying delegation to Tehran.

Iraq's Minister of Labor and Social Affairs will visit Tehran heading a delegation soon.

Patients From Neighboring Countries Welcome Treatment

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi lauded the Islamic Republic's achievements in the health sector, saying that health tourism in the country has attracted patients from neighboring countries and even Central Asian states who prefer to get medical care in Iran rather than in Europe.

Raisi made the remarks on Friday as he inaugurated Ghadir Major Hospital in the north of the Iranian capital of Tehran on the occasion of Eid al-Ghadir, which marks the appointment of the first Shia Imam, Ali ibn Abi Talib, by Prophet Muhammad (PBUH) as his successor.

He highlighted Iran's status as a hub for health tourism in West Asia, saying that patients from regional countries and even Central Asian states choose to come to the country over Europe for treatment.

This is because of the lower costs and high expertise available in Iran, Raisi said.

A large, modern, and well-equipped center that meets international standards, Ghadir Hospital has an area of 62,000 square meters, divided into five blocks and 13 floors. It can accommodate 821 patients in different departments, such as smart



operating rooms, CCU, NICU, ICU, LDR delivery, and emergency.

The hospital has been equipped with the latest technologies in the world to provide high-quality care. It has been described as one of the leading hospitals in West Asia.

Iran's success in becoming a prominent destination for health tourism can be attributed to its well-established healthcare infrastructure, highly skilled medical professionals, and advanced medical facilities.

The affordability of medical treatments in the country compared to European states has been a significant factor driving the influx of health tourists. Patients from regional governments and Central Asia have found that they can receive the same level of care in Iran at much cheaper costs.

Tehran, Hanoi Confer Ways to Boost Bilateral Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Caretaker of Iran Trade Promotion Organization (TPO) Mehdi Zeyghami on Saturday hosted Ambassador of Vietnam to Tehran Mr. Luong Quoc Huy and in the meeting both sides explored ways for broadening bilateral trade.

The meeting was held on the eve of the visit of Parliament Speaker of Vietnam to Tehran. In the meeting both sides discuss trade plans in relation with the upcoming visit of Parliament Speaker of Vietnam to Tehran and his meeting with Iranian traders.

It was decided a list of traders of the two countries is prepared and invited to a business forum which will be held concurrent with the visit of Vietnamese official to Tehran.

The issues of preparing the preferential trade agreement and barter were of major issues which were discussed in the meeting between Zeyghami and Huy.

Vietnamese diplomat pointed to Iran's trade in the form of barter and asked Iran to share its experiences with Vietnam.

Zeyghami also pointed to holding of the joint economic commission of both countries which happened 5 years ago and called for holding the new meeting of the commission which was welcomed by the Vietnamese diplomat.

Iran Proceeding With Dynamic Diplomacy to Realize National Interests

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Foreign Minister Hossein Amirabdollahian says Tehran is proceeding with "dynamic" diplomacy and efforts to protect the national interests.

In a post on his Twitter account on Friday, Amirabdollahian gave a brief report on his diplomatic moves made during his two-day trip to Baku.

The Iranian minister attended the two-day meeting of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Azerbaijan's Baku. With its main theme "NAM: United and steadfast in confronting emerging challenges," the NAM Ministerial Meeting of the Coordinating Bureau opened on Wednesday.

The top Iranian diplomat delivered a speech at the NAM meeting and also attended the NAM Ministerial Committee on Palestine.

In his Twitter post, Amirabdollahian said in addition to his speeches, he held meetings with Azerbaijan's president and his counterparts from Turkey, Iraq, Malaysia, Sudan, Belarus, Syria, Kuwait and Nicaragua.

Amirabdollahian said he also met with Riyad al-Maliki of Palestine's Fatah Liberation Movement.

"Dynamic diplomacy is underway to pursue the fulfillment of Iran's national interests," the Iranian foreign minister said.

Perpetrators Behind Shah Cheragh Terror Attack Executed

TEHRAN (MNA) - Two main elements of the October 2022 terrorist attack on the Shah Cheragh holy shrine in the southern Iranian city of Shiraz have been executed.

The terrorists were hanged early on Saturday near the scene of the incident which led to the killing of over 10 people, including women and children.

The initial verdict against Mohammad Ramez Rashidi and Naeem Hashem Ghotali was announced on March 16, 2023; then the lawyers of the two terrorists appealed against it. The initial verdict was confirmed by the Supreme Court of Iran after the case was reviewed once again by the Islamic Republic's high judicial officials and the direct role of the two terrorists in designing and

supporting such an attack was proved.

On October 26, 2022, a shooter opened fire on pilgrims at the shrine of Shah Cheragh in Shiraz, the capital city of the southern Iranian province of Fars. 13 were killed in the terrorist attack and 30 more were wounded.

The agent who carried out the attack on the holy place in Shiraz died in hospital despite efforts to keep him alive.

The terrorist attack whose responsibility was claimed by the Takfiri terrorist group of Daesh generated a big wave of condemnation at the international and national levels.

Iran Not to Back Down on Rights in Disputed Arash Gas Field

TEHRAN (IFP) - An Iranian lawmaker says the country will not back down on pursuing its right in the Arash natural gas field, which is shared with Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, amid a dispute between Tehran and its two Persian Gulf neighbors over the case.

Mostafa Nakhaei, who chairs the Iranian Parliament's Energy Committee, said no Iranian official has the right to compromise on the national rights in the Arash gas field.

"The field belongs to the entire nation and country, this generation and the next ones," he said.

"We have differences [with Saudi Arabia and Kuwait] over the Arash gas field, which we have to resolve through negotiations in a diplomatic framework in the first step. If the negotiations do not reach a conclusion for any reason, we will pursue it in a specific legal framework with the presence of international institutions," he added.

The comments came days after Saudi Arabia rejected Iran's partial ownership of the gas field.

Saudi media cited an informed source in the Saudi Ministry of Foreign Affairs as saying that the field, known in al-Durra in Riyadh and Kuwait City, is jointly owned by Saudi Arabia and Kuwait "only, and they alone have full sovereign rights to exploit the wealth in that region."

The Arash natural gas field is located in the waters of the Persian Gulf off the coast of Kuwait and holds an estimated 20 trillion cubic feet of gas reserves.

Einollahi emphasized that Iran has unique healthcare capabilities. Furthermore, sharing knowledge and transferring medical experiences play a crucial role in Iran's contribution to the development of healthcare in Iraq and other countries.

Al-Hasnawi arrived in Tehran on Friday, heading a high-ranking delegation to expand bilateral relations in health and treatment fields.

According to Saif al-Badr, the spokesperson for the Iraqi Ministry of Health, the Iraqi Health Minister's visit to Iran is aimed at gaining insight into the Iranian pharmaceutical industry and utilizes their experience to enhance the local pharmaceutical sector in Iraq.

Minister Urges Implementation of Iran-Iraq Health Diplomacy

TEHRAN (IP)- Minister of Health and Medical Education stressed health diplomacy by forming working groups and implementing the current agreements between Iran and Iraq.

Iran's Minister of Health and Medical Education, Bahram Einollahi, met with his Iraqi counterpart Saleh Mahdi al-Hasnawi in Tehran on Saturday.

During the meeting, Iran's Health Minister pointed to medical cooperation between Iran and Iraq, including medicine and medical equipment, saying that implementation of the collaboration promotes services provided to the people of the two countries.

IRGC Navy Seizes Tanker With 900 Tons of Smuggled Fuel

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Navy has seized a tanker vessel carrying hundreds of liters of smuggled fuel in the Persian Gulf waters.

Fars news agency reported on Thursday that the naval forces of the IRGC had confiscated the vessel with 900 tons of smuggled fuel and also arrested all the 12 crew members onboard.

No further details about the identity of the vessel and the nationality of its crew members have been announced.

Stressing that the seizure of vessels carrying smuggled fuel in the Persian Gulf is conducted with a judicial order, the report said the IRGC's Navy confiscated more than 50 million liters of smuggled fuel, mainly diesel, in various missions last year.

The report came as Iran's maritime authority said it was seeking to confiscate a tanker owned by US energy company Chevron that had damaged an Iranian vessel in the Persian Gulf on July 5 before illegally rerouting to territorial waters of Oman.

Five people had been seriously injured in the collision between the Bahamas-flagged tanker and the Iranian ship which was carrying seven crew members when the incident took place.

The IRGC's Navy has over the past years foiled several attacks on both Iranian and foreign tankers in the strategic Persian Gulf region and other high seas.

A report by Fars news agency in late April showed that Iran is losing some \$4 billion per year to fuel smuggling.

Standard Chinese Added To Iranian School Curriculum

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran has added Standard Chinese and Arabic to the list of foreign languages that can be taught in schools around the country.

According to the latest enactment of the Education Ministry's Supreme Council, signed into law by the president, the two languages were added in order to diversify school programs and meet public demands.

According to the new law, schools can now choose between Arabic, French, German, Italian, Russian, Spanish, and Standard Chinese to teach in addition to English.

Article 15 of the Iranian constitution has declared Farsi as the official and common language of the country.

Meanwhile, Article 16 states that Arabic must be taught in all classes and fields after elementary school, given that Arabic is the language of the Holy Quran and Islamic sciences and teachings, and Persian literature is completely intertwined with it.

Non-Oil Exports to Iraq Hit \$2.3b in 3 Months

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran exported non-oil commodities valued at \$2.3 billion to Iraq during the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration (IRICA) announced.

As reported, Iraq was the second top export destination of Iranian non-oil goods in the mentioned three-month period.

As previously announced by an official with Iran's Trade Promotion Organization (TPO), the value of Iran's export to Iraq increased by 15 percent in the past Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

Farzad Piltan, the director-general of TPO's Office of West Asian Countries, said that based on the data released by the Islamic Republic of Iran Customs Administration, Iran exported commodities worth over \$10 billion to its neighbor in the previous year.

By stating that Iraq is one of the strategic partners of Iran in the field of foreign trade and especially exports, he put the value of Iran's import from Iraq at about \$200 million in the past year.

Considering Iran's vast export capacity and Iraq's large market for Iranian goods, both sides want to expand the volume of bilateral economic exchanges.

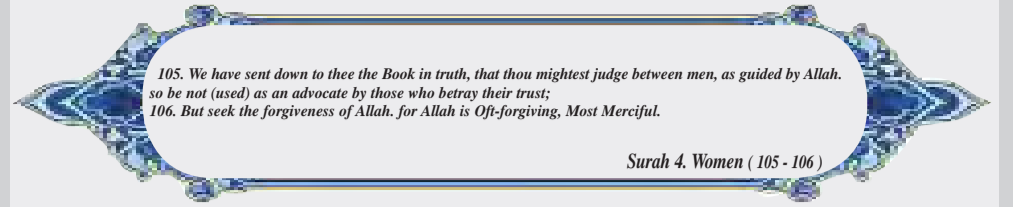
Iran and Iraq have set a target of \$20 billion in annual trade, and businessmen and authorities of both countries are determined to meet that target, Head of the Iran-Iraq Joint Chamber of Commerce Yahya Ale-Es'haq has stated.

"In general, Iran and Iraq have agreed to improve relations and change the monetary and banking conditions so that the central banks of the two countries will ease the current situation and solve the problems," he has noted.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:09
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:44
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:12
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	04:56



Iran to Dispatch Trade Delegation To Saudi Arabia

Ferial Mostofi, Head of Investment and Consultancy Center of Tehran Chamber of Commerce, Industry, Mine and Agriculture (TCCIMA) says soon the chamber will dispatch a trade delegation to Saudi Arabia for reinforcing economic relation.

TCCIMA hosted a seminar on economic cooperation of Iran and Saudi Arabia and the outlook of the private sector where Mostofi said that diplomatic co-ordinations are underway, adding that Saudi Arabia's economy is state-run like Iran but it is trying to reduce its dependence on oil sales and to improve the share of the private sector in its economy.

Pointing to the efforts of Prince Bin Salman for turning Saudi Arabia to a developmentalist government, Mostofi said that Saudi Arabia has introduced new tools and markets for reinforcing international trade and exporting companies.

She added that Saudi Arabia attracted \$103b of foreign investment and in 2022 it had around \$20b domestic investment. She noted that Saudi Arabia invested some \$20b abroad, noting that Riyadh is focused on the fields like transport, logistics, renewable energies and production of electric vehicles.

Mostof added that Iran and Saudi Arabia can have good cooperation and then pointed to the good relation between Saudi Arabia and China and TCCIMA recommends the launch of an economic union in the region like EU and it can be a good option for sustainable peace and different future for both states.

She then stated that Iran has good experiences in the downstream like in the



field of oil and gas, technical and engineering services and agriculture and today's seminar was the first on Iran and Saudi Arabia which will help knowing Saudi Arabia's economy.

She then said that the chamber is determined to dispatch a trade delegation, adding that the chamber will launch a think-tank for broadening ties with Saudi Arabia and the first step is to prepare a roadmap which will be unveiled very soon.

Meanwhile in the meeting, Secretary of TCCIMA Mr. Nahman Eshqi said that Iran has been always beside the Saudis and will be and neither Iran nor Saudi Arabia has enough power to eliminate the other party, adding that the story of competition between the two countries continue and it seems creation of sustainable capacities in both economies to lead to friendship is difficult as both countries are trying to win popularity in the Middle East.

He added that dispute between Iran and Saudi Arabia is nothing new and it has root in the history and it is not limited to recent years and during the Islamic Republic.

Eshqi said that both Tehran and Riyadh are trying to win popularity in the Middle East and after the establishment of Israel, Saudi Arabia has tried to introduce itself as the Arab axe but it has failed and even the country was unable to be effective during the Iran-Iraq war.

He reiterated that both countries are unable to eliminate the other side and the role of the chamber of commerce is irreplaceable for strengthening this relation .

Iran's Q1

Unemployment Rate at 8.2%

TEHRAN (IRNA) - According to a new report by the Statistical Center of Iran (SCI), Iran's unemployment rate, the proportion of the jobless population of ages 15 and above, stood at 8.2% in the first quarter of the current Iranian year (March 21-June 21).

The latest SCI report cited by Iran's state IRNA news agency on Saturday registered a one-percent decrease compared with the same period of the year before.

Accordingly, from the first quarter of the previous Iranian year, some 728,000 jobs were created.

The report indicates that 24,306,000 people in this period were in work.

Gov't Puts Seasonal Ban On Rice Imports

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - The Agriculture Ministry has banned rice imports until further notice, saying the measure is aimed at giving support to local farmers and balancing supply and demand in the market, deputy agriculture minister, Shapour Alaei, announced.

"The ban will positively stimulate the market by preparing the ground for the purchase of Iranian rice," he was quoted as saying by IRNA.

Ban on rice imports are imposed seasonally by the government, though last year (March 2022-23) it was not implemented. This year, the measure is taking effect earlier than expected.

The secretary of the Association of Rice Suppliers and Importers criticized the ban on imports, saying rice imports at cheap prices are essential to cover the production deficit, noting that rice is a staple food for six lower income deciles of the Iranian population.

"Therefore, any plan to ban and limit the import of this product will affect the food security of this group," Masih Keshavarz was also quoted as saying by the Tehran Chamber of Commerce's news portal.

130,000 Vessels Annually Commute to Iranian Ports



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of Iran's Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Ali-Akbar Safaei said 130,000 vessels commute to Iranian ports annually despite the limitations created by the U.S. sanctions.

Speaking on the sidelines of a visit to Shahid Rajaei port in southern Iran, Safaei noted that several foreign investors are currently participating in the country's port projects, the PMO portal reported.

He stated that all the pressures crated by the sanctions were intended for Iranian ships not to have international traffic, adding: "however, our shipping lines that connect Shahid Rajaei port to different parts of the world has provided conditions for economic operators and merchants to have commercial and economic exchange with different countries of the world."

While Iran is combating the U.S. unilateral sanctions on its economy, the country's ports as the major gates of exports and imports play a significant role in this battle. This role makes all-out support to ports and more development of them serious and vital.

He said the goal behind sanctions against Iran was to stop international commuting of Iranian ships and today the country has the biggest ships.

Such necessity has led the government to define projects for more development of the ports and also take some measures to encourage investment making in ports, in addition, to facilitate loading and unloading of goods, especially basic commodities, there.

It is worth mentioning that Ports and Maritime Organization has defined a high number of projects to develop and improve the country's ports, as the country aims to double the capacity of its ports in a course of five years.

Enjoying the most modern container terminals and port equipment, Shahid Rajaei accounts for 85 percent of the total loading and unloading at the Iranian ports.

New PMI Data Shows Iran Economy Continues to Thrive

TEHRAN - Iran Chamber of Commerce has released the country's new PMI data for the fiscal month of Khordad (May 22 - June 21) which suggests that the Iranian economy continues to thrive but with a lower slope compared to figures from the preceding month.

According to the new PMI reading, Iran's monthly PMI stood at 53.28. The figure indicates that the Iranian economy is still growing but not as quickly as it did in the preceding month when the PMI was registered at 57.30.

All the main sub-indices except for the "new orders" and "raw material inventory" were reported above the threshold (above 50) in the new PMI reading.

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

The headline PMI is a number from 0 to 100, such that over 50 shows an expansion of the economy when

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK



compared with the previous month. A PMI reading under 50 indicates contraction and a reading of 50 implies no change.

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

The "business activities" sub-index (57.26) is fewer than 60.96 reported in the preceding month but it is still above the threshold which indicates that the indicator continued to grow in the month under review.

The "new orders" sub-index (49.96) declined to below the threshold after it had registered one of its biggest in the preceding month.

The "raw material inventory" sub-index which had registered a record 58.08 last month fell below the threshold (46.56) in this calendar month once again.

The "sales of goods and services" sub-index which had posted a dramatic improvement to 64.09 in the previous month, reduced again to settle at 50.65 in this calendar month.

Iran, Iraq Discuss Implementing Joint Oil Projects

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - The oil ministers of Iran and Iraq held talks in the Austrian capital of Vienna on Friday on the implementation of joint oil projects.

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji and his Iraqi counterpart Hayyan Abdul Ghani held the meeting on the sidelines of the second day of the 18th OPEC International Seminar in Vienna to discuss bilateral ties in the field of joint oil and gas cooperation. The two sides emphasized the expansion of bilateral relations in the fields of oil, gas and oil byproducts.

Joint investment, development of joint oilfields, export of technical and engineering services to neighboring Iraq and also implementation of joint oil and gas projects were among the main topics of discussion between Iranian and Iraqi oil ministers.

On Thursday, Owji held talks with Secretary General of Gas Exporting Countries Forum (GECF) Mohamed Hamel to discuss bilateral ties and latest situation of gas in the world. In this meeting, the two sides exchanged their views on the future of gas markets in the world, investment opportunities, prediction of gas prices and convergence of gas exporting countries in the global market.

The 8th OPEC International Seminar wrapped up its work on Friday. With the motto entitled "Towards an Inclusive Energy Transition" hosted expert-level ministerial meetings and high-profile panel discussions with the participation of oil and energy ministers of OPEC member states and also some special guests comprising of oil and energy ministers of OPEC+ (Non-OPEC) countries, CEOs of giant oil and gas companies, researchers, experts and academics active in the field of energy.

Russian Chamber of Commerce Keen to Boost Ties With ICCIMA

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Head of the Chamber of Commerce and Industry of the Russian Federation has expressed the chamber's willingness for the expansion of ties with the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA).

Sergey Katyrin has sent a congratulatory message to the newly elected ICCIMA Head Hossein Selahvarzi, emphasizing the commitment of the Russian chamber to cooperate with the Iranian side to strengthen bilateral interactions.

"Considering the significant potential for the development of trade and economic cooperation between Russia and Iran, I look forward to further strengthening the interaction between our organizations for the benefit of the business operators of our countries," Katyrin said in his message. In a meeting between the board members of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce and Russian Ambassador to Tehran Alexey Dedov the two sides explored ways of facilitating mutual business exchanges.

During the meeting which was held at the place of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture last week, the board members of the Iran-Russia Joint Chamber of Commerce called on the Russian side to ease the conditions for issuing business visas for Iranian traders and to make the process of issuing certificates of origin online.

Speaking at the meeting, Hadi Tizhoush-Taban, the head of the Iran-Russia joint chamber of commerce, emphasized using the capacity of the Iranian Trade Center in Astrakhan and referred to it as a suitable platform to establish communication between interested Iranian and Russian business units to cooperate with each other.

HOSCO, the Exemplary Industrial Unit of Hormozgan Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The ceremony for honoring exemplary miners and industrials of Hormozgan Province was held by the Industry, Mine and Trade Office of the province and Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) was honored as one of the exemplary industrial units.



In the ceremony, which was held in presence deputy head of industry, mine and trade office of the province Mr. Baradaran and governor of the province Mr. Mehdi Doost as well as representative of the province to Majlis Mr. Ahmad Moradi, HOSCO was awarded with statue and plaque of appreciation of the event as the exemplary industrial unit of the province.

Hormozgan Province with 1000 industrial companies and 250 active mines as well as its strategic ports is considered as one of the important economic hubs of the country and it is the biggest development lever of the national economy.

Many managers and activists of industrial and mineral companies of the province were present in the event.

Nobel Winner Vargas Llosa Recovers From Covid

MADRID (Dispatches) - Nobel literature laureate Mario Vargas Llosa has been discharged from the Madrid hospital where he was admitted at the weekend for complications linked to Covid-19, his son said.

"My father has been discharged and has recovered," Alvaro Vargas Llosa wrote on Twitter, thanking the hospital and the "countless people" who sent "touching messages from many countries".

The 87-year-old writer, who won the Nobel Prize in Literature in 2010 and lives in the Spanish capital, was admitted to hospital on Saturday after contracting the disease for the second time in 15 months.

The first time he caught the virus was in April 2022.



Fire in Italy Retirement Home Kills Six

MILAN (Dispatches) - A fire at a retirement home in Milan killed six people, firefighters said, with some 80 other residents hospitalized suffering from smoke inhalation.

The three-storey building was reportedly housing 167 people when the fire started in the early morning hours. "It was a hellish scene," local resident Lucia, who can see the home from her house, told reporters.

"We saw old people protecting their faces with wet rags," and windows had been cracking with the heat, she said. The cause of the blaze was not yet known, the fire brigade said.

Over 10 ambulances, various fire trucks and a silver mortuary van attended the scene in the south of the Italian city.



Ukraine Claims Advancing Near Eastern City of Bakhmut



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said its troops had advanced by more than a kilometre near the eastern city of Bakhmut in the past day of fighting against Russian forces.

The comments were the latest by Kyiv signalling that the counteroffensive it launched in early June is gradually making progress although Russian accounts of fighting in the Bakhmut sector differ from Ukraine's.

"The defence forces continue to hold the initiative there, putting pressure on the enemy, conducting assault operations, advancing along the northern and southern flanks," Serhiy Cherevatyi, spokesperson for the eastern military command, told Ukrainian television.

"In particular, over the past day, they have advanced more than one kilometre (0.62 mile)."

General Oleksander Syrskyi, who is in charge of Ukraine's land forces, also said Ukrainian troops were pushing forward in the direction of Bakhmut.

"The defence forces are making progress and advancing," he said, adding that some territory had been regained but providing no details.

A spokesperson for the armed forces general staff said Ukrainian forces had had "partial success" near the village of Klishchiivka, just southwest of Bakhmut.

Ukrainian military analysts have said that securing Klishchiivka would help Ukraine take back Bakhmut, which was captured by Russian forces in May after months of fighting.

Russia's RIA news agency cited a Russian army source as saying this week that Moscow's forces had repelled an attack on Klishchiivka and were mopping up remaining Ukrainian troops in the area.

Reuters could not verify the battlefield situation.

Moscow, which began its full-scale invasion of Ukraine in February 2022, sees Bakhmut as a stepping stone to attacking other cities. Russia still holds Bakhmut but Ukrainian forces hope to encircle the city.

Kyiv says it has taken back some villages in the south since launching its counteroffensive, but Russia still holds large parts of eastern and southeastern Ukraine.

Meanwhile NATO leaders at a summit this week will underscore a vow that Ukraine will join the alliance in the future, its chief Jens Stoltenberg said Friday, as Kyiv seeks faster progress.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelensky is set to attend the two-day gathering in Lithuania to make the case that his country should join when Russia's war ends.

"I expect allied leaders will reaffirm that Ukraine will become a member of NATO and unite on how to bring Ukraine closer to its goal," Stoltenberg said.

NATO's 31 members are still haggling over the final wording for a statement on how to address Ukraine's membership.

Eastern European countries back Kyiv's calls to be granted a pathway into NATO for when the conflict ends.

But key powers the United States and Germany are reluctant to go beyond a 2008 promise that Ukraine would join one day, without setting a clear timeframe.

"The exact wording will be made public when we have agreed," Stoltenberg said.

NATO diplomats say allies could smooth Ukraine's eventual path by dropping a more formal list of conditions it would have to meet when it comes nearer to joining.

Thousands Rally in Pakistan To Condemn Quran Burning

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - Thousands of people rallied in streets across Pakistan to condemn a Quran burning in Sweden that has outraged Muslims around the world.

Last week, Salwan Momika, an Iraqi living in Sweden, stomped on the Muslim holy book and set several pages alight outside a Stockholm mosque.

His act came as Muslims across the globe began celebrating the Eid al-Adha holiday and as the annual hajj pilgrimage to Mecca in Saudi Arabia was drawing to a close.

Earlier this week Pakistan's Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif called for countrywide protests against the burning, declaring Friday "a day to uphold the Koran's sanctity".

Several political parties used the occasion to trumpet their Islamic credentials ahead of an election that must be held later this year, including former prime minister Imran Khan's Pakistan Tehreek-e-Insaf (PTI) party.

In the finance hub of Karachi, about 3,000 supporters of the radical Tehreek-e-Labbaik Pakistan (TLP) marched for kilometres on Friday, with some beating effigies draped in Swedish flags.

About 5,000 more TLP members rallied in one of at least a dozen protests held in the second-largest city of Lahore.

Swedish flags were burned at rallies across the country, including at Islamabad's Sitara Market.

"Koran is our red line," chanted hundreds of protesters at the market, who held placards calling for the expulsion of the Swedish ambassador and severing of diplomatic ties with Stockholm. Others trampled on modified Swedish flags that read "#Boycott Sweden" and featured a crossed-out image of Prime Minister Ulf Kristersson. Clerics and Imams in mosques across the country condemned the burning in their Friday sermons.

"The entire Islamic world should cut diplomatic ties with Sweden and put economic pressure on Sweden by boycotting its products," Maulana Sheikh Tahir said in a sermon at a mosque in Islamabad.



Myanmar Military in Systematic Denial of Humanitarian Aid

GENEVA 9 (Dispatches) - Myanmar's military rulers are preventing life-saving humanitarian aid from reaching people who need it as the country falls deeper into violence, the United Nations human rights chief has said.

Addressing the Human Rights Council in Geneva, Volker Turk said the military, which seized power in a coup in February 2021, was engaged in a "systematic denial" of humanitarian relief to the millions of civilians in need of help.

A series of legal, financial and bureaucratic barriers had been established to prevent people from receiving or even accessing assistance. "This obstruction of life-saving aid is deliberate and targeted, a calculated denial of fundamental rights and freedoms for large swathes of the population," said Turk, the UN High Commissioner for Human Rights. "This is being done in a situation where one-third of the entire population requires urgent help - including access to adequate housing, enough food and water, or employment."

The generals plunged Myanmar into crisis when they seized power from the elected government of Aung San Suu Kyi sparking mass protests that evolved into armed rebellion after the military responded with brutal force.

Despite the military later agreeing a five-point peace plan with its fellow members of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), under which it was supposed to end the violence and release political prisoners, the situation has only deteriorated. Nearly 3,800 people have been killed by the military since the coup, according to the Assistance Association for Political Prisoners, which has been tracking deaths and arrests.

Turk said in the first six months of this year his office had seen a 33 percent increase in indiscriminate airstrikes compared with the same period in 2022. He noted that attacks on civilian targets, including villages, schools, hospitals and places of worship, were rising. Artillery attacks also increased dramatically, he said, with more than 563 so far this year, representing 80 percent of the attacks throughout the whole of 2022. The UN had also documented repeated incidents of sexual violence, mass killings, extra-judicial executions, beatings, dismemberments and mutilations.

Seoul Backs Fukushima Water Plan

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea says it believes proposal to release more than 1.3 million tonnes of radioactive water into the Pacific meets international standards.

South Korea has said it believes Japan's plan to release treated water from the destroyed Fukushima nuclear power plant will meet international standards days after a United Nations atomic agency review of the controversial proposal found it was safe.

Seoul said its own assessments - based on an inspection of the plant in late May, its own data and UN nuclear watchdog IAEA's review - suggested the release of more than 1.3 million tonnes of radioactive water into the Pacific Ocean would be safe if it were carried out as detailed in the proposal.

"We have confirmed the concentration of radioactive material meets standards for ocean discharge ... and therefore, the plan meets international standards including those of the IAEA," Bang Moon-kyu, Minister of the Office for Government Policy Coordination, told in a briefing on Friday.

The proposal to release the water - most of it used to cool the reactors before being treated and stored in huge tanks around the site - has caused concern not only among Japan's neighbours but also among many Pacific island nations, which are still dealing with the legacy of nuclear weapons testing.

Much of the concern centers around the potential

risks from the radioactive isotope tritium, which is difficult to remove from water.

In its two-year safety review, the IAEA said Japan would dilute the water before discharge to bring the level below regulatory standards, adding that its experts would be stationed at Fukushima for any release, which is expected to take decades.

The plan was "consistent with relevant international safety standards ... [and] the controlled, gradual discharges of the treated water to the sea would have a negligible radiological impact on people and the environment," Director General Rafael Grossi said on Tuesday.

Having secured the IAEA green light, Japanese media have said the release could start as early as next month.

But China has emerged as one of the fiercest critics of the plan, and in a response to the IAEA report, said it had "failed to fully reflect views from experts" who participated in the review. The state-run tabloid, the Global Times on Thursday quoted Senlin Liu, a Chinese expert on the agency's technical working group, saying they were disappointed with the "hasty" report and that the expert input was limited.

Grossi rejected those claims on Friday.

"What we have published is scientifically impeccable," he told the Reuters news agency on his return to Tokyo from a visit to Fukushima.



HRW Urges Tunisia to Suspend Expulsions of African Refugees

TUNIS (Dispatches) - A global human rights group has urged Tunisia to stop its expulsion of sub-Saharan African refugees and migrants and for humanitarian services to be provided to those languishing at the North African country's border with Libya.

Human Rights Watch (HRW) made the statement after hundreds of people were rounded up this week from the coastal city of Sfax and driven to Ben Guerdane, a militarised Tunisia-Libya border zone.

"Not only is it unconscionable to abuse people and abandon them in the desert, but collective expulsions violate international law," said Lauren Seibert, refugee and migrant rights researcher at HRW.

At the Tunisian-Libyan border, people from African countries told Al Jazeera they were being forced to drink seawater to survive, while Libyan border guards were refusing to let them in.

"We don't have water. We don't have food," a man said.

Reporting from the border, Al Jazeera's Malik Traina said the conditions were "dire". Among the people who had been expelled were women and children as well as injured people.

"They are in desperate need of some kind of help," Traina said. "They want a safe haven."

The expulsions occurred after days of violence in the port city in which one Tunisian was killed. Locals have complained about the refugees' behaviour while the refugees said they have been subjected to racist attacks.

The people expelled are from many African countries, including Cameroon, Chad, Guinea, Ivory Coast, Mali, Senegal and Sudan. Among them are 29 children and three pregnant women, HRW said.

The International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Libya said it was able to provide some emergency medical assistance to the refugees and migrants.

Wadih al-Asmar, president of EuroMed Rights, said the refugees were stuck in a "no-man's land".

"What the Tunisian government has done violates all international commitments on the safety of people," he told Al Jazeera.

Thousands of undocumented people have travelled to Sfax in recent months, hoping to get to Europe on boats run by human traffickers.



South Korean Doctors Flee Pediatrics as Low Birth Rate Bites

SEOUL (Dispatches) - South Korea is suffering from a shortage of pediatricians, partly a result of the world's lowest birth rate and increasingly a factor behind it, leaving hospitals unable to fill posts and raising risks for children's health, doctors say.

The number of pediatric clinics and hospitals in the capital has fallen by 12.5 per cent over the five years to 2022, to just 456. Over the same period, the number of psychiatry clinics increased by 76.8 per cent, while anesthesiology centers saw a 41.2 per cent rise, according to the Seoul Institute, a public administration think tank.

At the root of the problem is a birth rate that fell to 0.78 in 2022 — that's the average number of babies expected per woman — combined with the failure of the insurance system to adapt to it, leaving pediatricians starved of resources and doctors shunning a field they think has no future, seven pediatricians told Reuters.

The Ministry of Health and Welfare acknowledged "limitations" in the system and said measures were being implemented to address them.

According to ministry data, hospitals were only able to secure the services of 16.3 per cent of the pediatricians they sought in the first half of this year, down from 97.4 per cent in 2013.

For parents, the shortage can mean long waits for treatment for sick children.

One recent morning, the waiting room at a hospital in Seoul's outskirts was packed with dozens of children, many on intravenous drips.

"We had to wait two weeks," said Lee Bo-mi, a 35-year-old mother with a sick 3-year-old boy, at the Healthy Children's Hospital.

"I was really scared. It felt like the sky was falling."

Dr Song Dae-jin at Korea University Guro Hospital said he worried that staff shortages could soon cripple his team's ability to provide emergency care.

"At this rate, we won't be able to last the year," Song said. "It's not a big deal if mild diseases are not seen for a day or two but the consequences of not seeing serious diseases or emergency patients in a timely manner can be devastating."

A five-year-old boy with a respiratory infection died in May after failing to find a hospital bed, sparking a public outcry.



"Patients dying while bouncing around multiple emergency rooms, dying when it's not a serious disease, it's a travesty," said Dr Choi Yong-jae, vice president of the Korea Children's Hospital Association.

Doctors say the low fee problem is particular to pediatrics as the insurance system hasn't been revised to reflect fewer child patients. When more babies were growing up, pediatricians could sustain a low price, high volume model but that doesn't apply now.

"In foreign countries, the government pays enough to maintain the hospital even if you see 20 patients a day," said Dr Lim Hyun-taek, president of Korean Pediatric Association, who said fees had not been raised significantly for 30 years.

"But it's about US\$10 (RM46.60) per treatment in Korea so clinics have to see about 80 patients a day."

By comparison, it costs about A\$335 for initial standard consultation with an Australian pediatrician, while observation at Nationwide Children's Hospital in the U.S. costs US\$208 per hour, according to its website.

The health ministry said measures had been introduced this year on fees and insurance compensation to supplement "limitations". It said it had proposed more state-backed centers and requirements for major hospitals to maintain emergency pediatric treatment.

"We understand that there are opinions from doctors saying it is not enough to cope with difficulties in the field. The government plans to steadily implement and continue to supplement the announced measures," it said.

Data from the Health Insurance Review and Assessment Service shows paediatricians are South Korea's lowest paid doctors, making 57 per cent less than the average doctor's salary.

Hospitals are feeling the crunch.

Sowha Hospital, South Korea's oldest children's hospital, recently suspended Saturday afternoon and Sunday treatment for the first time in 77 years due to a lack of staff.

Some hospitals have reduced night-time treatment and shut children's emergency rooms.

Our Food Production Continues to Erode The Environment

GENEVA (Dispatches) - While an increasing number of individuals are reducing their meat consumption for ecological reasons, the production of our food will unfortunately continue to have a major impact on the environment. While demographic growth is an obstacle faced by the food industry in reducing its carbon footprint, the growth in animal protein-based diets is adding yet another hurdle to overcome in meeting this objective, which is essential for reducing global warming on a planetary scale.

At the end of April, the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations (FAO) published what is considered the most comprehensive analysis to date on the benefits and risks of consuming animal source food, and identified meat, eggs and dairy products as "essential sources of nutrients for most vulnerable groups." These sources of nutrients are considered vital in diets during "key life stages such as pregnancy and breastfeeding, as well as during childhood, adolescence and older age." This document did not, however, ignore the environmental impact of these foods, considering that livestock farming is estimated to be responsible for 14.5 per cent of greenhouse gas emissions.

Over the past 20 years, food-related greenhouse gas emissions have risen by 14 per cent, or 2 gigatonnes of CO2 equivalent, according to a study published in the journal Nature Food and carried out jointly by the Universities of Groningen (Netherlands) and Birmingham (England). Taking the period between 2000 and 2019 as a reference, the scientists noted that the increase in consumption of animal-based foods largely explains (up to 95 per cent) the rise in global CO2 emissions that can be attributed to food. While beef is often singled out as most problematic, the impact of dairy production is even more significant: beef was found to contribute 32 per cent of the increase in global emissions linked to animal products, while the total is even higher for dairy, at 46 per cent.

It's been established that to put the brakes on global warming, we need to restrict our consumption of these foods. Some parts of the world are less concerned than others, but globally the major shift that society needs to undertake is far from a fait accompli. "The agrifood system drives global land use and agricultural activities — contributing to around one-third of global anthropogenic greenhouse gas. Population growth, expansion of food production, and an increase in animal-based diets are likely to further increase emissions and squeeze the global carbon budget," explains Dr. Yuli Shan, author of the study, in a statement relayed by the University of Birmingham. The analysis also points out that the United Nations has estimated that to feed 9.1 billion mouths by 2050, that current food demand will increase by 70 per cent.

Currently, five countries alone account for over 40 per cent of global emissions linked to the food supply chain. In 2019 China emitted 2 gigatonnes of carbon equivalent related to food production, while India accounted for 1.3 gigatonnes, Indonesia for 1.1 gigatonnes, Brazil for 1 gigatonne and the USA for the same amount.



Study Highlights Limitations of BMI in Predicting Death



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - People classified as overweight though not obese are not at a higher risk of death, according to a new study Wednesday that underscores the limitations of the body mass index (BMI), long a standard medical metric.

The findings, published in the journal PLOS ONE, come as populations in both rich and poor countries are becoming heavier. In the United States, more than 70 percent of adults are defined as either overweight or obese.

BMI, which was first described by a Belgian mathematician in the 19th century, is calculated by dividing a person's weight by the square of their height. It is increasingly seen as a crude instrument for measuring individual health.

Lead author Aayush Visaria of Rutgers University told AFP: "I think the real thing that people should get from this is that BMI by itself is just not a great indicator of health."

Measuring waist circumference or performing a type of scan that visualizes bone density, body fat and muscle mass should also be used for a more holistic interpretation, he said. Having excess fat still increases risk for a range of conditions including heart disease, stroke and diabetes.

"I've seen patients with the same exact BMI, but with vastly different metabolic and health implications. So I wanted to investigate this further," added Visaria, a physician.

Older studies on the link between weight and death rates drew inconsistent and uncertain results, and were mostly focused only on non-Hispanic white adults.

In the new work, Visaria and his co-author Soko Setoguchi drew on data on more than 550,000 American adults from the 1999-2018 National Health Interview Survey and the 2019 US National Death Index.

Alps to Atlas: Swiss-Inspired Cheese Comes to Algeria Mountains

TAMASSIT (Dispatches) - Sporting a white cap and apron, Rachid Ibersiene bustles around vats at his dairy in Algeria's Atlas Mountains where he has brought the tradition of artisanal cheesemaking back from Switzerland.

"We started with a butane gas bottle and stove," the cheesemonger said, alluding to the growth of his factory since it opened. In a matter of 15 years, Ibersiene's "Tamgout" cheese -- a blend of the Swiss Gruyere and Dutch Gouda styles -- has become a source of honour for the north African country.

Both Algerians and foreigners have taken a keen interest in the product, which has a unique taste as it draws on age-old European traditions but is made from Algerian milk.

"We were inspired by Vacherin Fribourgeois, adapting the entire tradition to Algerian milk, which is different from Swiss milk," Ibersiene said, referring to a semi-hard Swiss cheese.

"Algerian milk is less uniform and somewhat more organic because the farms are smaller and more diversified. In Switzerland, you don't find farmers with only two or three dairy cows.

"Our cheese has a more nuanced taste," the 57-year-old added, describing it as "typically Algerian".

Born to a working-class family in Algiers, Ibersiene studied petroleum engineering but struggled to find a job. After moving to Italy, he tried his luck at filmmaking before relocating again to Switzerland, where he spent 16 years working as a computer consultant.

"That's where the idea of the cheese factory came from," he recalled.

"To relax on weekends, I would go up to the mountain chalets in Gruyere where many cheesemakers are located." In 2003, he moved to the area to learn the basics of Swiss cheese production.

Three years later, he returned home to set up his own dairy factory in Tamassit at the foot of Mount Tamgout -- from which his cheese takes its name.

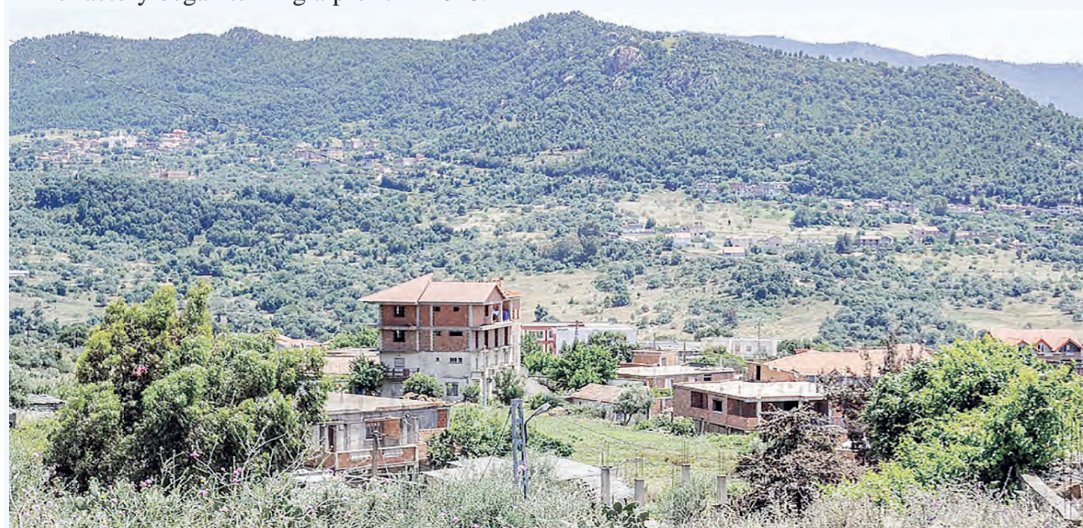
Unable to secure financial backing, Ibersiene used his life savings to fund the project, which required 10 million dinars (over \$73,000) in equipment.

Aided by five employees, Ibersiene spends his days inspecting the cellars where the wheels of cheese, which need to be regularly rubbed and turned, are stored.

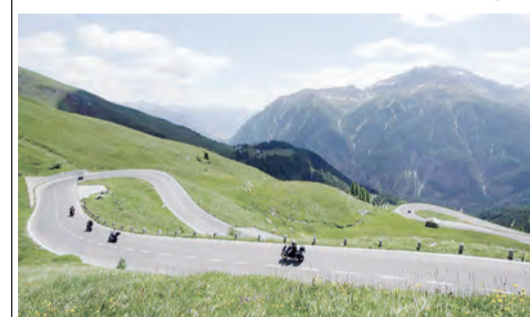
"The maturation period of Tamgout varies from one month to two years, depending on the taste of the customers," he said.

"Our cheese is made from raw cow's milk, without any food additives. It is untreated. We use natural lactic ferments." He receives deliveries of up to 1,000 litres (265 gallons) of cow's milk that produce nearly 50 kilograms (110 pounds) of cheese daily.

The factory began turning a profit in 2018.



Austria's Highest Paradise Feels Heat of Climate Change



Vienna (Dispatches) - Ever since Herbert Hoegl and his wife first drove up the majestic Grossglockner High Alpine Road, named after Austria's highest mountain, the breathtaking vistas that the route offers have been imprinted on their minds.

Now, twenty years later, he and his wife struggle to recognise one of the Alps' most characteristic landscapes featuring the jagged Pasterze glacier, whose length these days is nearly eight kilometres (five miles).

In the early 2000s, the ice field "went all the way up there, so you could take the lift down and walk straight onto the Pasterze," Hoegl said of the longest glacier in the Eastern Alps.

"Now it's 100-150 metres further away", said the 58-year-old IT specialist.

Up to one million people visit the scenic Grossglockner road, renowned for its 36 treacherous hairpin bends, from early May until late October each year, travelling by car, motorbike or bicycle. It is nestled amid the Hohe Tauern national park famous for its hillsides blooming with wildflowers, lush forests, waterfalls and lakes.

Up to one million people visit the scenic Grossglockner road, renowned for its 36 treacherous hairpin bends, from early May until late October each year © JOE KLAMAR / AFP

Authorities have introduced a speed limit to help protect the unique Alpine landscape, and electric vehicles benefit from a reduced access fee for enjoying the 48-kilometre route, where cyclists in particular are encouraged.

U.S. Job Openings Fall in May, Still Elevated

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. job openings dropped in May, but remained at higher levels, indicating that labor market conditions were slowly easing.

Job openings, a measure of labor demand, fell 496,000 to 9.824 million by the last day of May, the Labor Department said in its monthly Job Openings and Labor Turnover Survey, or JOLTS report, on Thursday. Data for April was revised up to show 10.320 million job openings instead of the previously reported 10.1 million. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast 9.935 million job openings.

The labor market has remained resilient despite 500 basis points worth of interest rate increases from the Fed since March 2022, when the U.S. central bank embarked on its fastest monetary policy tightening campaign in more than 40 years to curb inflation.



COP28 Chief Can Press Oil Nations On Climate



PARIS (Dispatches) - The head of French firm TotalEnergies says national oil giants from the Persian Gulf and other nations must pull their weight against global warming, and the Emirati oil executive chairing the COP28 climate summit is right man to press them.

The appointment of Sultan al-Jaber as head of the COP28 talks to be held in Dubai later this year has been controversial because he heads the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi National Oil Company.

But TotalEnergies chief executive Patrick Pouyanne told AFP that Jaber "is trying to level up the discussions and he knows well what the expectations are on this".

The French firm, like other Western oil majors such as BP, Chevron, ExxonMobil and Shell, has been hit with criticism and lawsuits for continuing to invest heavily in fossil fuel extraction.

The International Energy Agency says no new oil projects can be launched if the world is to reach net zero carbon emissions by mid-century and limit global warming to 1.5 degrees Celsius.

Pouyanne, however, insisted the world will continue to need fossil fuels to meet growing energy demand from developing nations.

Western oil and gas firms no longer dominate the world energy

markets, accounting for 15 percent of total output in 2018.

More than half of global production came from national oil companies such as those controlled by Persian Gulf nations, China, Iran and Russia, according to the IEA.

Jaber has brushed off criticism over his appointment, noting he founded the UAE's national renewable energies firm Masdar in 2006 and has represented his country a dozen COP meetings.

"I know there is scepticism regarding Sultan al-Jaber... but I think that on the contrary, his background is an advantage," said Pouyanne in his first interview concerning COP28.

"His position means more pressure on national oil companies," added Pouyanne, who has known Jaber for nearly two decades.

"The United Arab Emirates wants the COP in Dubai to be a success" and this creates a "reputational risk", he said. "That makes Jaber the spokesman of the oil and gas industry" in terms of climate pledges.

Pouyanne considers Jaber to be a "pragmatic industrialist".

Both advocate boosting renewable energy production but consider fossil fuels as indispensable for the foreseeable future.

The appointment of Sultan al-Jaber as head of the COP28 talks to be held in Dubai later this year has been controversial because he heads the United Arab Emirates' Abu Dhabi National Oil Company

They also look to the still underdeveloped technology of carbon capture and storage to reduce the climate impact from burning fossil fuels.

Pouyanne's comments offer a hint of possible outcomes at COP28: instead of a call to phase out fossil fuels, Jaber could seek more climate pledges from different industries -- including the energy sector -- concerning both decarbonization and the reduction of methane emissions.

Methane is a potent greenhouse gas and escapes in large volumes from gas fields and pipelines. "One area where we could do something very strong is to get the national oil companies to roll up their sleeves and pledge to arrive by 2030 at zero methane emissions and a reduction of their emissions" from operations, said Pouyanne.

Around 20 percent of an oil company's emissions come from its operations, so-called scope 1 and 2 emissions. More than 80 percent of emissions come from the burning of its products by clients (scope 3).

For the most part, only Western oil companies have made pledges covering all three scopes.

"Every national oil company needs to set at least one objective and not just the (Western oil) majors," said Pouyanne.

German 2-Year Bond Yield Hits 15-Year High

LONDON (Dispatches) - Germany's two-year bond yield jumped to its highest level in 15 years, rising back above the peak it hit in March before jitters in the banking system rocked global markets.

The new milestone was reached during a sharp sell-off in bonds in the euro zone, the United States and Britain, as investors bet central banks would hike interest rates even further than previously expected. Yields move inversely to prices.

Germany's two-year yield, which is highly sensitive to interest-rate expectations, rose to 3.393%, the highest since autumn 2008. It was last up 8 basis points (bps) at 3.366%.

Global yields were already higher on the day, and rose further after data showed that U.S. private payrolls increased much more than expected in June. Separate data showed that U.S. job openings dropped in May, but remained elevated.

Market analysts and traders said the minutes from the U.S. Federal Reserve's latest meeting, released on Wednesday, were likely another factor boosting yields on Thursday.

The minutes showed the bulk of policymakers expected they would need to tighten policy further, though they held interest rates at that meeting.

Giles Gale, head of European rates strategy at NatWest Markets, said investors were coming to terms with the idea that central bankers are going to keep rates "higher for longer".

"That central banks are going to break something and they'll be cutting rates soon, that's a story that just isn't tracking," he said.

Turkish Treasury Chief Signals Further Rate Hikes to Tame Inflation

ANKARA (Dispatches) - Turkey's recently appointed Treasury and Finance Minister Mehmet Şimşek said the program of Turkey's new economic team is focused on fiscal discipline, gradual monetary tightening and structural reforms.

He also signaled further rate hikes this year in a bid to tame inflation.

"Our program has three key components," Şimşek posted on Twitter, listing them as: "Restoration of fiscal discipline; that is, reducing the budget deficit to a level compatible with the Maastricht criteria, excluding the effect of earthquakes (from this February); gradual monetary tightening and incomes policy in line with the inflation target in order to reduce inflation to single digits in

the medium term; (and) structural reform that will make macroeconomic financial stability and all other gains permanent."

Consumer price inflation in Turkey moderated further in June as the downward trend continues at a slower pace.

Prices climbed 38.21% last month compared with a year earlier, down from May's 39.59% year-over-year increase, due in part to base effects, according to the Turkish Statistical Institute (TurkStat) data.

The June reading marks the lowest level since December 2021, when inflation stood at 36.08%, before rising to above 85% in October 2022, a 24-year high.

The annual reading recorded more than a 4-point drop in May after Ankara's provision of free natural gas that month offset other price rises.

Prices increased 3.92% from May to June, TurkStat said, its highest level since January, after a steep decline in the Turkish lira. It is up sharply from a 0.04% rise from April to May.

Annual and monthly figures both came in below market expectations. A median of estimates in a Reuters poll predicted inflation would reach 4.84% month-over-month. The poll had forecast that annual consumer price inflation (CPI) would be 39.47% and is expected to end the year at 51.5%.

Turkey's economic authorities have taken steps since President Recep Tayyip Erdoğan was reelected on May 28 to combat inflation, including changing course after two years of monetary easing.

Erdoğan reshuffled his economic team after reelection, bringing in Şimşek, the respected veteran policymaker, as treasury and finance minister, and Hafize Gaye Erkan, a former Wall Street banker, as central bank governor.

The Central Bank of the Republic of Turkey (CBRT) increased its benchmark policy rate by 650 basis points last Thursday, lifting its one-week repo rate to 15%, and called it the "first step" to curb inflation.

OPEC Upbeat Over 2024 Oil Demand Outlook Despite Slowdown

VIENNA (Dispatches) - OPEC will likely maintain an upbeat view on oil demand growth for next year when it publishes its first outlook later this month, predicting a slowdown from this year but still an above-average increase, sources close to OPEC said.

OPEC's forecast for 2024 will likely be lower than the growth it expects for this year of 2.35 million barrels per day, or 2.4%, an abnormally high rate as the world moves out of the coronavirus pandemic.

Even so, it would still be well above the annual average of the past decade with the exception of the pandemic years and above predictions by the International Energy Agency, which sees a major slowdown in demand growth next year to 860,000 bpd.

OPEC and the IEA have repeatedly clashed in recent years, with OPEC criticizing the IEA, which advises industrialized countries, for what it sees as irresponsible predictions and subsequent data revisions.

Oil demand growth is an indication of likely oil market strength and forms part of the backdrop for policy decisions by OPEC and its allies, known as OPEC+. The group in June extended supply curbs into 2024 to support the market as concern over weakening demand pressured prices.

For 2024, three OPEC sources said that while demand growth was likely to show a slowdown, it would not be as severe as the IEA predicts, and growth will likely be above 1 million bpd and below 2 million bpd. A fourth source close to OPEC said demand will likely rise by at least 1.5 million bpd.

"It can be expected that the increase in oil demand in 2024 will be much lower than 2023," one of the OPEC sources said, adding that it could be between 1.5 million and 1.7 million bpd.

OPEC is expected to publish its first demand forecast for 2024 in its monthly report on July 13. OPEC did not immediately respond on Thursday to an emailed request for comment.

"It will be more bullish than the IEA," another source said of OPEC's 2024 demand view.

Top officials from OPEC countries at a conference this week such as Amin Nasser, CEO of state-owned oil producer Saudi Aramco, expressed optimism over the oil demand outlook despite economic headwinds weighing on prices.

"Asia is growing. China alone between 2019 and 2023, three million bpd growth, India one million bpd growth, so there is a pick-up in demand," he said.

Oil demand forecasters often have to make sizeable revisions given changes in the economic outlook and geopolitical uncertainties, which this year included China's lifting of coronavirus lockdowns and rising interest rates.

OPEC originally predicted demand growth in 2023 of 2.7 million bpd in its first forecast published in July 2022, later revising it down to 2.35 million bpd.

Bank of Canada to Raise Rates 25 Basis Points on July 12



BENGALURU (Dispatches) - The Bank of Canada will raise interest rates by a quarter-point for a second straight meeting to 5.00% on July 12 following a five-month pause earlier this year and then hold well into 2024, according to a majority of economists polled by Reuters.

While that is the new expected peak rate, this same group of economists had called 4.50% the top before the BoC's surprise June move, underscoring how persistently price pressures have lingered in an economy still performing well.

Inflation slowed sharply to 3.4% in May from 4.4% the prior month, but is well above the central bank's 2.0% target and not expected to reach it until early 2025.

So the BoC will press ahead and hike the overnight rate by 25 basis points to 5.00% on July 12, according to 20 of 24 economists in the June 28-July 6 Reuters poll.

That would amount to 475 basis points in total since March 2022, taking the overnight rate to a new 22-year high.

Economists appear more convinced of another rate rise than financial markets, which are pricing in a roughly 55% chance of a quarter-point hike this month.

"The slowdown (in inflation) may not be enough to remove another BoC rate hike from the table this month given stickier core rates of inflation, while a decent GDP report coupled with a tight job market suggests the economy remains sturdy," said Priscilla Thiagamoorthy, senior economist at BMO Capital Markets.

Gross domestic product was expected to grow at an annualized pace of 1.3% this year, up from 0.7% in an April poll. The unemployment rate will average 5.4% in 2023, according to the median forecast, only marginally above the current 5.2%.

Inflation is not expected to fall to the central bank's 2% target at least until 2025, according to the poll. Economists said core inflation, stripped of volatile food and energy prices, would fall only slightly by year-end.

UAE Attracts Record \$23b in Foreign Investment in 2022

DUBAI (Dispatches) - Foreign direct investment (FDI) flows into the United Arab Emirates rose 10% in 2022 from the previous year to a record \$23 billion, the United Nations trade body said in a report.

Globally, FDI fell 12% in the year, the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) report said in its World Investment Report 2023.

The UAE, the Arab world's second-biggest economy, attracted around 60% of total FDI into the six-member (Persian) Gulf Cooperation Council (PGCC) bloc, which more than doubled to \$37 billion, UNCTAD said.

FDI flows into neighbouring Saudi Arabia, the region's biggest economy and the world's top crude exporter, dropped almost 60% to \$7.9 billion in 2022.

The Persian Gulf states, largely dependent on hydrocarbons for revenue, all have plans underway to diversify their economies and sources of income, and pull in foreign investment.

The UAE is among the most advanced in that process, having developed sectors such as financial services, trade and tourism as well as implementing social and business reforms.

Earlier this week, it announced the establishment of a new federal investment ministry to develop both a global and domestic strategy as it contends with growing economic competition from neighbors.

The UNCTAD report also said the UAE attracted the fourth-highest number of greenfield projects in the world last year.

The UAE is also a source of investment, with \$25 billion in outward investments last year, up 10% on the previous year.



Iran to Produce "The Survivor 2"

TEHRAN (IRNA) - "The Survivor 2", a sequel to "The Survivor" that was made about three decades ago, is to be produced with the help of Iran's Farabi Cinema Foundation. Directed by the late Seifollah Daad and produced by Manouchehr Mohammadi, The Survivor narrates the story of the conflict between Arabs and the Zionist regime of Israel over Haifa.

Once, Daad said that The Survivor was written based on the novella "Return to Haifa" by Palestinian author Ghassan Kanafani. Now after 29 years, The Survivor 2 is to be produced by Mohammadi with the cooperation of the Farabi Cinema Foundation. The film script is said to be in the final phase, and the director and the cast of the movie will be introduced soon.



Twitter Chaos Leaves Door Open for Meta's Rival App

SAN FRANCISCO (Dispatches) - Elon Musk spent the weekend further alienating Twitter users with more drastic changes to the social media giant, and he is facing a new challenge as tech nemesis Mark Zuckerberg prepares to launch a rival app this week.

Zuckerberg's Meta group, which owns Facebook, has listed a new app in stores as "Threads, an Instagram app", available for pre-order in the United States, with a message saying it is "expected" this week.

The two men have clashed for years but a recent comment by a Meta executive suggesting that Twitter was not run "sanely" irked Musk, eventually leading to the two men offering each other out for a cage fight.

Since buying Twitter last year for US\$44 billion (RM204.7 billion), Musk has fired thousands of employees and charged users \$8 a month to have a blue checkmark and a "verified" account.

On the weekend, he limited the posts readers could view and decreed that nobody could look at a tweet unless they were logged in, meaning external links no longer work for many.

He said he needed to fire up extra servers just to cope with the demand as artificial intelligence (AI) companies scraped "extreme levels" of data to train their models.

But commentators have poured scorn on that idea and marketing experts say he has massively alienated both his user base and the advertisers he needs to get profits rolling.

In another move that shocked users, Twitter announced Monday that access to TweetDeck, an app that allows users to monitor several accounts at once, would be limited to verified accounts next month.

John Wihbey, an associate professor of media innovation and technology at Northeastern University, told AFP that plenty of people wanted to quit Twitter for ethical reasons after Musk took over, but he had now given them a technical reason to leave too.

And he added that Musk's decision to sack thousands of workers meant it had long been expected that the site would become "technically unusable".

Musk has said he wants to make Twitter less reliant on advertising and boost income from subscriptions.

Yet he chose advertising specialist Linda Yaccarino as his chief executive recently, and she has spoken of going into "hand-to-hand combat" to win back advertisers.

"How do you tell Twitter advertisers that your most engaged free users potentially will never see their ads because of data caps on their usage," tweeted Justin Taylor, a former marketing executive at Twitter.

Mike Proulx, vice president at market research firm Forrester, said the weekend's chaos had been "remarkably bad" for both users and advertisers.



"Advertisers depend on reach and engagement yet Twitter is currently decimating both," he told AFP.

He said Twitter had "moved from stable to startup" and Yaccarino, who remained silent over the weekend, would struggle to restore its credibility, leaving the door open to Twitter's rivals to suck up any cash from advertisers.

The technical reasons Musk gave for limiting the views of users immediately brought a backlash.

Many social media users speculated that Musk had simply failed to pay the bill for his servers.

French social data analyst Florent Lefebvre said AI firms were more likely to train their models on books and media articles than social network content, which "is of much poorer quality, full of mistakes and lacking in context".

Yoel Roth, who stepped down as Twitter's head of security weeks after Musk took over, said the idea that data scraping had caused such performance problems that users needed to be forced to log in "doesn't pass the sniff test".

"Scraping was the open secret of Twitter data access," he wrote on the Bluesky social network — another Twitter rival.

"We knew about it. It was fine."

Migration Only Option for Many in Latin America

BRUSSELS (Dispatches) - Many people in Latin America see migration as "the only option they have" after enduring successive crises of climate change, Covid and spiking food prices, the World Food Programme's head for the region told AFP.

"It's a hemispheric migration," the official for the United Nations organisation, Lola Castro, said in an interview in Brussels. "People are transiting everywhere in the continent... all the way to the border with the US and Mexico, everywhere is affected by migration, and the governments are telling us 'What do we do with all these masses of people transiting?'"

The pressures, particularly food insecurity, prompted Castro to plead that Latin America "not be forgotten" when its leaders get together with EU counterparts in a joint summit in Brussels July 17-18.

Haiti is of particular concern for the World Food Programme, mainly because of unchecked gangs, Castro said.

"The situation has deteriorated enormously," she said, adding that "there are 200 gangs and they have taken over the city of Port-au-Prince," Haiti's capital.

The danger they pose is preventing Haitians going to work or school or taking food to market, she said.

It "is really like a population taken hostage," she said.

Nearly half of Haiti's population, 4.9 million people, are in need of food assistance, but the WFP is only able to get to around 2.5 million of them. But "due to funding cuts around the world, we are not going to be able to reach one (million) of these 2.5 million," Castro said, calling that "very dramatic".

Funding for WFP's operations in Haiti is \$122 million short for this year, she explained. While Russia's war in Ukraine has thrown up challenges to food supplies in many regions, Africa and the Middle East especially, food insecurity was climbing inexorably in Latin America, despite its agricultural production capacity, Castro said.

German Firm Sees U.S. Getting Lion's Share of 100b Euro Military Fund

MUNICH (Dispatches) - Up to half of the 100 billion euro (\$109 billion) special fund set up to modernize the German military will likely go to U.S. defense companies, a leading tank gear box maker said, accusing Berlin of lacking a strategy for its defense industry.

"I don't believe that much of the money will be left over for the German industry," Susanne Wiegand, chief executive of Renk Group, told reporters in Munich, adding the government in Berlin did not realize the strategic importance of the defense industry.

"Germany does not have a strategic compass for the defense industry. This is something the French are handling much better," she said late on Monday at a journalist briefing embargoed for Tuesday.

Wiegand called on the government to use the 100 billion euro fund not only to plug short-term gaps in the German military's inventories but also to help develop technologies of the future.

The chancellor in Berlin did not immediately respond to a Reuters e-mailed request for comment.

Khayyam Satellite...

FROM PAGE 1

"Khayyam satellite is currently taking images from different parts of the country as part of efforts to implement the memorandum of understanding. These images will be utilized in order to address legal challenges of ordinary people and state institutions concerning land use changes," Daliriyani said.

"We are ready to offer necessary data to other Iranian state agencies and help them solve their problems in various fields, including environmental monitoring, water resources, soil erosion and land subsidence," added.

Back in August last year, the Khayyam satellite was launched into orbit from the Moscow-operated Baikonur Cosmodrome in Kazakhstan, marking what Iran called the beginning of "strategic" aerospace cooperation between Tehran and Moscow.

With remote-sensing applications, the satellite will send high-quality pictures four times a day for use in environmental and agricultural research and monitoring of water resources, according to Iran's

Space Organization.

The maps and data will be used for improving agricultural productivity, enhanced monitoring of Iran's water resources, managing natural disasters, supervising development projects under construction, observing environmental hazards, monitoring mines and relevant excavations, and keeping a close watch on the country's borders.

Iran's Space Organization received the first telemetry data sent from the Khayyam satellite hours after the launch.

The satellite was launched at the velocity of 7.6 kilometers per second and was placed into an LEO orbit 500 kilometers above the earth's surface some 480 seconds after the blast-off.

The Earth observation satellite has been named after legendary Persian polymath Omar Khayyam (May 18, 1048 – December 4, 1131), who is known globally for his epic contributions to the fields of mathematics, astronomy, philosophy, and poetry.

Tehran Lauds Pakistan...

FROM PAGE 1

The Iranian Embassy also called on all of the faithful people and free thinkers worldwide to join in a unified effort to denounce the desecration.

"Islamophobia, the insulting of sacred elements and symbols of the divine religions, and the desecration of holy books should be halted through political synergy, legal procedures and appropriate didactic instructions as these actions provide fertile ground for the spreading of hatred and violence, ideological clashes, destabilization and the anguish of countless religious individuals worldwide," the statement said.

"To rectify this situation, it is imperative to employ coordinated and unifying measures such as clarification, explanation, education, legal procedures and dialogue. These constructive approaches will pave the way for correcting the current state of affairs," it added.

The statement came more than a week after a man burned a copy of the Qur'an outside the Stockholm Central Mosque as Muslims were celebrating Eid al-Adha, one of the major feasts that is marked at the end of the Hajj pilgrimage.

Tehran Urges Foreign...

FROM PAGE 1

However, the region faces a range of serious security challenges, from traditional threats such as the military presence of extra-regional powers to emerging concerns like piracy, drug trafficking, and environmental degradation. These issues pose a significant threat to the region's growth. Consequently, fostering indigenously driven regional security becomes a public good that benefits not only the region but also the entire world, while simultaneously preventing major powers from vying for control over the region's resources and sea lanes.

We must bear in mind the significance of the Declaration on the Indian Ocean as a Zone of Peace, adopted on 16 December 1971. This declaration calls upon all states to consider and respect the Indian Ocean region as a zone of peace, free from great power rivalry. It also envisions the region to be free of nuclear weapons, an essential component for sustainable security in the area. In light of

the worrisome exponential increase in military tensions and expenditure, it remains crucial to allocate available resources to non-military alliances, reducing tensions that contradict the goals outlined in the Declaration.

In this context, military powers bear a substantial responsibility to refrain from any activity that undermines this noble goal. Extra-regional powers must eliminate their military presence in the Indian Ocean region. It is high time for the world to recognize the capabilities of regional countries in addressing issues independently, without relying on external powers.

Lastly, the strengthening of Iran's friendly relationships with regional countries and its recent full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization serve as ample proof and examples that regional countries can determine their destiny and shape their history.

If Not Burned...

FROM PAGE 1

Abdrew Copson, the executive manager of the British Humanist Association (BHA), has told Russia Today about the reason behind the decline of Christianity in the UK and has said: This issue is a long term decline and currently on average, 95% of Christians in the UK do not turn up in the churches and this is a bitter truth for Christians which has been noticed by the British Government in a way that former British Prime Minister David Cameron, with expressing his concerns in his speeches aimed at encouraging the Christians, had emphasized the necessity for commitment of the Christians to the religious rites especially protecting sanctity of the churches.



During the recent days in Sweden some incomprehensible reactions to Holy Quran burning took place. Salwan Momika, the Iraqi refugee, on June 29, burned a copy of the Holy Quran in front of the largest mosque of the capital of Sweden, Stockholm. This insult and blasphemy has precedents in Europe and especially in Sweden. Danish-Swedish politician Rasmus Paludan on January, 27, 2023 burned a copy of the Holy Quran outside the Turkish Embassy in Stockholm. This blasphemy and insult took place like what Iraqi refugee did and unfortunately under the protection of the Swedish police and government. This politician once again a week later and after the Friday Prayer ceremony in the capital of Denmark, Copenhagen, continued his insult against the Holy Quran. Paludan said the reason of his insult was the disapproval of Turkish government for joining of Sweden to the NATO that these two issues were irrelevant.

Edwin Wagensveld, Dutch leader of Far-Right Patriotic Europeans Against the Islamisation of the West (PEGIDA) group, on January 23, 2023, tore apart the Holy Quran before showing it being set on fire. Historic sources show us that revengeful reaction of Holy Quran burning in Europe dates back to the Middle Ages. The region of Iberian Peninsula, including two countries of Spain and Portugal of today after the conquest by the Umayyad Caliphate, was named Andalus. 800 years later and in 1492 and because of the rift among Muslims, Muslims lost the control of Andalus. The very revengefulness caused that the Arabic versions of the Holy Quran were burned between 1498 -1500 under the orders of the church. The 16th Century was the beginning of the famous inquisition courts in the Spanish Empire. These courts for over 300 years, spread the shadow of fear over the Spanish Kingdom as the most important empire and kingdom of the 16th of the world.

The main goal of this type of revengeful reaction was to eliminate Islam and its exalted rites which strongly provoked the anger of the church, and Muslim citizens of Spain were displaced in different parts of the world because of fear of torture and horrible death. This trend was carried out permanently in other cities of the Catholic European powers.

So one can understand that insults against Muslims' rites have always been in progress with the aim of humiliation and wiping out signs of Islam in Europe and Western world. Today's Holy Quran burning is undoubtedly a kind of hysteric reaction of the far-right in Europe to the trend of population growth of Muslims in the world and especially in European countries.

History has shown that the more hysterical reaction and away from wisdom, justice and logic increases in any field, the more attention and deepening of nations especially the youths to that field increases.

Thank God thousands of times that today Muslims are on the threshold of creating unity and integrity for materializing their old dreams of return to their own civilization and they account for one-fourth of the world population and actually they will not retreat from their sublime destinations because of such imprudent reactions. Experience has shown us that unconventional reactions brings this point to the mind that if they have not burned, they will not burn.

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Khaka Joins Leverkusen From Arsenal

LONDON (Dispatches) - Bayer Leverkusen have signed Switzerland midfielder Granit Xhaka from Arsenal on a five-year deal, the Bundesliga club said.
Financial details were not disclosed but British media reported the German club paid 25 million euros (\$27.19 million) for the 30-year old.
Xhaka joins Xabi Alonso's Leverkusen after spending seven seasons with Arsenal in which he made 297 appearances, with 23 goals and 29 assists, and helped the club win two FA Cups.

PSG Swoop for Ugarte to Boost Midfield in €60m Deal

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris Saint-Germain completed the signing of Uruguay midfielder Manuel Ugarte from Portuguese club Sporting following the arrivals this week of Milan Skriniar and Marco Asensio.
Ugarte, 22, has signed a five-year deal with the French champions who reportedly paid a transfer fee in the region of €60 million to ward off interest from Chelsea.
The defensive midfielder began his career with Fenix in Montevideo before moving to Portugal to join Famalicao. He was soon snapped up by Sporting and spent the past two seasons with them.

Alcaraz Cruises Into Wimbledon Third Round

LONDON (Dispatches) - Carlos Alcaraz swept into the third round of Wimbledon on Friday, beating Frenchman Alexandre Muller 6-4, 7-6 (7/2), 6-3.

The Spanish top seed, who reached the last 16 last year, is attempting to become the third-youngest player in the Open Era to win the title after Boris Becker and Bjorn Borg.

The 20-year-old, seen as the greatest threat to defending champion Novak Djokovic, won his opening match against French veteran Jeremy Chardy on Tuesday.

But heavy rain has played havoc with the schedule at the All England Club -- Djokovic, in action later Friday against Stan Wawrinka, is a round ahead of his rival.

A single break was enough for Alcaraz to seal the first set and he won the second-set tie-break to take an iron grip on the contest.

He broke 84th-ranked Muller again in the eighth game of the third set and served out for the match.

The US Open champion won his first grass court title at Queen's last month.

"I'm really, really happy to play here again and this time with a win on this really beautiful court," he said. "I wanted to enjoy every single second and I think I did."

Alcaraz said he was learning quickly on grass -- he is playing in only his fourth tournament on the surface.

"I'm playing really, really well on grass. I'm not an experienced guy like other players but I'm enjoying playing on grass... getting better every match that I play.

"Playing here in Wimbledon is something special. You feel different compared to other tournaments."

World number two Djokovic, who is bidding for a record-equalling eighth Wimbledon and 24th Grand Slam title, had his second-round obligations wrapped up by Wednesday.

The 36-year-old faces three-time major winner Stan Wawrinka, two years older than the Serb, for a place in the last 16.

"It's the duel of the veterans," said Djokovic.

The two have met 26 times over their 17-year rivalry.

Wawrinka has won just six of those matches but crucially two were in Grand Slam finals, at the 2015 French Open and the US Open, 12 months later.

"I will enjoy it if I don't get killed," joked the Swiss.

Men's third seed Daniil Medvedev returned to complete his second-round clash against Adrian Mannarino, the Frenchman who defeated him at Wimbledon five years ago.



The mercurial Russian was two sets and 4-4 ahead when play was halted on day four but quickly wrapped up victory in a third set tie-break.

Unseeded dangerman Matteo Berrettini, the 2021 runner-up to Djokovic, made the last 32 with a straight-sets defeat of Australian 15th seed Alex de Minaur.

Danish sixth seed Holger Rune reached the third round for the first time, brushing aside Spain's Roberto Carballes Baena 6-3, 7-6 (7/3), 6-4.

Women's second seed Aryna Sabalenka recovered from a set down to beat Varvara Gracheva, who recently switched nationality from Russia to France, 2-6, 7-5, 6-2.

"I couldn't find my rhythm in the first set," said Sabalenka, a semi-finalist at Wimbledon in 2021 before last year's ban on Russian and Belarusian players.

"I was telling myself to keep fighting, keep trying and you probably can win this one."

Former US Open champion Bianca Andreescu recovered from 2-5 down in the final set to defeat Ukraine's Anhelina Kalinina 6-2, 4-6, 7-6 (10/7).

Two-time champion Petra Kvitova eased past Aliaksandra Sasnovich 6-2, 6-2, avenging her defeat to the Belarusian in the first round in 2018.

Ukraine's Marta Kostyuk made the last 32 for the first time when Paula Badosa suffered a recurrence of a back injury and quit their second-round match.

Kostyuk was 6-2, 1-0 ahead when her Spanish rival retired after just 36 minutes on Court 18.

Badosa immediately pulled out of the mixed doubles she was due to play with boyfriend Tsitsipas.

The 21-year-old Kostyuk next faces Madison Keys of the United States, a quarter-finalist in 2015.

Victoria Azarenka, twice a semi-finalist, was the first woman into the last 16 when she brushed aside Russia's Daria Kasatkina.



Chelsea Legend Azpilicueta Joins Atletico Madrid

LONDON (Dispatches) - Cesar Azpilicueta's 11-year stay at Chelsea came to an end as the Spanish defender returned home to join Atletico Madrid.

Azpilicueta made 508 appearances for the Blues and won nine trophies, including the Premier League, Champions League, Europa League, Club World Cup, FA Cup and League Cup.

"Cesar leaves an everlasting mark at Chelsea as a warrior, as a champion, and as a loyal Chelsea legend," said the club's co-owners Todd Boehly and Behdad Eghbali in a statement.

"He has set the standards at the club for more than a decade and demonstrated to everyone what is required day in, day out to achieve success."

Azpilicueta won the Premier League title under Jose Mourinho and then Antonio Conte, becoming a fan favourite for his work ethic and willingness to deputise in a number of positions.

However, his final season at Stamford Bridge was a difficult one.

Chelsea finished 12th in the Premier League -- their lowest placing since 1994.

"It's difficult to express with words what I feel," said Azpilicueta in a video posted on Chelsea's social media accounts.

"It's been incredible. Just thank you to everyone because it couldn't happen without the help of a lot of people. What a journey!"

The 33-year-old, who joined Chelsea from Marseille and began his career with Osasuna, has signed a one-year deal with Spanish side Atletico.

Bangladesh's Tamim Iqbal Announces Shock Retirement

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh captain Tamim Iqbal has announced his immediate retirement from all forms of international cricket, a surprise move coming just three months before the World Cup in India.

The announcement on Thursday came a day after Bangladesh's loss in the first One Day International (ODI) against Afghanistan, in which Tamim, who by his own admission was not 100 percent fit, scored just 13 runs.

"Yesterday against Afghanistan was my last international game. I am retiring from international cricket effective right now," Tamim told reporters.

He broke into tears as he made the announcement during a news conference that was broadcast live on national television.

"There was no sudden reason behind this. I was thinking about it for quite some time," said Tamim, who has been struggling with a back issue. "I was talking about it with my family members for a few days. I thought this was [the] right time for me to decide."

The 34-year-old batsman scored 8,313 runs in the 241 ODIs he played for Bangladesh during a 16-year career, hitting 14 centuries -- both run-scoring statistics being the highest by any Bangladeshi batsman.

The veteran left-hander scored 5,134 runs from the 134 innings he played in 70 Tests, scoring 10 hundreds. He retired from Twenty20 internationals in 2022.

Former Bangladesh captain Habibul Bashar led tributes to Tamim.

"One of the greatest batsman Bangladesh ever produced," he said.



PSG Sign Skriniar, Asensio on Free Transfers

PARIS (Dispatches) - Paris St Germain have signed defender Milan Skriniar and forward Marco Asensio on free transfers, the Ligue 1 champions announced.

Slovakian Skriniar was signed on a five-year deal, with his Inter Milan contract having expired in June.

Skriniar joined Inter from Sampdoria in 2017 and made nearly 250 appearances in Serie A, the Coppa Italia and the Italian Super Cup during his time at the club. He also has 60 caps for Slovakia.

The 28-year-old was linked with a move to PSG in January but the two clubs did not work out a deal before the transfer window closed. Inter had reportedly rejected bids of more than 50 million euros for Skriniar last year.

The centre back's final season in Italy was interrupted by injuries as he missed more than

20 games in all competitions, including the Champions League final when Inter lost to Manchester City.

"There is always pressure when you join a club like Paris St Germain. I feel it a little bit," Skriniar told PSG's website. "But I feel that I am ready, ready to be part of this very big club."

"I like pressure. I'm a defender so we know what it's like, you always have to be ready."

Former Real Madrid attacker Asensio was signed on a three-year deal until 2026, PSG said.

The Spaniard, who broke out under Zinedine Zidane in the 2016-17 season and scored in Real's 4-1 win against Juventus in that season's Champions League final, had gradually fallen out of favour at the LaLiga club over the last few years.

The 27-year-old made 51 appearances for Real across all competitions last season, scoring 12 goals, but was used mainly as a substitute.

Skriniar and Asensio are PSG's first signings of the transfer window, announced a day after the club appointed Luis Enrique as manager to replace Christophe Galtier.

Hamilton Positive on New Contract, Protests And Filming His Movie

SILVERSTONE (Dispatches) - Lewis Hamilton confirmed yesterday that talks about a new contract with Mercedes had proceeded beyond salary and duration and were now focused on fine details.

Speaking at Silverstone ahead of his home British Grand Prix, a race he has won a record eight times, the seven-time world champion reiterated his confidence in the 'Silver Arrows' and his belief that they can catch and overhaul Red Bull.

He also confirmed he would support any peaceful protest by climate activists and felt thrilled to see filming begin of the Hollywood movie about Formula One during the weekend at the circuit.

Asked during a mandatory pre-event news conference if recent positive comments about their talks by Mercedes team chief Toto Wolff were true, Hamilton said: "Yes, that's correct."

He added that a terse radio exchange between them, when Hamilton grumbled about his car's lack of performance during last Sunday's Austrian Grand Prix, was typical of the open and honest nature of their relationship.



Alonso Concerned About Stress of F1's Expansion

SILVERSTONE (Dispatches) - Two-time world champion Fernando Alonso expressed his concern that the massive growth of Formula One's calendar could become too stressful for the teams.

The sport this week announced a record 24-race calendar for 2024 to run from March to December, with testing taking place in February, ahead of the opening race.

The Aston Martin driver said he believed it was too much and was sure to be a strain on team members as the season stretched almost across most of the year.

When he made his debut with Minardi in 2001, the now 41-year-old driver embarked on a season of 17 races, mostly in Europe, running from March to October.

"I understand all the benefits of having 24 races and the reasons behind doing so many," he said. "It is difficult. There is a lot of interest in F1 and a big demand."

"So, it is good to go to new countries and have new races -- this year it will be in Las Vegas and a few years ago it was Qatar. And it is great to open the sport to new countries. "There is more revenue for everyone. I understand that, but I think that for team members, a good number of races is 18.



AC Milan, Monza to Honor Berlusconi With Annual Friendly

MILAN (Dispatches) - AC Milan and Monza will honour Silvio Berlusconi with an annual friendly named after their deceased former owner, the two Serie A teams announced.

In a joint statement, the clubs said that the first edition of the Silvio Berlusconi Trophy would be held at Monza's U-Power Stadium on August 8, with the match switching venues each year.