

Iran and Uzbekistan Have Seen a 24% Increase in Their Trade Exchange During the First 5 Months Of the Current Year Compared to the Same Period in the Previous Year, an Uzbek Committee Has Announced

IRAN NEWS

TEDPIX, the Main Index of the Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Dropped 513 Points to 2.07m on Saturday, Ad Per Report, Over 13.071b Securities Worth 85.744 Trillion rials (About \$175m) Were Traded at the TSE

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Iran, Russia Mulling Establishment of Joint Shipping Company

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's ambassador to Russia Kazem Jalali says Tehran and Moscow are discussing the possibility of establishing a joint shipping company, as the two sides work to further bolster strategic cooperation.

Jalali said in an interview with the Rossiya-24 TV Channel on Friday that the creation of a joint shipping company was discussed between Iranian and Russian officials as part of efforts to "strengthen" Tehran-Moscow's shipping fleet.

"There is a need to reinforce our ports; there is a need to strengthen the shipping fleet. Even to create a joint shipping company. I just had a conversation with First Deputy Prime Minister of Russia Andrey Belousov. Iran's Minister of Transport also discussed this topic with him. Our Russian counterparts welcomed the creation of a joint shipping company," the Iranian diplomat said.

Countries need to develop ports and link them "like railroads," he said. "The potential for freight shipping is huge there."

Moscow and Tehran are working together on multiple fronts, facilitating bilateral trade and business, expediting the completion of transit routes including the North-South Transit Corridor and its Caspian Sea component, and linking their banking systems to facilitate financial transactions. **See Page 7**

Moscow Revises Stance on 3 Iranian Islands in PG

TEHRAN (IRNA)- Moscow has reaffirmed its respect for Iran's sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands of the Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Musa following calls from Tehran to correct a previous stance on the issue.

During a meeting with Iranian Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali, Mikhail Bogdanov, the Russian president's special representative for the Middle East, underscored his country's firm stance toward the Islamic Republic as a friendly country.

Various topics, including the latest state of bilateral relations between Iran and Russia, were discussed during the meeting.

The islands of the Greater Tumb, Lesser Tumb and Abu Musa have historically been part of Iran, proof of which can be found and corroborated in historical, legal, and geographical documents in Iran and worldwide. However, the UAE has repeatedly laid unfounded claim to the islands.

Last Monday, the sixth joint ministerial meeting of the strategic dialogue between the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and the Russian Federation in Moscow ended with a joint statement that supported the UAE's initiative to resolve the issue of the Iranian islands through negotiations and based on international law.

Iran's Foreign Ministry summoned the Russian ambassador on Wednesday to protest the contents of the joint statement while urging Russia to revise its stance on the issue.



IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iran ranks first in terms of access to drinking water in urban and rural areas across the globe and among countries in the West Asia region, according to the World Bank.

In a new report, the World Bank said 99.83% of Iranian people in urban areas and 82% in rural areas have access to drinking water, while those figures stood at 85.7 and 59.6 percent in the world and 83.2 and 69.5 percent in West Asian countries.

Iran's localization and production of 80% of the equipment needed for water treatment plants, localization and production of 65% of the equipment needed for sewage treatment plants, localization and production of 90% of the equipment needed for water and sewage networks, water supply of about 100% of the urban population, which is higher than the global average, are among other indicators in the country's water industry, said the report.

The achievement was attributed to substantial changes the Islamic Republic has made in its water industry, such as adopting new approaches to water resources management and development of water infrastructure and facilities.

The changes included the creation of a suitable and collaborative mechanism for managing watersheds, improving water productivity, reappropriation of water, bulk delivery of agricultural water, installing gauging tools and prevention of overharvesting and unauthorized withdrawal of water.

Construction of dams and irrigation and drainage networks, urban and rural water supply, and creation of sewage facilities and water stress management were also regarded as Iran's new approaches to its water industry.

Meanwhile Energy Minister Ali Akbar Mehrabian said that Iran has a privileged position in accessing drinking water in urban and rural areas both globally and regionally.

"According to a recently published report, Iran's access to drinking water is 99.83 percent in urban areas, and it is more than 82 percent in rural areas," he said.

Referring to the published report on the status of access to drinking water supply in urban and rural areas in different countries by the World Bank, Mehrabian said on Saturday that Iran has a privileged position in accessing drinking water in urban and rural areas both globally and regionally.

The average access to drinking water in the world is 85 percent in urban areas and it is 59 percent in rural areas, he said, adding that the average access to drinking water in West Asia is 83 percent in urban areas and it is 69 percent in rural areas.

Pointing to the importance of the published report from two perspectives, Mehrabian underlined that the report shows that Iran is among the countries that supply drinking water in urban areas. "Also, it has a good ranking among the countries in providing water in rural area."

Iraq Ramps Up Deployment of Guards on Kurdistan Region Border With Iran

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Iraq has ramped up the deployment of its guards on the Kurdistan region's border with Iran, after Islamic Republic's top general warned that the Baghdad government's failure to deal with anti-Iran militants will prompt a fresh round of Iranian strikes.

"Under the guidance of the Commander-in-Chief of the Armed Forces [Prime Minister Mohammed Shia' al-Sudani] as well as efforts and follow-up of the Minister of Interior [Abdul Amir al-Shammari], there has been an agreement with the Kurdistan Region to reopen the 21st Border Guard Brigade in Sulaymaniyah province on the border with Iran," Director of Relations and Media in the ministry, Major General Saad Maan, told the official Iraqi News Agency on Friday.

He said that 50 concrete towers and 40 cameras have been erected, and construction of 47 border posts will soon begin on the Iraqi-Iranian border line.

"Specialized contracting companies will be invited next week to submit their bids, and they will start their activities after that. The monitoring center for border cameras will also be inaugurated at the same time, which will utilize 130 cameras. Efforts are underway to increase their number," Maan added.

The senior Iraqi official stressed that the cameras will closely monitor Sinjar district in the Kurdistan region as well as border areas between Iraq and Iran, noting that a large monitoring hall will also come into service for security purposes.

Addressing an annual gathering of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) commanders in the northeastern Iranian city of Mashhad on July 11, Chief of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Baqeri warned over the existence of armed separatist groups in northern Iraq that "cause insecurity at our borders."

The general then noted that Iran will wait until September and hopes that the government of Iraq would honor its commitments.

"If the deadline passes and they (terrorists) remain armed or carry out any operation, our operations against those groups will definitely reoccur more severely," he stated. **See Page 7**

ViewPoint U.S.'s Hollow Democracy

For decades or according to some claims for centuries the West and predominantly the U.S. have been claiming of supporting democracy and they have been apparently fighting for it in their own countries and even been seeking it in other countries but when we just have a look at their own records we realize that it is much ado for nothing and democracy is an illusion and hollow that even their own people do not believe in the claims and slogans of their statesmen.

A new poll released in the U.S. shows how much its people believe in the democracy in Western and better to say the American style which is actually hollow and deceitful.

The poll conducted by the Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research says only about 1 in 10 U.S. adults give high ratings to the way democracy is working in the United States or how well it represents the interests of most Americans, according to a new poll from The Associated Press-NORC Center for Public Affairs Research.

As per poll, majorities of adults say U.S. laws and policies do a poor job of representing what most Americans want on issues ranging from the economy and government spending to gun policy, immigration and abortion. The poll shows 53% say Congress is doing a bad job of upholding democratic values, compared with just 16% who say it's doing a good job.

The findings illustrate widespread political alienation as a polarized country limps out of the pandemic and into a recovery haunted by inflation and fears of a recession. In interviews, respondents worried less about the machinery of democracy — voting laws and the tabulation of ballots — and more about the outputs.

Overall, about half the country — 49% — say democracy is not working well in the United States, compared with 10% who say it's working very or extremely well and 40% only somewhat well. About half also say each of the political parties is doing a bad job of upholding democracy, including 47% who say that about Democrats and even more — 56% — about Republicans. **See Page 7**

U.S. Plans to Send F-16 Jets to Persian Gulf

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - A senior U.S. defense official has confirmed that Washington is deploying additional fighter jets around the strategic Strait of Hormuz "to protect ships". The Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says Iranian naval forces have so far seized 35 ships for violating maritime laws in the waters off the Persian Gulf.

Speaking to Pentagon reporters on Friday, the official said the U.S. will send F-16 fighter jets to the Persian Gulf region this weekend to augment the A-10 attack aircraft that have been patrolling there for more than a week.

The defense official, who spoke on condition of anonymity to provide details of U.S. military operations in the region, added that the F-16s will give air cover to the ships moving through the waterway and increase the U.S. military's visibility in the area, as a deterrent to Iran, the Associated Press (AP) news agency reported.

The defense official also told reporters the U.S. is considering a number of military options to address increasing Russian aggression in the skies over Syria. The official declined to detail the options but noted that the U.S. will not cede any territory and will continue to fly in the western part of Syria as part of operations against Daesh fighters.

In recent months, Iranian naval forces have impounded several ships off the country's southern coast for their breaches of shipping safety law, with the U.S. claiming that the moves are "illegal" and "endanger" shipping safety.

Tehran dismisses the claims as baseless, stressing the vessel seizures are in fact meant to consolidate the maritime law.

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Leader Offers Condolences to Hezbollah Chief

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has extended his condolences to the Hezbollah secretary-general over the passing of a religious authority and Shia scholar from Lebanon.

In a message to Sayyed Hassan Nasrallah, the Leader paid tribute to the respectable family of Sheikh Afif al-Nabulsi as well as all the Lebanese and Palestinian fighters.

According to reports, Nabulsi was going through a health crisis, as a result of which he passed away at the age of 82.

President Calls Africa Land of Opportunities

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Ebrahim Raisi stresses the need to promote ties with African nations, describing the continent as the land of opportunities where its potential should not be overlooked.

"We value our ties with the African continent, just as we do with the countries of Asia and other regions, and we should not overlook this continent, which is full of opportunities," Raisi said at Tehran's Mehrabad Airport upon return from his African tour, which took him to Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe.

He said the first objective of the trip was to boost the Islamic Republic of Iran's "strategic depth."

Seeing the faith, anti-colonialism spirit, and courage of the Iranian people following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, African nations were drawn to this Revolution and the system that came out of it, Raisi said.

The Iranian president noted that Iran, following the 1979 Islamic Revolution, has forged diplomatic ties with many African states, and these countries are keen on the advancement of relationships with Tehran in different areas.

Raisi also stressed the need for enhancing relations with African countries, saying that the states are gifted with abundant natural resources and mines, and enjoy many potentials and areas for closer cooperation.

He said his three-nation tour of Africa was also aimed at strengthening economic and trade relations with those countries and entering new markets with knowledge-based products made by Iranian experts.

The Iranian president mentioned the provision of raw materials as another goal of his African tour, saying that the issue of extra-territorial cultivation was also among the discussed subjects.



According to Raisi, agreements have been made for barter deals with African countries where Iran would get basic goods in return for supplying petrochemical products.

Scientific and technological exchanges were another topic discussed during the trip, he said, adding, "Offices were accordingly established in all the three countries to take an effective step in facilitating and strengthening our communication and cooperation in this area."

Pointing to "good meetings" with entrepreneurs and businessmen who expressed their readiness to expand business ties between Iran and Africa, Raisi said ways to overcome existing challenges were also explored.

"Greater work needs to be done to expand relations with African states in political, economic and cultural fields more than ever," Raisi said, adding that improving bilateral cooperation with these countries will result in regional and international cooperation.

"We share common views with these (African) countries on opposing unilateralism, [defending] human rights, protecting family values and fighting against moral corruption and organized crime," the Iranian president said.

He described Kenya as the gateway to East Africa, stressing that closer ties with Nairobi will strengthen interactions in other spheres.

"We believe that the world is not limited to the West," Raisi said, stressing that Iran's foreign policy is based on engaging with the whole world. "Africa is as important as America and Asia," the Iranian president said.

Iran Slams Zionist Dictators for Handling Protests With Iron Fist

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has slammed unmasked Zionist dictators for clamping down on protesters with an "iron fist" over holding demonstrations against the regime of Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

"For many years, the occupying and criminal Zionists tried to portray their fake regime as the most democratic entity in West Asia," Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kan'ani said in a post on his Twitter account.

He said the Zionist dictators are now handling the upheaval with an "iron fist."

The protest leaders have warned Netanyahu that Israel is on the edge of a precipice, the Iranian spokesman said.

Over the past weeks, Israel has been the scene of thousands-strong anti-regime protests in Tel Aviv and elsewhere. The principal grievance is Netanyahu's unpopular judicial overhaul plan.

The plan seeks to scrap a number of the supreme court's powers to make it incapable of overriding the decisions made by the far-right cabinet. It also seeks to give sweeping powers to the political elite in the process of selecting judges for the court.

Pakistani Official Calls for Enhancement of Air, Rail Tie With Iran

ISLAMABAD (IRNA) - President of Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry Ahsan Zafar Bakhtawari has said that the development of Pakistan and Iran are interlinked and that improvement of rail and air connections is necessary for increasing trade between the two countries.

According to the Islamabad Chamber of Commerce and Industry website, heading a delegation, Bakhtawari met with Iranian Ambassador to Pakistan Reza Amiri Moghadam at the Iranian Embassy.

In the meeting, issues of mutual interest and improvement of trade relations between the two countries, barter trade, energy projects, and other issues were also discussed.

He also said that Pakistan and Iran not only share a border but are also connected by mutual historical and cultural ties, which should be used to promote trade and business, adding that direct air connectivity, rail and road systems should be improved based on their importance.

In this regard, the two governments should form a joint plan of action, he said.

The Iranian ambassador to Pakistan said in the meeting that the new changes taking place in the region are a great opportunity for Pakistan and Iran and Pakistan and Iran need to take advantage of these opportunities together.

MP Warns Italy Over Inviting Terrorist MEK

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Senior Iranian Lawmaker Ebrahim Azizi has criticized the Italian Parliament for inviting the terrorist Mojahedin-e Khalq (MEK) noting that Iran's response to the friendship between the Italian parliament and MEK will be crushing.

Azizi pointed to the recent armed clashes between the MEK terrorists and the Albanian police, noting that the terrorists have lost their positions in the world.

Under such circumstances, the terrorists seek to make friends by using their deadwood and political systems that have an attitude of hostility towards the Islamic system and want to revive themselves with the help of the hostile currents, he added. He noted that Iran warns the countries who try to support the terrorist MEK, adding that Iran's response to such countries will be crushing.

Earlier, Iran's Ministry of Foreign Affairs summoned Italy's Ambassador to Tehran Giuseppe Perrone to protest a meeting between members of the Italian parliament and an anti-Iran terrorist.

Director General of Western Europe Majid Nili Ahmabadi emphasized Italy's international obligations in the fight against terrorism, noting that meeting of several Italian legislators with a terrorist is a clear example of promoting terrorism; so, the Islamic Republic does not tolerate it in any shape by anyone and categorically censures it.

Undoubtedly, the Islamic Republic urges the Italian government to show its seriousness in preventing the country turning into a safe haven for terrorists.

Support for terrorism will not guarantee Italy's interests in benefiting from constructive ties with Iran, and such a move will extremely tarnish the state's image in the eyes of public opinion.

China Supports Iran's Membership In BRICS



TEHRAN (IP) - China's ambassador to Tehran said his country supports Iran's request to join the world economies of Brazil, Russia, India, China as well as South Africa (BRICS).

On 20 September 2006, the first BRICS Ministerial Meeting was held at the proposal of Russian President Vladimir Putin on the margins of a UN General Assembly Session in New York.

Regarding the continuation of China's role in resolving regional issues, such as what happened in the restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia, Chinese ambassador to Tehran, Chang Hua, said: "China has good relations with all countries in the region. Last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping visited Saudi Arabia, and at the beginning of the current year, Iran's president also visited China."

He added: "The Presidents of three countries, including Iran, China, and Saudi Arabia, exchanged views on peace and security in the region, and the Iranian and Saudi sides also stated that they will restore bilateral relations and maintain peace and stability in the area, which China welcomes."

Referring to the signing of an agreement between Tehran and Beijing by the two countries foreign ministers, the Chinese ambassador said: "In our opinion, this is the success of peace and dialogue. Chang Hua also stated that Chinese President Xi Jinping proposed the global security initiative, focusing on resolving disputes through dialogue. The restoration of relations between Iran and Saudi Arabia is a successful model of the global security initiative. China is willing to improve peace and the stability of the region to follow this initiative."

Regarding whether his country will continue to support Iran's membership in organizations such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the Chinese diplomat said: "Certainly, China supports Iran's membership in the BRICS organization. Last year, Chinese President Xi Jinping invited Iran's president to participate in the High Development Dialogue; we support Iran's request to join the BRICS organization, although other members must agree on this."

Indian Ambassador Visits Chabahar Port

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - New Indian Ambassador to Iran, Rudra Gaurav Shresth, paid a visit to the Chabahar Port on Friday, marking his first visit to the port since assuming the charge as envoy.

The visit comes soon after he presented his credentials to the Iranian President, Ebrahim Raisi in the first week of July.

"Chabahar is an important project for India and it shows that the ambassador has chosen to visit Chabahar in his first official visit outside Tehran," a source said.

On his first visit to the Chabahar Port, the ambassador interacted with several senior port officials.

The port's General Director, Engineer Asgari, Governor of Chabahar, Dr Sepahi and India Ports Global Limited Managing Director Sunil Mukundan and senior officials of the port also interacted with the envoy.

Ambassador Rudra Gaurav Shresth is a career diplomat and a member of the Indian Foreign Service. He assumed charge



as the Indian Ambassador to Iran in May 2023.

Earlier in his career, Shresth worked in India's Diplomatic Missions in France, Mauritius, Afghanistan, Singapore, and Bhutan. He also served as India's High Commissioner to Mozambique from 2016 to 2019.

The Chabahar Port holds strategic importance for India, and the country is developing the Chabahar Port in a phased manner. The country

is developing the first phase of the Shahid Beheshti port in Chabahar. The capacity of the port will reach 8.5 million tonnes (MT) at the end of the first phase.

Chabahar Port is a seaport in the Sistan-Balochistan province of Iran, on the Gulf of Oman. It serves as Iran's only oceanic port and consists of two separate ports named Shahid Kalantari and Shahid Beheshti. Its geographic proximity to Afghanistan, Pakistan, India and International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) gives it the potential to develop into one of the most important commercial hubs.

Iran, Pakistan Discuss Enhancing Military Cooperation

TEHRAN (MNA) - The chief of staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Hossein Bagheri hosted Lt. Gen. Syed Asim Munir, chief of Pakistan's army in Tehran on Saturday to discuss booting cooperation.

During the meeting, Major General Bagheri and Asim Munir discussed increasing the bilateral interactions in order to develop the level of cooperation in different fields including defense, security, military, and training.

The historical background of the two neighboring countries of Iran and Pakistan is a basis for the expansion of bilateral relations and cooperation in various fields, Bagheri said in the meeting.

He also stressed the importance of developing military relations between Tehran and Islamabad, calling for increasing the training interactions and joint defense and security relations between the two countries at the regional level.

The Pakistani army chief is also scheduled to meet with several other Iranian officials in Tehran.

Iran, China Officials Follow Up Customs Agreements

TEHRAN (IP) - The Director General of Iran's Customs Administration (IRICA) and China's Deputy Customs Commissioner-General, on the sidelines of the 18th meeting of the Iran-China Joint Economic Cooperation Commission in Beijing, exchanged views on customs agreements between the two countries.

Mehdi Mirashrafi and Wang Lingjun emphasized the implementation of the customs cooperation documents signed between the two sides. Tehran and Beijing have signed an agreement to broaden cooperation in customs affairs for increasing bilateral trade ties.

Based on the document, IRICA will introduce measures to expedite customs inspections for companies certified and rated by the Chinese customs office. The Chinese authority will reciprocate the move for Iranian companies authorized by IRICA.

The agreement will help minimize customs procedures needed to clear goods exported by authorized merchants of the two countries, which would lower the costs incurred by traders and speed up customs clearance.

Mirashrafi also suggested that the two countries sign "a document for the electronic exchange of bilateral customs information". It was decided that the parties

should do the necessary follow-up in this regard.

Both sides emphasized the development of educational cooperation and the exchange of experiences in the form of study opportunities.

Expansion of cooperation in various assemblies and meetings of the World Customs Organization, and cooperation in the field of using transformative technologies such as artificial intelligence and mechanized customs equipment to facilitate trade and security controls were among the other issues raised in the said meeting.

Iran, Republic of Azerbaijan Diplomats Discuss Consular Issues

BAKU (IP) - Iran's ambassador to the Republic of Azerbaijan and the country's Deputy Foreign Minister discussed bilateral developments in the consular area.

Iran's ambassador to Azerbaijan, Seyyed Abbas Mousavi, met with Deputy Foreign Minister Fariz Rezayev to discuss consular matters and Iranian prisoners in Azerbaijan.

A while ago, the Iranian ambassador in Baku and the head of the State Customs Committee of Azerbaijan discussed increased cooperation between the two countries customs departments, particularly in the four border areas.

The Republic of Azerbaijan, Iran's neighbor, has sought to expand cooperation in various fields in recent years with Iran.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:41
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:19
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:01

117. (The Pagans), leaving Him, call but upon female deities: They call but upon satan the persistent rebel!
 118. Allah did curse him, but he said: "I will take of Thy servants a portion Marked off:
 119. "I will mislead them, and I will create in them false desires; I will order them to slit the ears of cattle, and to deface the (fair) nature created by Allah." Whoever, forsaking Allah, takes satan for a friend, hath of a surety suffered a loss that is manifest.

Surah 4. Women (117 - 119)

Iran, Serbia Eye Boosting Exchange of Trade Delegations

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran and Serbia in a meeting between the head of the Iran Chamber of Commerce, Industries, Mines and Agriculture (ICCIMA) and Serbia's ambassador to Tehran stressed the need for expanding trade ties by promoting the exchange of trade delegations.

The CEO of ICCIMA Hossein Selahvarzi and Serbia's Ambassador Dragan Todorovic discussed the obstacles facing the commercial cooperation of the two countries in the meeting and explored the latest information related to the economic opportunities and capacities of the two countries.

Referring to the emerging economy of Serbia, Selahvarzi said: "The ICCIMA is focusing a lot on promoting international activities, and in this regard, countries with economic advantages are given priority; therefore, with the help of the Serbian Embassy, we can take good steps to develop business relations."

He mentioned the visit of an Iranian trade delegation to Serbia in 2022, saying: "In that visit, solutions were agreed upon in the form of some payment mechanisms and now we should focus more on implementing those mechanisms."

The ICCIMA head further underlined the advantages of trade relations between Iran and Serbia and continued: "ICCIMA is ready to exchange trade delegations with Serbia and as the first step we will get in touch with the Serbian Chamber of Commerce to make the necessary arrangements for receiving a trade delegation from Serbia."

Todorovic, for his part, congratulated Selahvarzi on his election as the new head of



the ICCIMA and welcomed his proposal regarding the visit of a Serbian trade delegation to Iran, saying: "In October or November this year, the joint economic committee of Iran and Serbia will be held in Tehran, and a business delegation can also be sent to Iran at the same time as this event."

"Also, in ten days, the speaker of the Serbian Parliament is going to visit Iran, and after two weeks, our Deputy Foreign Minister will also travel to Tehran. Arrangements can also be made for the presence of business delegations during these trips," he added.

During a meeting between the private sector representatives of Iran and Serbia in Tehran in late May, the two sides discussed ways of expanding mutual economic ties.

In the meeting which was attended by acting head of the ICCIMA Department of International Affairs Niloufar Asadi and a delegation of Serbian private sector representatives, the two sides stressed the need for promoting joint investment and production in order to increase the level of trade.

According to Asadi, establishing a barter trade mechanism between the two sides can also significantly boost economic relations between the two countries.

The officials also explored common areas for cooperation including agriculture, petrochemicals, tourism, and especially health tourism.

The head of the Serbian delegation for his part expressed his country's readiness for welcoming Iranian economic delegations in the future, saying: "In addition to cooperation between the science and technology parks of the two countries, we are looking for trade in agricultural products, especially the import of chemical fertilizers from Iran and the export of corn, soybeans, and other products."

Slogan of "We Can" Now an Organizational Culture in HOSCO



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – The CEO of Hormozgan Steel Company (HOSCO) pointing to the achievements of the company in the field of production in the first quarter of the current year said HOSCO with reliance on the technical knowhow and great determination of its staff has been able to produce 449,136 tons slab set a new record for production in the first quarter of the year and it shows 14.8% growth comparing to the same period in the preceding year.

Speaking in the monthly meeting of the council of deputies and some senior managers of the company, the CEO of HOSCO Mr. Ataollah Maroufkhani touched upon the achievements of the company in the first quarter of the current year, saying that the planning of the company for this year has been in line with the slogan of the year "curbing inflation, production growth" and the second part of the slogan was materialized in the company.

He added that fortunately due to the endeavors of his colleagues and continuation of last year's strategies the company could set a historic record and it began the year with two monthly production records.

Maroufkhani then elaborated the details of the achievements and records of the company in the first quarter and blamed the energy restriction for better setting more records.

He added that HOSCO now has turned into a hub for the steel production in the country and the company has institutionalized the slogan of "We Can" in the company as an organizational culture.

He noted that the company in the first quarter of the year has witnessed 72% growth in his export revenues comparing to the same period and its total sales in the domestic and international markets have hit 8620b tomans which shows 78% growth comparing to the same period last year.

Iranian Ship Docks In North Africa



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The deputy CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines (IRISL) announced that the ship carrying Iran's exports cargo left ports in North Africa after docking operations.

Following the visit of Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi to three African states, Amir Bayat stated, "In addition to strengthening the regular shipping line for transporting Iran's export cargo to North and East Africa which had previously been launched, the ship carrying the country's export cargo left North African ports after docking."

He then pointed to the programs devised by the Islamic Republic of Iran Shipping Lines regarding the bolstering of the direct shipping line for forwarding Iran's export cargo to North and East Africa. He reiterated that IRISL has paved suitable ways for ships of the national fleet (IRISL) to travel to East Africa once every two weeks and also North Africa on a monthly basis.

Bayat went on to add that IRISL had previously launched a regular shipping line to the North and East Africa in line with promoting trade with the African states.

He said that the Iranian ship that left Libya earlier in the day was the second to dock in the North African country in less than two months.

Bayat said the IRISL currently sends container and dry bulk ships to ports in East Africa every two weeks, adding that Iranian ships also dock at North African ports at least once per month.

He said Iran's shipping activity in Libya is expected to increase with a return of calm to the North African country. The official said the IRISL is seeking to launch a regional office in Africa amid a surge in exports from Iran to the region.

IRISL's increased shipping activity in Africa comes as figures by the Iranian customs office show that trade with African countries more than doubled in the calendar year to March 20.

Nayat further said that IRISL plans to open a regional office in Africa to ensure regular commute of its fleet to the continent through direct shipping lines.

95% of Escalator Industry Has Been Indigenized



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The 12th International Exhibition of Elevator, Escalator and Related Industries and Equipment entitled "Iran LIFTEX 2023" was inaugurated in Tehran on Friday in presence of President of Iran Chamber of Commerce (ICC) Bahman Abdollahi, Deputy Minister of Industry, Mine and Trade Mr. Seyed Mohammad Mousavi and some Majlis lawmakers and managers in the cooperative sector.

Addressing the opening ceremony, President of ICC Mr. Abdollahi said that almost 95% of escalator industry has been indigenized in the country and the country only imports 9% of its required parts and in the near future all of the parts will be produced in the country.

He added that escalator and elevator industry in the country has progressed considerably in recent years and in production of elevators with high altitude some good actions have been taken.

Abdollahi further said that production and quality in this industry have reached to the acceptable level, expressing hope in less than five years the country would be needless of imports.

He said that ICC is in interaction with other countries for easing exports and with what will happen in this industry in the next three years, the country will step up exports.

Abdollahi reiterated that production of parts of elevator are currently exported to over 15 countries due to their good qualities, adding that elevator and escalator industry is one of the leading industries of the country whose products are exported to the neighboring and European countries. He added that over 140 domestic companies as well as 15 foreign companies from 7 countries have participated in this exhibition which is aimed at boosting the exports.

He noted that some 1200 escalators are produced in the country annually and over 2000 of them are The latest achievements of the participating companies were displayed at this exhibition within the framework of groups of product of elevator, escalator, conveyor belt, crane (lift), lift-truck, consultation, design, production, installation and commissioning of related equipment, smart-building, modern technologies, etc.

Business-to-Business (B2B) meetings and expert-level meetings will be held on the sidelines of the exhibition with the participation of trade and economic delegations from countries including Pakistan, Iraq, Iraq's Kurdistan region, Afghanistan and Oman. The representatives of countries including Spain, Germany, Italy, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) took part in the exhibition.

The 12th International Exhibition of Elevator, Escalator and Related Industries and Equipment was inaugurated by Iran Chamber of Cooperatives at Tehran Permanent International Fairgrounds on Friday which will run until through July 17.

Quarterly Export From Qeshm Free Zone Rises 63%

TEHRAN (MNA) - The value of export from Qeshm Free Zone in the southern Qeshm Island rose 63 percent during the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year (March 21-June 21), as compared to the same period of time in the past year, the head of the zone's Customs Department announced.

Products worth nearly \$76.9 million were exported from Qeshm Free Zone in the three-month period, Mokhtar Garshasbi stated. The official further said that the value of imports to the zone dropped 30 percent to \$31.2 million during the first quarter of the present year.

Secretary of Iran's Free Zones High Council Hojatollah Abdolmaleki has recently said the value of exports from free trade and special economic zones last year was close

to \$18 billion and about a third of the country's non-oil exports value. Of this amount, the share of special economic zones was more, and the share of free trade zones was \$1.7 billion, and considering that the value of imports to the free zones was almost \$1 billion, then the trade balance of these zones was \$700 million positive, and it was the first time that this happened.

"This year, we plan to have a surge in non-oil exports from the free zones", the official noted.

The establishment of free trade zones (FTZs) in Iran dates back to the Iranian calendar year 1368 (March 1989 - March 1990) following the fall in the country's oil income in the preceding year which prompted the government to promote non-oil exports.

IME Posts 7.7% Rise In Weekly Trade



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Iran Mercantile Exchange (IME) last week witnessed trade of 2,658,800 tons of commodities with a total trading value of nearly \$652m on its physical market.

According to a report by the IME's International Affairs and PR, the exchange saw on its metals and minerals trading floor trade of 2,094,221 tons of commodities valued at more than \$396m.

On this floor the IME sold 1,143,335 tons of cement, 614,000 tons of iron ore, 201,211 tons of steel, 142,100 tons of sponge iron, 15,631 tons of copper, 6,615 tons of aluminum, 1,210 tons of zinc, 210 tons of molybdenum concentrate and 75 tons of precious metals concentrate.

Based on this report, the exchange saw trade of 400 kg of saffron on its agricultural trading floor.

Moreover, the IME witnessed on both domestic and export rings of its oil and petrochemical trading floor 508,488 tons of commodities worth nearly \$236m.

Commodities traded on this floor included 151,320 tons of bitumen, 150,000 tons of vacuum bottom, 124,096 tons of polymeric products, 49,708 tons of chemicals, 24,000 tons of lube cut, 4,678 tons of oil, 3,692 tons of petroleum products, 825 tons of sulfur, 340 tons of water proofing material and 100 tons of feedstocks.

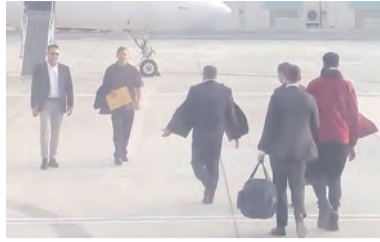
The IME also traded within the same week 56,091 tons of commodities on its side market.

U.S. Takes Custody of Russian Agent From Estonia

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States took custody of an alleged Russian intelligence agent extradited from Estonia, as the Biden administration pursues possible prisoner exchanges for U.S. detainees in Russia.

Vadim Konoshchenok was arrested in Estonia late last year as he sought to cross the border into Russia carrying semiconductors and U.S.-made ammunition for sniper rifles, according to charges filed against him.

He was allegedly a central figure in a seven-person smuggling ring, which included five Russians and two Americans who operated "under the direction of Russian intelligence services" to obtain US electronics and other goods restricted by U.S. export controls.



UNSC Appeals for Support for Haiti Police

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - The UN Security Council urged the international community to support Haiti's police, but stopped short of any concrete moves to create an international intervention force that is being called for by the crisis-wracked country.

Haiti, the Western Hemisphere's poorest nation, has seen compounding humanitarian, political and security crises, with gangs controlling most of the capital and terrorizing the population with kidnappings, rape and murder.

The Security Council's unanimously adopted resolution encourages member states "to provide security support to the Haitian National Police," including through "the deployment of a specialized force."



North Korea Defends Missile Launch

UNITED NATIONS (Dispatches) - North Korea's launch of an intercontinental ballistic missile (ICBM) was an exercise of its right to self-defense "to deter dangerous military moves of hostile forces and safeguard the security of our state," the country's U.N. envoy told the Security Council during a rare appearance.

The 15-member Security Council met after North Korea said it tested on Wednesday its latest Hwasong-18 ICBM, adding the weapon is the core of its nuclear strike force.

"We categorically reject and condemn the convening of the Security Council briefing by the United States and its followers," North Korea's U.N. Ambassador Kim Song told the council.

North Korea last spoke at a council meeting on its nuclear and ballistic missile programs in December 2017, diplomats said.

North Korea - formally known as the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK) - has been under U.N. sanctions for its missile and nuclear programs since 2006. This includes a ban on the development of ballistic missiles.

In a separate statement on Friday, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un's powerful sister, Kim Yo Jong, "strongly denounced" the U.N. meeting as unfair and biased, blaming the United States for escalating tensions in the region.

"The price the U.S. would have to pay for provoking us won't be light," Kim said, vowing to push for the "most overwhelming" nuclear deterrence until Washington drops what she called its hostile policy against Pyongyang.

For the past several years the council has been divided over how to deal with Pyongyang. Russia and China, veto powers along with the United States, Britain and France, have said more sanctions will not help and want such measures to be eased.

China and Russia blame joint military drills by the United States and South Korea for provoking Pyongyang, while Washington accuses Beijing and Moscow of emboldening North Korea by shielding it from more sanctions.

"Russia and China have prevented this council from speaking with one voice. And with these repeated launches, Pyongyang is demonstrating it feels emboldened," Deputy U.S. Ambassador to the United Nations, Jeffrey DeLaurentis, told the council.

DeLaurentis said the U.S. was committed to diplomacy and "publicly and privately and at senior levels we have repeatedly urged the DPRK to engage in dialogue."

He said Washington had made clear there were no preconditions for engagement and it would "discuss any topic of concern to Pyongyang."

"The DPRK has not responded to our offers," he said.

China's U.N. Ambassador Zhang Jun told the council that Beijing was committed to the denuclearization of the Korean Peninsula and the settlement of the issue through dialogue.

He described the situation as "tense" and said it was getting "ever more confrontational." China has "taken note" of North Korea's latest missile launch, Zhang said.

"The Cold War has long since ended, but the specter of the Cold War mentality lingers. It has not only rendered the Peninsula issue intractable, but also intensified antagonism and conflict around the world," he said.

He went on to slam a communique by NATO leaders this week, telling the council it was as "long-winded as it was harping the same old tunes filled with Cold War mentality and ideological prejudices." Zhang said NATO should do some "soul-searching."

NATO leaders in the communique said China challenged NATO's interests, security and values with its "ambitions and coercive policies."

"China does not cause trouble, nor does it fear trouble," Zhang said. "We stand ready to respond firmly and forcefully to any act that violates China's sovereignty and territorial integrity, undermine China's development and security interests and breach the peace and stability in China's neighborhood."



Sudan Fighting Sparks Communications Blackout in Khartoum

KHARTOUM (Dispatches) - War-torn Sudan's capital experienced a communications blackout for several hours, residents said, as the army and paramilitary forces waged intense battles across Khartoum and humanitarian groups warned of worsening crises.

"Violent clashes" shook the capital, witnesses told AFP over the phone, after residents woke up to an outage of vital internet and mobile phone connections.

The source of the malfunction was not clear, though mobile and internet networks were restored by the afternoon.

Throughout the day, columns of black smoke were seen rising near army headquarters in the centre of Khartoum as well as in the city's south. Witnesses in Khartoum North said there were "clashes using all kinds of weapons".

In Omdurman, just across the Nile river, witnesses reported fighter jets and drones flying overhead.

Since April 15, the forces army chief Abdel Fattah al-Burhan have been at war with the paramilitary Rapid Support Forces, commanded by his former deputy, Mohamed Hamdan Daglo.



Erdogan Confident of Extension to Ukraine Grain Deal

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkish President Recep Tayyip Erdogan expressed confidence on the prospects of an extension to the deal that allows Ukraine to export its grain and ease a global food crisis.

"We are preparing to welcome Putin in August and we agree on the extension of the Black Sea grain corridor," Erdogan told reporters.

Erdogan said he had spoken with Russian President Vladimir Putin about the crucial deal, set to expire on Monday, though he did not say when the conversation had taken place.

Questioned by Russian press agencies Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov neither confirmed nor denied Erdogan's statement. "There is no statement about this from the Russian side," he said.

The Black Sea grain deal was first signed in July 2022, five months after the Russian invasion of Ukraine, and has already been renewed two times. This time however, Putin has repeatedly threatened not to renew it because of obstacles to Russia's own exports.

Earlier Friday, speaking in Jakarta, US Secretary of State Antony Blinken called on Russia to extend the deal, warning that the most vulnerable countries would suffer without it.

"Developing countries including in the region will pay the price including quite literally with higher food prices, as well as greater food scarcity," Blinken told reporters after Southeast Asian talks.

UN Secretary General Antonio Guterres this week sent Putin a letter about the extension of the deal. He supports removing hurdles to Russia exporting its fertilisers -- another element Moscow has complained is not being respected.

Erdogan said he hoped "that with this letter we will ensure the extension of the grain corridor with our joint efforts and those of Russia".

"Discussions are being had," said Stephane Dujarric, a spokesman for Guterres. "WhatsApp messages are being sent, Signal messages are being sent and exchanged."

Wagner Troops Training Belarus Forces

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Belarus said that instructors from the Russian mercenary force Wagner were training its troops, following weeks of uncertainty about the future of the group after its failed mutiny in Russia.

The short-lived rebellion was ended by a deal under which some Wagner fighters and their outspoken leader Yevgeny Prigozhin were supposed to move to Belarus.

But Belarusian President Alexander Lukashenko had cast doubt on the deal when he said earlier this month that no Wagner fighters had moved to the country yet.

The Belarusian defence ministry appeared to confirm that at least some Wagner fighters had arrived.

"Near Asipovichy, units of territorial defence troops are undergoing training," the defence ministry said in a statement.

"Fighters of the Wagner private military company are acting as instructors in a number of military disciplines," it said. The Wagner group, which recruited extensively from Russian prisons, played a key role in the Ukraine offensive.

A video released by the Belarusian defense ministry showed masked fighters as instructors in the drills for soldiers living in a nearby tent camp.

A group of foreign reporters earlier this month was shown a camp near Asipovichy where Belarusian officials said the mercenaries could be based.

The deal, signed five months after Moscow's all-out

assault on Ukraine, is set to expire on Monday, and Russian President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly threatened not to renew it because of obstacles to Russian exports.

"We are preparing to welcome Putin in August and we agree on the extension of the Black Sea grain corridor," Erdogan told reporters.

But Kremlin spokesman Dmitry Peskov told state news agency RIA Novosti: "There were no statements on this subject from the Russian side".

In Ukraine, Kyiv's much-hyped counteroffensive, which began last month, ground on with only very gradual advances.

This has created tensions with the ex-Soviet country's Western supporters, who have sent billions of dollars in military aid.

Ukraine has blamed the slow delivery of promised arms, calling on allies to send long-range weapons and fighter jets.

Ukraine said on Friday its forces had moved forward 1,700 metres (just over a mile) on the front line in the south over the past seven days.

Ukrainian troops are advancing despite "dense" minefields and shelling, Mykola Urshalovych, a senior representative of the National Guard, told reporters.

There have also been some advances to the north and south of Bakhmut, a city which was captured by Russian troops in May after a battle lasting nearly a year.



France Fetes India's Modi At Bastille Day Celebration

PARIS (Dispatches)- Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi was treated to one of France's most spectacular accolades as guest of honour at the Bastille Day military parade, part of a visit that has sealed high-profile defense deals.

Modi and President Emmanuel Macron watched French and Indian soldiers march down the tree-lined Champs-Elysees avenue in Paris, while French-made Rafale fighter jets India bought in 2015 took part in a fly-past over the Arc de Triomphe.

The national celebrations come at a delicate time for Macron, who was also booed by some members of the public as he drove down the Champs-Elysees in a military car.

His decision to raise the retirement age sparked months of protests this spring and has hurt his popularity ratings.

Modi began a two-day visit to Paris on Thursday, when he was granted the Legion of Honour, France's highest award.

"(India) is a giant in the history of the world which will have a determining role in our future," Macron said in a speech late on Thursday. "It is also a strategic partner and a friend."

The parade comes after New Delhi gave initial approval to buy an extra 26 Rafale jets for its navy and three Scorpene class submarines, deepening defence ties with Paris at a time the two nations are seeking allies in the Indo-Pacific.

The total value of the purchases is expected to be around 800 billion rupees (\$9.75 billion), according to a source familiar with the details, although that was still subject to negotiations.

France has been one of India's closest partners in Europe for decades. It was the only Western nation not to impose sanctions on New Delhi after India conducted nuclear tests in 1998.

India has relied on French fighter jets for four decades now. Before buying Dassault Aviation's Rafale, India bought Mirage jets in 1980s and those still comprise two squadrons of the air force.

The ageing fleet of India's Russian-made planes, Moscow's inability to perform maintenance work, and delays in India's indigenous manufacturing plans have led to the two new defence deals.

Later on Friday, Macron will host Modi at the Elysee Palace for talks before a state banquet at the Louvre Museum.



Water Fasting Is Trendy, But Health Benefits Fade Fast

LONDON (Dispatches) - Water fasting has become one of the trendiest new weight-loss sensations, touted by former athletes and wellness gurus.

But whatever weight is lost during a water fast can come back quickly, while other health benefits fade fast, according to a new review of the available scientific evidence.

"I personally wouldn't really recommend this diet," said senior researcher Krista Varady, a professor of nutrition at the University of Illinois at Chicago. "I know it's become popular for some reason, kind of out of nowhere, over the past year or so. But even if people maintain the weight loss, all the health benefits go away."

Water fasting involves taking in nothing but water for at least five to 20 days, and sometimes even longer, researchers said in background notes.

Some supervised water fasts allow 250 calories a day, "a little bit of juice at breakfast and a really small amount of soup at lunch," Varady said.

Last month, former Seattle Seahawks lineman Russell Okung announced on Twitter that he had lost more than 100 pounds by taking in nothing but water for 40 days.

"I fasted for 40 days with nothing but water. Yes, you read right!" Okung tweeted. "The experience was so rich and rewarding that I'm going to do it again..."

And Australian wellness coach Kristine Crouch says a 25-day water fast cleared up her skin and helped her lose 20 pounds.

"I felt lighter in my body, my digestion was incredibly smooth, I had noticeably clearer and smoother skin, brighter eyes, increased energy and mental clarity and, above all, a new sense of peace," Crouch wrote in an essay for Newsweek.

Stories like these prompted Varady, an expert on intermittent fasting, to conduct a review of the available evidence for water fasting.

"Journalists were contacting me to ask about it," she said. "I just wanted to review the literature so people could see the science-based evidence supporting this diet."

Varady and her colleagues identified eight studies on water fasting, and analyzed the data to consider how well this method of weight loss works.

Fasting did spur noticeable short-term weight loss, researchers found.

A five-day water fast caused people to drop about 4% to 6% of their weight; a seven- to 10-day fast produced 2% to 10% weight loss; and fasting 15 to 20 days yielded 7% to 10% loss of total body weight.

But people tended to lose more lean muscle mass than fat mass during a water fast, according to two studies that measured body composition.

About two-thirds of weight loss came from loss of lean mass in those studies, while only a third came from reductions in body fat, the review said.

"This finding is concerning as lean mass is a key predictor of resting metabolic rate," researchers wrote. "Reductions in lean mass can translate into lower resting metabolic rate after fasting, which can put individuals at risk for future weight regain."

Only a few of the studies tracked whether participants regained weight they lost during a water fast.

In one study, people gained back all the weight lost during a five-day water fast within three months.

Two other studies found that a small amount of lost weight returned, but participants in those studies had been encouraged to restrict their calorie intake after their fast.

"If people change their eating habits afterwards and they try to get a healthier diet, it seems like they can maintain some of the weight loss," Varady said.



In Canada, Deserted Oil Wells Are Environmental Time Bombs

RED DEER (Dispatches) - With its flaking red paint, broken pressure gauge and cranks fallen to the ground, an oil well sits forsaken in western Canada, like tens of thousands of others that have been out of service for decades -- but never plugged.

Activists and experts say the existence of these inactive oil and gas installations -- often dug hundreds of meters (yards) below the surface in Alberta province -- is a ticking ecological time bomb for the vast country.

"Every single one of them is simply steel and concrete. They erode and break down," said Regan Boychuk, the founder of Reclaim Alberta, a group advocating for the clean-up of such wells.

"Every one of these holes needs to be managed, monitored for eternity because of the danger of leaks," he told AFP.

Each one of these wells also emits methane, a potent greenhouse gas that, over a 20-year period, is "86 times more impactful compared to a molecule of carbon dioxide," stresses McGill University professor Mary Kang, who has written a study on the issue.

It's a source of pollution that she believes is likely underestimated and "has a much bigger uncertainty range compared to other methane emission sources," Kang notes.

More than 120,000 oil and gas wells are inactive but not sealed off in Alberta and Saskatchewan provinces, home to more than 90 percent of Canada's wells, according to government data released in 2022.

The oldest of these has not been used since World War I.

Overall, according to that government data, these installations have emitted an average of 16,000 tonnes of methane per year over a century -- the equivalent of 545,000 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually, or what about 237,000 vehicles emit in one year.

Most of the wells were built sometime between the dawn of the oil and gas era in the 1860s and the end of the 1940s. In some provinces of Canada, which has the world's fourth largest proven oil reserves, they are not even registered.

After decades of industrial expansion, Alberta -- home to most of the country's oil resources, mainly in the form of oil sands -- saw the number of inactive wells increase rapidly since 2010, particularly after crude prices dropped off in 2014.

Under the polluter-pay principle enshrined in Canadian law, energy companies must pay for the plugging of wells and cleanup of the surrounding area, but there is thus far no deadline for that work to be completed.

This allows oil and gas firms to postpone the work indefinitely, or to transfer their inactive wells to smaller companies.

When these companies file for bankruptcy, the environmental burden for orphaned wells falls to provincial authorities -- and creates another bureaucratic nightmare.

Over roughly a decade, the number of orphaned wells in Alberta exploded, from 700 in 2010 to almost 10,000 in 2023.

The government in Ottawa says the cost of cleaning them up will soar from CAN \$361 million (US \$272 million) in 2020 to \$1.1 billion in 2025.

While the Orphan Well Association in Alberta plans to get the job done over the next 10 to 12 years, some say the monumental task has been wildly misjudged.

"There are tens of thousands that fit the common sense definition, but only a few thousand are officially designated," Boychuk says.

Albert Hummel, a farmer in southern Alberta, had seven abandoned wells on his land. But he's one of the lucky ones -- some of them were finally sealed off and "reclaimed," or restored to their original state. There are two left to handle.



Traumatic Brain Injury May Lead To Unique Form of Depression



LONDON (Dispatches) - Depression that arises after a head injury may be its own distinct condition -- one that differs from traditional major depressive disorder, a new study suggests.

Researchers found that people with post-concussion depression showed a unique pattern of activity in the brain circuitry involved in depression. This "picture" was different from depression unrelated to a head injury, and different from people who'd suffered a concussion but had no depression symptoms.

Experts said the findings shed light on the brain basis for post-concussion depression, and underscore an important take-away for patients: Your mental health symptoms are not just "in your head."

While most people recover from concussion, some have lingering symptoms, which can include depression. In fact, traumatic brain injury (which includes concussion) increases the risk of developing depression by about eightfold, studies show.

A key question has been whether that depression stems from the brain injury, per se, or from the emotional trauma of the incident that caused the injury -- whether a car accident, military combat or blow to the head on the football field.

Many experts have believed it's the brain injury, said Dr. Shan Siddiqi, the lead researcher on the new study and a clinical neuropsychiatrist at Brigham and Women's Hospital in Boston.

That's, in part, because the symptoms of post-concussion depression are often somewhat different, explained Siddiqi. People with major depression -- the "regular" depression that's commonly diagnosed -- typically have a hard time feeling pleasure.

In Brazil, Stargazers Escape Cities in Search of Astro-Tourism

SANTA MARIA MADALENA (Dispatches) - Awestruck by the oranges and blues of the Jewel Box star cluster, part of the Southern Cross constellation, Pedro Froes manages to get out a few words: "It's incredible."

Froes is viewing the stars from a telescope in Desengano State Park, a rural patch of Brazil largely spared from light pollution, located some 260 kilometers (160 miles) north of Rio de Janeiro.

Desengano is Latin America's first "International Dark Sky Park," as designated by the global light pollution tracker DarkSky. And Froes is one of the park's growing number of "astro-tourists," drawn there by its isolation from cities and the light they spew into the night sky.

"From here you can see 3,000 stars a year with the naked eye, without the help of an instrument," says astronomer Daniel Mello, from the Valongo Observatory at the Federal University of Rio de Janeiro. "In cities like Rio or Sao Paulo, at most, you can see 200 a year."

In the front garden of the park's headquarters, located in the small town of Santa Maria Madalena, Mello conducts a public observation session in front of about 20 people, pointing with a laser to the Southern Cross, Scorpio and Centaurus constellations.

The evening is part of a project created by Mello and a group of specialists in tourism, ecology and photography. The nearest big city is 120 kilometers away, protecting the park -- replete with vegetation, forest and mountains -- from artificial light. That means the Milky Way is visible to the naked eye even on moonlit nights. Two telescopes provide views of more distant stars.

"I always liked to admire the sky, but I rarely had the opportunity to see it like here," says Froes, a 22-year-old biologist from Niteroi, a city near Rio.

Some 80 per cent of people on Earth sleep under night skies polluted by artificial light, the consequence of modernisation and urbanisation.

But beyond clouding out the stars, light pollution also has negative environmental effects -- leading to restless humans and disoriented migratory birds, and causing reproductive issues for other species.

In Latin America, the only other area recognised by DarkSky is in Chile's Elqui Valley, classified as a "sanctuary." Unlike in Chile, Europe or the United States, astro-tourism is still in its infancy in Brazil.

But more and more stargazers have been trekking to Santa Maria Madalena, "especially in the last six months," says Nelson Saraiva. He runs one of the few hotels in the town of 10,000, where most people are farmers.

Saraiva, a retired teacher, is convinced astro-tourism can become a huge economic boon for the community. Beyond Mello's observation sessions, there are also monthly gatherings that mix astronomy and gastronomy. The government and local entrepreneurs have banded together to organize a star festival to take advantage of growing tourist interest. The first festival was organized last September, with plans in place this fall for what's shaping up to be an annual tradition.

To obtain certification from DarkSky, Desengano park also had to commit to promoting environmental education, as well as using low-impact lighting.



Ancient Egypt Artists Altered Their Work

PARIS (Dispatches) - From subtly shifting the position of Ramses II's scepter, to touch-ups on a necklace or headdress, ancient Egyptian artists were more creative than previously thought, according to a study published yesterday.

Using new portable imaging and chemical analysis techniques, an international team of scientists took a fresh look at paintings in the Valley of the Kings -- a royal burial ground for pharaohs and other ancient Egyptian elites.

Egyptologists have until now considered art in these tombs to be very conventional, adhering to certain rules and using predefined patterns which were transferred onto walls.

However, a small robot moving in front of the painted walls used X-ray, ultraviolet, and infrared vision to "scrutinize" the art in-depth, much like a medical scanner, said Philippe Walter of the French center for scientific research, CNRS, a co-author of the study published in the PLOS One journal.

On an image of Ramses II, decorating the tomb of the priest Nakhtamon, painted some 1,200 years BCE, the pharaoh is depicted in profile, wearing a necklace and headdress and holding a royal scepter.

However image analysis revealed a different composition, hinting at efforts to touch up the original work.

"We didn't expect to see such modifications of a supposedly very formal representation of a pharaoh," meant to be frozen in time, said Walter.

Similar alterations were found on the tomb of the nobleman Menna, depicted with his arms stretched out towards the god of the dead, Osiris.

Analysis showed the position of one of the arms had been moved, while changes were made in the pigments used for skin color.

It is unclear how many years passed between the alterations, or why they were carried out, but the scientists said it showed evidence of "freedom of creation."

Walter compared this "personal touch" to that seen from "the great painters of the Renaissance," who were shown to make adjustments to their work.



Global Energy Demand to Rise 23% by 2045

ABUJA (Dispatches) - Global demand for all forms of energy is forecast to rise by 23% through 2045, OPEC Secretary General Haitham Al Ghais told a Nigerian oil and gas conference.

Oil executives and officials from the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries (OPEC) have repeatedly made the case for continued investment in oil, warning that prices will otherwise spike higher. Al Ghais also said calls to limit or stop funding new oil projects were unrealistic and unwise. He acknowledged, however, the need for technology to tackle continued fossil fuel emissions.

"Global primary energy demand is forecast to increase by a significant 23% in the period up to 2045, which means we will need all forms of energy," he said.



China's Exports Fall Most in Three Years as Global Economy Falter

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's exports contracted last month at their fastest pace since the onset three years ago of the COVID-19 pandemic, as an ailing global economy puts mounting pressure on Chinese policymakers for fresh stimulus measures.

Momentum in China's post-pandemic recovery has slowed after a brisk pickup in the first quarter, with analysts now downgrading their projections for the economy for the rest of the year as factory output slows in the face of persistently weak global demand.

Outbound shipments from the world's second-largest economy slumped a worse-than-expected 12.4% year-on-year in June, data from China's Customs Bureau showed on Thursday, following a drop of 7.5% in May.

Imports contracted 6.8%, steeper than an expected 4.0% decline and the previous month's 4.5% fall.

"The global downturn in goods demand will continue to weigh on exports," said Zichun Huang, China economist at Capital Economics, with a further decline in exports seen likely before they bottom out towards the end of the year.

"But the good news is that the worst of the decline in foreign demand is probably already behind us," she added.

Lv Daliang, a spokesperson for the General Administration of Customs, blamed the poor export performance on "a weak global economic recovery, slowing global trade and investment, and rising unilateralism, protectionism and geopolitics," in comments at a news conference in Beijing.

Exports to the United States - the top destination for Chinese goods - have fallen the most among its major trading partners over the first half of the year, as diplomatic tensions mount over chip technology and other issues, while exports to Russia have risen sharply, although from a modest level.

With exports accounting for about one-fifth of the economy and the troubled property sector for about one-third, China's prospects have dimmed for a quick recovery after COVID-related lockdowns battered the economy in 2022.

The government has set a modest GDP growth target of around 5% for this year, after badly missing last year's goal.

"Soft exports and deflationary pressure will add to calls for stimulus, but I don't think the scale of support will be enormous," said Xu Tianchen, senior economist at the Economist Intelligence Unit.

"This is owing to fiscal constraints on the government, they need to borrow more to fund larger expenditure," he added.

Chinese Premier Li Qiang, who took up his post in March, has promised to roll out policy measures to boost demand and invigorate markets, but few concrete steps have been announced and investors are growing impatient.

The Chinese yuan slipped against the dollar after the data was released, but analysts said further currency weakness was expected to be limited as investors set their sights on next month's Politburo meeting and any potential action on economic stimulus. "The big question in the next few months is whether domestic demand can rebound without much stimulus," said Zhiwei Zhang, chief economist at Pinpoint Asset Management.

Factory activity in China has been shrinking in recent months, while consumer prices teetered on the edge of deflation in June and producer prices fell at their fastest pace in more than seven years.

Philippine Banks Ride on Upbeat Economic Growth

MANILA (Dispatches) - All listed banking brands in the Philippines saw their brand values grow by at least four percent, thanks to the nation's upbeat economic growth driven by strong domestic demand, brand valuation consultancy firm Brand Finance said.

The economy of the Philippines is projected to grow faster than expected this year as strong domestic demand propels the nation forward despite high inflation and tight fiscal conditions.

"With the rise of a young and tech-savvy consumer base and an underutilisation of digital technologies, there is a growing need to adopt digital financial services. As such, a digital revolution has swept through the nation's banking sector with brands increasingly investing in digital banking platforms to upgrade customer experience," Brand Finance said in its Philippines 20 2023, report ranking the nation's top 20 brands in terms of brand value.

Consequently, banking brands in the Philippines saw their brand values head northwards, according to the report.

BDO led the charge as the most valuable banking brand (brand value up 49 percent to US\$2.2 billion), followed by Bank of the Philippine Islands (brand value up eight percent to \$1.3 billion) and Metrobank (brand value up by four percent to \$1.1 billion).

The sector also saw five new entrants that made the rankings this year - Union Bank of the Philippines (brand value at \$557.28 million), Security Bank (brand value at \$331.44 million), Chinabank (brand value at \$278.29 million), RCBC (brand value at \$246.02 million) and Philippine National Bank (brand value at \$234.69 million).

PLDT is the most valuable brand in the Philippines in Brand Finance's rankings this year, powered by a two percent increase in brand value to \$2.6 billion. PLDT's brand performance contributed to the brand capturing a higher market share of the fiber industry, which led to a 45 percent improvement in year-on-year revenue.

Globe Telecom held onto its stellar AAA brand strength rating, clinching the honor of being the Philippines' strongest brand in its rankings. However, the telecoms brand recorded a two percent decrease in brand value to \$2 billion and slipped one position to third place.

Jollibee is the fastest growing brand in its rankings, recording a meteoric rise in brand value by 53 percent to \$1.6 billion.

"This year, we would like to congratulate PLDT, Globe Telecom and Jollibee for topping Brand Finance's Top 20 Philippines brands rankings as our most valuable, strongest and fastest growing brand, respectively. We also see success in the nation's banking sector, as banking brands' investments to digitalise and improve customer experience have resulted in brand value growth across all brands in the sector," said Alex Haigh, managing director for Asia Pacific at Brand Finance.



U.S. Economy Shifts Into Disinflation Mode

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. consumer prices rose modestly in June and registered their smallest annual increase in more than two years as inflation subsided further, but probably not fast enough to dissuade the Federal Reserve from resuming raising interest rates this month.

The report from the Labor Department on Wednesday also showed underlying consumer prices posting their smallest monthly gain since August 2021. The considerable slowdown in underlying inflation sparked a rally on the stock and bond markets, with investors convinced the U.S. central bank's fastest monetary policy tightening cycle since the 1980s was drawing to a close.

"Inflation isn't dead, but the extraordinary pandemic push on prices from shortages and shift to stay-at-home purchases is clearly over, and the Fed for the first time has the upper hand in its inflation fight," said Christopher Rupkey, chief economist at FWD BOND in New York.

The CPI gained 0.2% last month after edging up 0.1% in May. Shelter, which includes rents, accounted for 70% of the rise in the CPI last month. There were also increases in motor vehicle insurance as well as gasoline prices, which rose 1.0%. These gains offset a decrease in the prices of used cars and trucks.

Food prices ticked up just 0.1%. Grocery food prices were unchanged amid further declines in the cost of eggs as well as cheaper meat and fish, which offset a 0.8% increase in fruits and vegetables. But it still cost more to eat out. In the 12 months through June, the CPI advanced 3.0%. That was the smallest year-on-year increase since March 2021 and followed a 4.0% rise in May.

Economists polled by Reuters had forecast the CPI rising 0.3% last month and climbing 3.1% year-on-year.

Annual inflation is a third of what it was last June, when prices surged 9.1%, which was biggest increase since November 1981 and marked a peak in the year-on-year CPI rate.

The year-on-year CPI is slowing in part as last year's large rises drop out of the calculation.

Cooling inflation also meant increased purchasing power for consumers. Inflation-adjusted weekly earnings for private workers rebounded 0.5% and were up 0.6% on a year-on-year basis.

President Joe Biden said the inflation and wages data were evidence that his economic policy, dubbed by economists as "Bidenomics" was delivering results and vowed to "continue to fight for lower costs for families every day."

Nevertheless, inflation remains well above the Fed's 2% target, with the labor market still tight. Though employment gains were the smallest in 2-1/2 years in June, the unemployment rate fell close to historically low levels and wage growth was strong. Still, retreating inflation raised cautious optimism that the economy could avoid a much-anticipated recession.

Bangladesh Moves Beyond Dollar to Settle Trade With India in Rupee



DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh is all set to settle trade with India in Rupee from Tuesday, a move to cut their reliance on the American currency, which was involved in nearly 90 per cent of global forex transactions in 2022, The Daily Star reported.

Bangladesh Bank and the Indian High Commission are expected to announce the news regarding the Indian currency at an event at Le Meridien Hotel in Dhaka tomorrow.

The central bank governor and the Indian high commissioner will also join, a Bangladesh Bank (BB) official said.

The BB has already given permission to three banks - Sonali Bank, Eastern Bank and State Bank of India (SBI) in Bangladesh - to open nostro accounts with their counterparts in the neighbouring country.

The nostro account is an account that a bank holds with a foreign bank in the currency of the country where the funds are held. It is used to facilitate foreign exchange and international trade transactions involving foreign currencies.

This new move will open the letters of credit in the rupee to source a portion of the products from the neighbouring country and thus cutting the use of the US dollar to some extent, according to The Daily Star.

The government has toughened import rules due to the shortage of American greenback, driven by higher import bills, with a view to stopping further depletion of the foreign currency reserve, which has fallen by nearly 30 per cent from a year ago.

The private commercial bank, Eastern Bank and the country office of SBI have already opened nostro accounts with Indian ICICI Bank and SBI, the BB official said, adding that state-run Sonali Bank will open the account in the quickest possible time.

Saudi Arabia Imports Record Russian Fuel Oil in June

SINGAPORE (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia imported record volumes of discounted Russian fuel oil in June, a near 10-fold annual increase to meet summer power generation demand and maintain crude exports despite OPEC+ production cuts, according to traders, analysts and Kpler data.

For Russia, its growing oil trade with the world's biggest exporter enables it to keep output flowing to global buyers despite Western sanctions that have shut its access to key markets including Europe.

Saudi Arabia imported a record 910,000 metric tons (193,000 barrels per day) of fuel oil from Russia in June, data from analytics firm Kpler showed.

The kingdom has ramped up fuel oil imports from Russia this year following the European Union's ban on Russian products. Saudi's Russian fuel oil imports hit 2.86 million metric tons for the first half of 2023, exceeding the 1.63 million metric tons for all of 2022, the data showed.

Saudi Arabia's energy ministry did not respond to a Reuters query. State oil giant Saudi Aramco declined to comment.

The predominantly high-sulphur fuel oil (HSFO) cargoes from Russia mostly end up at Saudi oil-fired power plants, said Royston Huan, fuel oil and feedstocks analyst at consultancy Energy Aspects.

Saudi Arabia said this month it would extend an extra 1 million barrels per day output cut for a second month in August to support prices as part of a pact between the Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and its allies including Russia, a group known as OPEC+.

IMF Approves \$3b Bailout for Pakistan

ISLAMABAD (Dispatches) - The International Monetary Fund's board approved a \$3 billion bailout programme for Pakistan which will immediately disburse about \$1.2 billion to help stabilize the South Asian ailing economy, the lender said.

Pakistan and the Fund reached a staff level agreement last month, securing a short-term pact, which got more than expected funding for the country of 230 million, which faced an acute balance of payments crisis with only

enough central bank reserves to cover barely a month of controlled imports.

The board's approval was mandatory before disbursing the first tranche, with the rest to arrive later in instalments.

The IMF executive board "approved a 9-month Stand-By Arrangement (SBA) for Pakistan for an amount of SDR2,250 million (about \$3 billion, or 111 percent of quota) to support the authorities' economic stabilization program," the lender said in a statement.

It said Pakistan faced "a difficult external environment, devastating floods and policy missteps have led to large fiscal and external deficits, rising inflation and eroded reserve buffers in FY23."

The deal, a lifeline for Pakistan, which has been on the cusp of default, came after eight months of tough negotiations over fiscal discipline.

Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said the bailout was a major step forward in the government's efforts to stabilise the economy and achieve macroeconomic stability. "It bolsters Pakistan's economic position to overcome immediate- to medium-term economic challenges, giving next government the fiscal space to chart the way forward," he said.

Terming it a milestone, Sharif said it was achieved against "the heaviest of odds & against seemingly impossible deadline."

Sharif's coalition government is due to face a national election this year and must undertake more painful fiscal discipline measures to satisfy the IMF. It included the central bank raising its policy interest rate to a record high of 22% while ordinary Pakistanis struggle with inflation running at about 29% and the government raising 385 billion rupee (\$1.39 billion) in new taxes.

The IMF said the fresh funding will provide a policy anchor for addressing domestic and external imbalances and a framework for financial support from multilateral and bilateral partners.

Iran Urges Pursuit of Cases of Terror, Chemical Attack Victims

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Secretary-General of Iran's High Council for Human Rights Kazem Gharibabadi has called for a probe into the cases of people who have been victim of terrorist attacks and chemical weapons at the international level. Gharibabadi on Saturday underlined the fact that Iran is "the biggest victim of chemical weapons in the world", adding that chemical weapons have killed more than 13,000 Iranians and injured 100,000 more. He said some of the veterans of the Iraqi-imposed war on Iran of the 1980s still suffer from the impacts of chemical weapons and even lose their lives. The Iranian official hailed the good actions taken by NGOs to expose the crimes against the victims of chemical weapons.



Woes Rise Over Food Security as Clock Ticks for Ukraine Grain Deal

ROME (Dispatches) - Concerns are growing that Russia will not extend a United Nations-brokered deal that allows the grain to flow from Ukraine to parts of the world struggling with hunger, with ships no longer heading to the war-torn country's Black Sea ports and food exports dwindling.

Turkey and the U.N. negotiated the breakthrough accord last summer to ease a global food crisis, along with a separate agreement with Russia to facilitate shipments of its food and fertilizer. Moscow insists it's still facing hurdles, though data shows it has been exporting record amounts of wheat.

Russian officials repeatedly say there are no grounds for extending the Black Sea Grain Initiative, which is up for its fourth renewal Monday. It is something they have threatened before - then have twice gone on to extend the deal for two months instead of the four months outlined in the agreement.

The U.N. and others are striving to keep the fragile deal intact, with Ukraine and Russia both major suppliers of wheat, barley, vegetable oil and other food products that countries in Africa, the Middle East and parts of Asia rely on. It has allowed Ukraine to ship 32.8 million metric tons (36.2 million tons) of grain, more than half of it to developing nations.

The deal has helped lower global prices of food commodities like wheat after they surged to record highs following last year's invasion, but that relief has not reached kitchen tables.

Russia's exit would cut off a source of World Food Program (WFP) aid for countries at risk of famine, including Somalia, Ethiopia and Afghanistan, and compound food security problems in vulnerable places struggling with conflict, economic crisis and drought.

"Russia gets a lot of good public will for continuing this agreement," said Joseph Glauber, a senior research fellow at the International Food Policy Research Institute. "There would be a cost to pay in terms of public perception and global goodwill, I think, as far as Russia is concerned" if the deal is not extended.

The amount of grain leaving Ukraine already has dropped, with Russia accused of slowing joint inspections of ships by Russian, Ukrainian, U.N. and Turkish officials and refusing to allow more vessels to join the initiative.

Average daily inspections - meant to ensure vessels carry only food and not weapons that could aid either side - have fallen from a peak of 11 in October to just two in June.

That has led to a decline in grain exports, from a high of 4.2 million metric tons in October to 1.3 million in May, a low for the year-old initiative. They rose to 2 million in June as shipment sizes grew.

If the deal is not extended, "the countries that had relied on Ukraine for their imports are going to have to look at other sources for imports, very likely Russia, which is something that I imagine Russia was intending," said Caitlin Welsh, director of the Global Food and Water Security Program at the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

The U.N. has been negotiating with Russia to stick with the initiative, with spokesperson Stephane Dujarric saying Monday that top officials are "doing whatever we can to ensure the continuation of all of the agreements."

Ukraine's Infrastructure Ministry said on Facebook on Tuesday that the final two ships are loading grain - heading for Egypt - while 29 vessels are waiting in the waters off Türkiye because Russia has refused to allow their inspection.

"Ukrainian agricultural products play a significant role in global food security," Infrastructure Minister Oleksandr Kubrakov said. But "for the past few months, the grain corridor has been practically closed."

Russia insists the agreement has not worked for its own exports, blaming Western sanctions for hindering financing and insurance.

While sanctions do not affect food and fertilizer, Moscow is seeking carveouts from restrictions on the Russian Agricultural Bank, as well as movement on its ammonia, a key ingredient in fertilizer, to a Ukrainian Black Sea port. But the ammonia pipeline has been damaged in the war, the U.N. said.

"There is still time to implement the part of the agreements that pertain to our country. So far, this part has not been fulfilled," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry



Peskov told reporters last week. "And so, at the moment, unfortunately, we don't see any particular grounds for extending this deal."

Russia, however, has increased its wheat exports to all-time highs following a large harvest. Shipments went from 33 million metric tons in 2021 to 44 million metric tons last year to expectations of 46 million this year, according to S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Meanwhile, Ukraine's shipments have fallen by around 60%, from 19 million tons in 2021 to predictions of about 7 or 8 million tons this year - a big hit to its agriculture-dependent economy.

With less from Ukraine and more from Russia, the world's available wheat stocks are the same as in 2021 - and there is enough of it to go around, said Peter Meyer, head of grain analytics at S&P Global Commodity Insights.

Europe and Argentina are expected to boost wheat shipments, while Brazil saw a banner year for corn, of which Ukraine is also a major supplier. Meyer would not expect more than a temporary bump to grain prices on world markets if the Black Sea deal isn't renewed.

"Markets just adapt extremely quickly," he said. "The fact of the matter is that the global grain markets, they balance each other out."

Ukraine can send its food by land or river through Europe, so it would not be completely cut off from selling grain, but those routes have a lower capacity than sea shipments and have stirred disunity in the European Union.

"We are a cat running out of lives in this situation," said Simon Evenett, professor of international trade and economic development at the University of St. Gallen in Switzerland. "It only takes one thing to go wrong before we're into trouble."

While the U.N. Food and Agriculture Organization's (FAO) food price index had fallen below the record highs it hit when Russian troops entered Ukraine, food costs were already high because of COVID-19, conflict and drought.

Then Russia's war helped push the costs to produce food - including energy, fertilizer and transportation.

In developing nations increasingly relying on imported food, from Kenya to Syria, weakening currencies are keeping local prices high because they are paying in U.S. dollars.

"With approximately 80% of East Africa's grain being exported from Russia and Ukraine, over 50 million people across East Africa are facing hunger, and food prices have shot up by nearly 40% this year," said Shashwat Saraf, the International Rescue Committee's regional emergency director for East Africa.

"It is vital for the international community to not only forge a long-term deal but also build durable solutions to tackle food insecurity," he said.

Kuwaiti Jazeera Airways Launches Weekly Tehran-Kuwait City Flights

TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Jazeera Airways airline has established flights on the Tehran-Kuwait City route and vice versa from the Imam Khomeini International Airport located near the Iranian capital.

Along with Kuwait Airways which operates three weekly flights on the Tehran-Kuwait City route and vice versa, Jazeera Airways has also set up flights at the Iranian Imam Khomeini International Airport.

Given the expansion of economic ties with neighboring states, the first flight of Kuwait's Jazeera Airways on the Tehran-Kuwait City route arrived at the Imam Khomeini Airport City on Friday, the communications office of the Imam Khomeini Airport City quoted the CEO of Imam Khomeini Airport Saeed Chalandari as saying.

Chalandari also said that according to the program presented by Jazeera Airways, the airline is scheduled to operate two weekly flights on Sundays and Fridays on the Tehran-Kuwait City route and vice versa.

At present, some 42 airlines fly from the Imam Khomeini Airport City to 63 destinations in 30 countries.

A Wasted Opportunity? Italy's EU Funds Bonanza Hits the Rocks

ROME (Dispatches) - Italy's hopes of transforming its economy with billions of euros of European Union pandemic recovery funds are unraveling fast, businesses on the ground say, with inefficiencies at all levels raising the risk of a greater boost to debt than to growth.

In mid-2020, Rome secured the lion's share of a 724 billion euro (\$801.24 billion) kitty aimed at helping EU members emerge from COVID-19 greener and more tech-friendly.

Italy's 191.5 billion euros of cheap loans and grants, to be received in tranches through 2026, was intended for productive investments in the bloc's most chronically stagnant economy.

Fast-forward three years and Brussels is withholding the funds due to Rome's failure to keep its part of the bargain: progressively adopting 527 extremely detailed policy "targets and milestones."

Disputes have arisen over, among other things, a reform of Italy's port concessions, whether soccer stadium improvements could feature in the plan and a failure to provide 7,500 extra beds for university students. Italy is also behind schedule in spending money already transferred, worrying economists and rating agencies eyeing the sustainability of the world's third-largest debt pile.

Roberto Perotti, an economics professor at Milan's Bocconi University, said Italy had put together its Post-COVID-19 Recovery and Resilience Plan (PNRR) too hastily and requested too much money.

"It was doomed from the start," he said. "We were unable to decide on sensible projects and we are unable to spend the money on the ones that have been agreed." Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, who took office nine months ago, plans to present a revamped and revised PNRR to Brussels next month.

Blaming the setbacks on her predecessors Mario Draghi and Giuseppe Conte, she told Parliament last week: "We will make good use of that money whatever it takes."

Italy has so far received 67 billion euros, with the latest tranche arriving in late 2022. By end-February, it had invested 26 billion, about half the amount planned.

Iraq Ramps Up...

FROM PAGE 1

Since September last year, the IRGC has launched several raids against the positions of the notorious so-called Democratic Party of Iranian Kurdistan (PDKI) and the Komala Party in the northern Iraqi Kurdistan region.

The elite force has, on at least several occasions, urged the central government in Iraq as well as the Kurdistan region to meet their commitments toward Iran and take necessary measures to secure the common border.

A commander of the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) says the elite forces are very close to the positions of terrorist groups in the Iraqi Kurdistan region.

Iran has repeatedly warned Iraqi Kurdistan's local authorities that it will not tolerate the presence and activity of terrorist groups along its northwestern borders,

saying the country will give a decisive response should those areas turn into a hub of anti-Islamic Republic terrorists.

On November 21, 2022, positions of anti-Iran separatist and terrorist groups in northern Iraq came under combined attacks using missiles and kamikaze drones. The strikes targeted the positions of the notorious PDKI and the Komala Party in northern Iraqi Kurdistan, Iran's Arabic-language al-Alam television news network reported at the time.

According to the network, one attack saw four missiles being fired against a PDKI position in the town of Koy Sanjaq in Erbil Province. A separate attack featured kamikaze drones smashing into another site belonging to the group near Baharka village.

U.S.'s Hollow Democracy

FROM PAGE 1

A self-described moderate Republican, Brown has seen the United States falling short of its democratic promise ever since learning in high school that the Electoral College allows someone to become president while not winning the majority of national votes. But he's especially disappointed with Congress now, seeing its obsessions as not reflective of the people's will.

"They're fighting over something, and it has nothing to do with the economy," Brown said, singling out the GOP-controlled House's investigation of President Joe Biden's son.

The poll shows 53% of Americans say views of "people like you" are not represented well by the government, with 35% saying they're represented somewhat well and 12% very or extremely well. About 6 in 10 Republicans and independents feel like the government is not representing people like them well, compared with about 4 in 10 Democrats.

Karalyn Kiessling, a researcher at the University of Michigan who participated in the poll, sees troubling signs all around her. A Democrat, she recently moved to a conservative area outside the liberal campus hub of Ann Arbor, and worried that conspiracy theorists who believe former President Donald Trump's lies that he won the 2020 election would show up as poll watchers. Her Republican family members no longer identify with the party and are limiting their political engagement.

Kiessling researches the intersection of public health and politics and sees many other ways to participate in a democracy in addition to voting - from being active in a political party to speaking at a local government meeting. But she fears increased partisan nastiness is scaring people away from these crucial outlets.

Polarization has transformed some states into single-party dominions, further alienating people like Mark Short, a Republican who lives in Dana Point, California.

The poll shows that the vast majority of Americans - 71% - think what most Americans want should be highly important when laws and policies are made, but only 48% think that's actually true in practice.

So we see that even Americans have lost their faith in what their statesmen claim of supporting the democracy and they blamed double standard attitude regarding the democracy.

With such a reaction by American people, one expects the U.S. officials to focus more on domestic issues rather than meddling into the affairs of other nations and stop trying to inject their ineffective democracy into other nations.

Democracy means respecting what people demand but we see actually the U.S. statesmen insist on what they themselves demand and want than the people, and for this reason people are losing their trust to the officials and even are losing their support to the American style democracy.

Of course, condition is the same, and if not worse, in other Western countries and countries like France and the UK, who claim they ardently support democracy and freedom in their countries and also in other countries, use force and even bullets to make the people follow their fake democracies.

In recent years those countries who have claimed more than others in supporting democracy have behaved otherwise and they have been anti-democracy and they have just been pretending they are supporters of democracy and they seek imposing their wrong version of democracy in other countries, something that even their own people do not believe in it while they want it to be accepted and supported by other countries.

One can see that the Western democracy is reaching its end or a dead-end and it is just a fuss and much ado about nothing trumpeted by the U.S. and its so-called pro-democracy Western allies.

Iran, Russia...

FROM PAGE 1

The development comes as Iran and Russia plan to open multiple new areas of cooperation by finalizing a long-term strategic cooperation agreement.

According to official reports, trade between the two countries doubled in 2022. Russia invested \$2.76 billion during the Iranian calendar year that ended in March, becoming Iran's largest foreign investor.

The two sides also aim to reduce the use of the dollar in regional and international transactions, joined by several countries, in order to minimize the West's dominance over the global economy.

The bilateral cooperation comes despite draconian Western sanctions, spearheaded by the US, on both Tehran and Moscow.

Iran has been hit by unilateral US sanctions, imposed by Washington after former president Donald Trump declared an unprovoked withdrawal from the Iran nuclear deal in May 2018 and targeted the Iranian economy with what he called a "maximum pressure" campaign.

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Izagirre Wins Tour de France Stage 12

PARIS (Dispatches) - Ion Izagirre gave his Cofidis team, and Spain, their second victory in this year's Tour de France when he won the 12th stage after a late, brutal attack. The Basque rider went solo in the last short climb of the day, 30km from the finish, and never looked back to claim a second career Tour stage win. Izagirre, who won the 20th stage of the Tour in 2016 in Morzine, is the second Spanish rider to win this year after Pello Bilbao on Tuesday and the second from the Cofidis team after Victor Lafay in the second stage.

Kipchoge to Make Berlin Marathon Return

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Kenya's Eliud Kipchoge will race the Berlin Marathon on September 24, a year after having set a new world record on the same course, his management team announced Thursday. Kipchoge will be aiming to become the first athlete in history to win the race five times. He is currently equal on four victories with Ethiopian Haile Gebrselassie. Kipchoge, the first man to break the two-hour barrier in the marathon during the INEOS 1:59 Challenge, set the official world record in Berlin in both 2018 and 2022 and also took the title in 2015 and 2017.

Alcaraz to Meet Djokovic In Wimbledon Final

LONDON (Dispatches) - Spain's Carlos Alcaraz delivered the Wimbledon final the world wants to see with a brutal, and at times breathtaking, demolition job on unfortunate Russian Daniil Medvedev, roaring to a 6-3 6-3 6-3 victory.

The 20-year-old phenomenon will now face a battle of the generations against 36-year-old seven-time champion Novak Djokovic, who earlier on Centre Court eased past Italian young gun Jannik Sinner to reach his 35th Grand Slam final.

For seven games under the roof this felt like it could be a contest as third seed Medvedev, who like Alcaraz was contesting his first Wimbledon semi-final, kept pace with the top seed. But from the moment Alcaraz broke the Medvedev serve for a 5-3 lead in the opening set it felt as though he had the grandest stage in tennis all to himself for a virtuoso display.

Grand Slam semi-finals are supposed to be hard labour but at times world number one Alcaraz toyed with his opponent, working through his extensive arsenal of weapons to dismantle the 27-year-old in merciless fashion.

Two nonchalant service breaks sealed the second set and the Spaniard accelerated towards victory with another one early in the third set as Medvedev's shoulders slumped.

Like a lion toying with its prey, the top seed offered back a couple of service breaks with some over-casual tennis but the respite was brief and Medvedev was put out of his misery in one hour and 50 minutes as Alcaraz seized on a drop shot and whipped away a forehand winner.

He is the third Spaniard to reach the Wimbledon men's singles final after Manuel Santana and Rafa Nadal and the fourth youngest in the professional era.

Earlier Djokovic barely got out of second gear as he swept past subdued Italian eighth seed Jannik Sinner at Wimbledon, easing into a record 35th Grand Slam final with a whirlwind 6-3 6-4 7-6(4) victory under the Centre Court roof.

Djokovic has turned the famous show court into his own personal fiefdom having not lost there in 10 years and the Serbian is one win away from a record-equalling eighth men's title at the grasscourt major to match Roger Federer's mark.

Top seed Alcaraz, who crushed Medvedev in straight sets later on Friday, stands between Djokovic and a 24th Grand Slam title to equal Margaret Court's all-time record.

The 21-year-old Sinner, playing his first Grand Slam semi-final, was outclassed,



falling flat on the big occasion and allowing Djokovic, 14 years his senior, to turn the screw at key moments in the contest.

He let break points slip through his fingers, including two set points in the third, while Djokovic was clinical as usual, applying constant pressure on the Italian's serve and pouncing on opportunities when they arose.

The second seed wrapped up the match when Sinner dumped a backhand into the net, leaving the Serbian to accept the applause of the crowd, who had cheered his opponent throughout.

Djokovic does not appear to be slowing down as the years pass and will be a heavy favourite to become the oldest man in the Open era at 36 to win the Wimbledon title.

"I'd like to believe that's the case," he said when asked if he was playing the best tennis of his career.

"We are part of an individual sport so you have to rely on yourself and put yourself in the best physical and mental state before heading out on court.

"I feel 36 is the new 26, it feels pretty good. I feel a lot of motivation."

The difference between the best and the rest is so often their ability to raise their level when it matters and while Sinner's best moments came when the pressure was off, Djokovic produced his top tennis when the tension was at its highest.

"First semi-final is never easy to play," Sinner told a press conference. "I felt like my level was good. It was just, especially in the pressure points, I messed it up a little bit."

Kane Included In Spurs' Pre-Season Squad

LONDON (Dispatches) - Harry Kane has been included in Tottenham Hotspur's squad for their pre-season Asia-Pacific tour, but club captain Hugo Lloris has been left out as the France goalkeeper seeks to complete a move to a new club.

England captain Kane is in the final 12 months of his contract with at north London side Spurs but is said to have attracted interest from German giants Bayern Munich amid reports their initial 70-million-euro (£60-million, \$76-million) bid for the forward was rejected by the Tottenham hierarchy.

Kane, along with other international players, returned for pre-season training on Wednesday, when new Spurs boss Ange Postecoglou was set to outline his vision to the club's leading scorer.

Spurs said Friday that veteran goalkeeper Lloris had been granted permission not to travel "in order to explore prospective transfer opportunities".

At the age of 36, the former France No 1 has been linked with a move to Inter Milan should Andre Onana join Manchester United.

Lloris, who joined Tottenham in 2012, has made 447 appearances for the club and also won the 2018 World Cup with France.

Cavendish Says Tour de France Fall Part of Cycling

PARIS (Dispatches) - British cyclist Mark Cavendish has described the fall that forced him to leave the Tour de France in an ambulance last week "as part of the beauty and brutality of cycling".

The joint record holder with Eddy Merckx for Tour de France stage wins had been hoping to establish sole ownership of the record by winning a 35th stage, but fell awkwardly on the way to Limoges last Saturday.

The 38-year-old, riding in what was billed as his final Tour de France, said Thursday he had gone under the knife and would be out longer than first expected.

"Yep, fractured right clavicle. Just out of surgery to plate it up," said the Team Astana sprinter who anticipates being sidelined for several weeks.

"It'll take a bit longer than the standard couple of weeks for a collarbone, just due to the screws that were in there from a previous injury." Cavendish, who was ashen-faced on impact and who remained on the road rolling in agony before being taken away in an ambulance crying, was clearly in better spirits after the surgery.

"It obviously hasn't been the ideal way to finish the Tour de France, but that's part of the beauty and brutality of cycling," said Cavendish, a fearless cyclist who has suffered his share of hard falls.

"But I've felt incredibly lifted thanks to all you beautiful souls living my journey with me," said the man whose every move is being followed by a Netflix team for a series to be aired in August.

Cavendish burst on to the Tour de France map in 2008 with his first four wins when he was just 23 years old.

Vingegaard Hails Pogacar After Latest Tour de France Skirmish

PARIS (Dispatches) - Defending champion Jonas Vingegaard hailed his rivalry with Tadej Pogacar after surviving the Slovenian's latest attack to cling on to the overall lead of the Tour de France on the Grand Colombier mountain.

Vingegaard finished just four seconds behind Pogacar after a sudden late attack that also earned the latter a four-second time bonus.

Barcelona, Man Utd Fined by UEFA Over Financial Breaches



MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Barcelona and Manchester United were among the clubs fined by UEFA on Friday for breaches of financial fair play (FFP) regulations during the 2022/23 season.

United were fined 300,000 euros (\$335,000) for failing to meet the break-even requirement that attempts to limit the losses made by clubs.

Spanish champions Barcelona were hit with a 500,000 euro sanction for including

profits from sales of intangible assets, which are not relevant income under the regulations, to balance their books.

FFP rules, which were introduced in 2010, have allowed clubs to report losses of no more than 30 million euros over a three-year period.

Last season was the final year those regulations will be used by UEFA before new licensing and sustainability regulations are eased in over the next three seasons.

Champions League finalists Inter Milan, AC Milan, Paris Saint-Germain, Monaco, Roma and Marseille escaped sanction after meeting targets set by a UEFA settlement agreement.

Belgian club Royal Antwerp and Turkish side Trabzonspor were hit with the biggest fines of two million euros each.

Bangladesh Beat Afghanistan Despite Janat Hat-Trick

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Afghanistan's Karim Janat grabbed a hat-trick in the final over but Bangladesh held their nerve to sneak a two-wicket win with just a ball to spare in the first T20 international in Sylhet.

The hosts seemed to be cruising towards victory in the first encounter of the two-match series after Towhid Hridoy and Shamim Hossain put on 73 runs for the fifth wicket in reply to Afghanistan's 154-7.

Then drama erupted at the Sylhet International Stadium.

Rashid Khan removed Shamim for 33 to break the partnership, but Bangladesh were still favourites needing only six runs from the final over.

Instead Janat dismissed Mehidy Hasan Miraz, Taskin Ahmed and Nasum Ahmed with the second, third and fourth balls of the over, leaving the hosts still two runs away.

Shoriful Islam came in at number 10 to strike a powerful shot that raced to boundary, earning Bangladesh a dramatic win.

Hridoy remained unbeaten on 47 at the non-striker's end as Janat finished with 3-15.

"We had the belief, all our tail-enders can bat. It was Shoriful's turn today but Miraz could have finished it," said Bangladesh skipper Shakib Al Hasan.

Rashid, the Afghanistan captain, lamented his side's inability to defend their total.

"With the bowling unit we have, that total was enough but in T20 one innings can take away the game from you," he said.

The visitors struggled at the start of their innings, losing their first four wickets for 52 runs after Shakib won the toss and elected to bowl.

But Mohammad Nabi scored an unbeaten 54 from 40 balls to give Afghanistan a competitive score.



Pulisic Joins Milan From Chelsea on Four-Year Deal

MILAN (Dispatches) - AC Milan have signed United States forward Christian Pulisic from Chelsea on a four-year contract, with the option of a further year, the Serie A side said.

Financial details were not disclosed but British media reported that the Italian club had paid Chelsea €20 million plus add-ons for the 24-year-old.

Pulisic has spent four seasons at Chelsea, making 145 appearances, scoring 26 goals and providing 21 assists.

He helped the west London club win the Champions League, Uefa Super Cup and Club World Cup in 2021.

Pulisic joins a long list of players who have left Chelsea after they came 12th in the Premier League last season, their lowest finish in nearly three decades.

Milan came fourth in Serie A last term to qualify for the Champions League.

"The last few seasons with Chelsea were difficult," Pulisic told a press conference after being unveiled by Milan.

"For whatever reason, I wasn't getting the opportunities I wanted at my previous club, but I now have a great opportunity to reach the highest level that I can..."

Pulisic will wear the number 11 shirt, worn by Zlatan Ibrahimovic, and acknowledged the weight of responsibility that comes with it following the Swede's retirement.

"I'm not trying to fill his shoes, he's a legend, but it was a fresh beginning and a number that I liked," Pulisic said.

"There are so many big names you can go through, but I am a bit younger, so watched the likes of Kaka and Ibrahimovic, plus the players who are here now."

He becomes the second player to leave Chelsea for Milan in this transfer window after midfielder Ruben Loftus-Cheek.

