

**TEDPIX, the Main Index of Tehran Stock Exchange (TSE), Rose 16,661 Points to 2.016m on Wednesday, as Per Report, Over 7.33b Securities Worth 55.18 Trillion Rials (About \$130m) Were Traded at the TSE**

# IRAN NEWS

**The Iranian Vice President for Science and Technology Says With the Support of the Country's Support for a Knowledge-Based Economy, the Issue Was Placed on Top of the Government's Agenda**

2 **DOMESTIC**

**No One Can Threaten Powerful, Capable Iran**



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## Iran Foreign Debt Shrinks by 27%

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – Iran's foreign debts were reduced to \$6.282 billion in the last Persian calendar year (ended on March 20), showing a 27.6 percent decrease compared to a year before.

In its latest report, the Central Bank of Iran (CBI) released the economic statistics related to the Persian calendar month of Esfand (February-March 2023) which contains the latest data and economic statistics in the monetary and banking sectors, balance of payments and the capital market.

According to the report, the foreign debts of the country at the end of the previous Iranian calendar year reached \$6.282 billion, showing a 27.6 percent decline compared to a year earlier.

The report also pointed to the settlement of \$2.393 billion of the foreign debts of the country in this period.

In April 2023, the Central Bank of Iran's statistics showed the country's balance of foreign at the end of Iranian month of Bahman (February 2023) stood at about \$6.4 billion, showing a 25.7 percent drop as compared to the end of the month of Esfand a year earlier (March 21, 2022).

Of Iran's total foreign debt, \$1.8 billion is related to short-term debts while \$4.6 billion are long-term debts.

And the recent report shows that the country is on the right track for its economic reform

## Iran Full SCO Membership to Counter Unilateralism, Sanctions



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN- Foreign minister says the country's full membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and potential accession to the BRICS group of emerging economies will promote multilateralism and counter unilateral policies, including sanctions.

In a televised interview on Tuesday, Hossein Amirabdollahian said Iran's full membership in the SCO was among the achievements of the Raisi administration's foreign policy and will improve people's livelihood.

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3 **DOMESTIC**

**Iran-EU Trade Reaches €1.869b in 5 Months**



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## U.S. Letting Baghdad Pay Tehran for Electricity

WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - The United States has moved to let Iraq pay Iran for electricity via non-Iraqi banks, a U.S. official said on Tuesday. Iraq owes billions of dollars to Iran for importing gas and electricity which has continued despite U.S. sanctions, but Tehran has been unable to obtain its assets frozen in Iraqi banks under U.S. pressure.

Secretary of State Antony Blinken signed a 120-day national security waiver allowing Iraq – heavily dependent on Iranian electricity – to deposit such payments into non-Iraqi banks in third countries instead of into restricted accounts in Iraq, said the official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

Monies put into the non-Iraqi accounts, like those deposited into Iraqi banks, will also be restricted, still requiring U.S. permission for Iran to get access to them and only for spending on humanitarian goods.

The latest waiver was expanded to permit payments to banks outside Iraq at the request of the Iraqi government, apparently in the hopes that this might transfer some of the pressure that Iran has exerted on Baghdad to other countries.

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«Ruhollah Khazaei», Deputy Chairman of Investment and Business Development of the Arvand Free Zone Organization, regarding the holding and presence of the Arvand Free Zone in the second exhibition of presenting the investment packages of Free Zones of the Islamic Republic of Iran in Mashhad, stated: the strategy that this year the Secretariat of the Supreme Council of the Free Zones of the country has adopted is to several exhibitions in different provinces that the first economic event was held at Tehran International Permanent Fairground and the second exhibition began its work from today in Mashhad.

He stated that the exhibition on presenting investment packages is a good opportunity for offering capabilities of the free zones of the country, adding that Arvand Free Zone in this economic event will present 106 investment packages for the economic activists.

Khazaei stated: The amount of investment included in these packages is over 24 thousand billion Tomans. He added: More than 150 products of the region that can be exported will be presented in this exhibition. According to this report, investment in Arvand Free Zone has factors and is subject to incentives that has turned it into one of the golden points of investment.

These rules, regulations. The components include the following:

- \* Special regulations for the employment of manpower in the free zone and the possibility of access to skilled, efficient and cheap manpower.
  - \* Issuance of products without payment of customs duties
  - \* Using value added law to transfer goods produced in Arvand free zone to the mainland up to 100% of production
  - \* Special provisions for insurance and social security in free zones
  - \* 20-year tax exemption for all activities in all fields
  - \* The possibility of participation with foreign investors without restrictions on the participation ratio
  - \* 100% ownership by foreign investors compared to the owners of leased lands
  - \* The possibility of having 100% shares of registered companies by foreign investors
  - \* Freedom to transfer currency abroad without any restrictions
  - \* Complete freedom of entry and exit of principal capital and profits from economic activities
  - \* Support and guarantee of foreign capitals
  - \* Prescribing the establishment of foreign banks and insurances
  - \* Having special regulations in export, import and customs affairs
  - \* No need for a visa and ease in issuing entry and residence permits for foreigners
- Also, this region has advantages in terms of competition and business that can be

## Arvand; A golden opportunity for investment, production and export

attractive for any investment.

These benefits include the following:

- \* The extent of Arvand Free Zone in 37 thousand 400 hectares
- \* Industrial and commercial background of the region
- \* A combination of experienced, young and educated manpower, especially in industrial and commercial fields
- \* Having a water and land border with Iraq and the possibility of easy access to the market of the Persian Gulf countries
- \* Access to the vast market and the domestic population of Abadan and Khorramshahr (with a population of over 500,000 people) and the population of Khuzestan province (with a population of over 4 million people) and the population of 28 million in Iraq.
- \* The closest free zone to the major population, industrial, agricultural and mining centers of the country
- \* The presence of Arvand, Karun and Bahmanshir fresh water rivers with shipping capability
- \* There are four types of road, rail, air and sea transportation in the region
- \* Production of nearly 90% of the country's hydropower in Khuzestan province
- \* Cheap energy and labor, especially for foreign investment in the region



\* Having the country's second container port (Khorramshahr) as well as Abadan port and the possibility of transiting goods to regional countries and Central Asian countries as the nearest port and the most economical and shortest north-south transit route of the country

- \* Industrial, commercial and urban infrastructure facilities and facilities
- \* Fertility of the soil along the rivers in the region to expand agricultural production
- \* Shalamche border terminal in Arvand Free Zone
- \* Annual trip of nearly 2 million pilgrims to visit Shlamche shrine
- \* Existence of Abadan International Airport within the region
- \* The existence of the country's largest sea passenger terminal in Khorramshahr port and the establishment of regular shipping lines to neighboring countries
- \* Existence of 450,000 barrel Abadan refinery in Arvand Free Zone
- \* Existence of huge platform construction facilities of the Ministry of Oil within the region
- \* Existence of petrochemicals in Abadan city
- \* Availability of well-equipped hotels within the free zone
- \* High population capacity in the region
- \* Proximity to Imam Khomeini Port and Petrochemical Special Economic Zone and Mahshahr Port and the possibility of using the facilities of those areas
- \* Existence of the beautiful touristic island of Mino in the Arvand Free Zone
- \* Acquaintance of the residents of the region with several living languages of the world
- \* The presence of universities and institutions of higher education with a long history

in the region

- \* Existence of more than one hundred companies and production factories such as petrochemicals, oil facilities, tire manufacturing, shipbuilding, flour, wood industries, foodstuffs, soap making, electricity production, etc. in the area
- \* Enjoying suitable weather conditions in eight months of the year
- \* Common language and culture and kinship relations of the people of the region with neighboring countries
- \* Located between the two oil poles of the Middle East, i.e. the oil-rich areas of southern Iran and the oil-rich areas of southern Iraq
- \* Adjacent to large sugarcane cultivation and development companies and its ancillary industries
- \* Adjacent to Hor and the beautiful Shadgan lagoon
- \* The presence of large shipbuilding and marine vessel repair companies in the free zone
- \* Proximity to Ahvaz steel and pipe rolling industries
- \* Large steel projects are being implemented in Arvand

According to this report, the vice president of investment and business development of Arvand Free Zone Organization, in the opening ceremony of the second exhibition of investment opportunities of free zones of the country hosted by

Holy Mashhad stated: Arvand Free Zone is a golden opportunity for investment and production and the products of this region have the ability to be exported across territorial borders. Stating that 196 million dollars of the region's products are exported abroad every year, he said: the value of Arvand Free Zone's products is over half a billion dollars. The vice president of investment and business development of the Arvand Free Zone Organization stated that this region has the most well-equipped border in the west of the country with more than 100 hectares of well-equipped docks, and stated: Last year, more than 650 million dollars were exported to the country through the Shalamcheh border. Iraq took place that this amount of export is rare among the free zones. Referring to the reception of one million Iranian tourists in the cities of



Abadan and Khorramshahr, Khazaei said: 500,000 foreign tourists enter the Arvand Free Zone every year, which is unique among the free zones of the country. He stated that the purpose of attending this exhibition was to unveil 106 investment opportunities in Arvand Free Zone and said: This zone will prepare investment packages for the first time in three languages, Persian, English and Arabic, and in the near future in Chinese and Russian. will provide these packages to investment applicants. He mentioned the amount of packages presented in this exhibition as 23 thousand billion tomans and reminded that: projects in the fields of industry, chemical, commerce, tourism, fisheries and agriculture will be presented to visitors in this exhibition. In the end, the vice president of investment and business development of Arvand Free Zone Organization noted: Arvand Free Zone welcomes any request for investment in various areas and all permits are issued with minimal administrative formalities.

## Minister of Justice Arrives in Damascus

TEHRAN (IP) - Minister of Justice arrived in Damascus at the invitation of his Syrian counterpart to discuss the ways to strengthen and develop relations between the two countries, especially in the legal and judicial spheres.

Minister of Justice of Syria Ahmed Awad Al Sayed officially welcomed Amin Hossein Rahimi at the Damascus International Airport. Upon his arrival in Damascus, Rahimi said that relations between the Islamic Republic of Iran and Syria should be strategic and expanded at all levels.

"The people of the two countries have always been at the forefront in the fight against global arrogance, and in the Syrian war, Iran was with and sympathetic to the Syrian people and government," added Rahimi.

## No One Can Threaten Powerful, Capable Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani says Iran has achieved a level of power that no one can threaten it.

Ashtiani made the remarks on the sidelines of a cabinet meeting in Tehran on Wednesday, two days after a Pentagon spokesperson confirmed the US military will send the destroyer USS Thomas Hudner and F-16 and F-35 fighter jets to the Persian Gulf region "in response to a number of recent alarming events in the Strait of Hormuz."

"The U.S. is pursuing its own affairs. The Islamic Republic of Iran is basically at a level of power and capability that no one can threaten it," he said.

The defense minister further noted that a similar point was echoed by Chief Of Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Baqeri.

Speaking on Tuesday, Baqeri said the enemies have dropped the military option rhetoric against Iran in recent years owing to the Islamic Republic's "sustainable deterrence."

Ashtiani added, "We have [even] passed this level and keep playing our regional



and international role. All these indicate that the Islamic Republic of Iran is progressing and developing."

Also in his remarks, he announced that the Defense Ministry is cooperating with knowledge-based companies in an attempt to equip the Iranian Armed Forces with new weapons and upgrade their existing equipment in the areas of ground combat, as well as vessels, helicopters, and drones.

Iranian military experts and technicians have in recent years made substantial headway in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient.

Homegrown Iranian military products have also found many clients in the world.

Iranian officials have repeatedly warned that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities, which are entirely meant for defense.

## Uzbekistan Welcomes Iran's Experience In Restoration of Documents

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Director of the Islamic Civilization Center in Uzbekistan Shoazim Minovarov has said that his country is eager to use Iran's experience in the field of libraries and document restoration.



In his Wednesday meeting in Tehran with Head of the National Documents and Library Organization of the Islamic Republic of Iran Alireza Mokhtarpour, Minovarov said that cultural development in the fields of Islamology and Iranology is of special importance for Uzbekistan.

Referring to the cultural commonalities of Iran and Uzbekistan, he added that using Iran's valuable experiences is one of the most important achievements of his visit to Iran.

Mokhtarpour for his part emphasized the implementation of the scientific and cultural memorandum of understanding (MoU) between the two countries.

## Envoy Names Turkey as 3rd Trade Partner for Iran

ZANJAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Ankara Mohammad Hassan Habibzadeh has termed the northwestern Iranian neighbor Turkey as the country's third trade partner, announcing that 24% of Iran's trade exchange belongs to Turkey.

Habibzadeh made the remarks in a meeting held with provincial officials in Zanjan, northwestern Iranian province.

About 14% of the figure is for Iran's exports to Turkey and the rest is for imports from the neighboring country, the ambassador underlined.

Referring to this year's 12-billion-dollar trade volume between Iran and Turkey, the ambassador said Iran plans to increase such a volume.

As he noted, both Tehran and Ankara attach great importance to strengthening bilateral relations.

## Raisi Administration Seeks Afghanistan's Development Path

TEHRAN (IP) - Iran's special envoy to Afghanistan noted that President Raisi's administration prioritized improving economic ties by removing investment and trade obstacles.

Hassan Kazemi Qomi, the Iranian special envoy to Afghanistan, tweeted on Tuesday that Iran and Afghanistan seek to develop their economic ties by removing investment obstacles, which is a top priority for the business people.

Kazemi Qomi added that organizing Iran's exports to Afghanistan, facilitating businessmen's visa issuing, activating the Khaf-Herat railway, and launching a committee to remove obstacles to production and investment as other pursued programs.

Kazemi outlined some of the actions taken in the field of economy-production and trade as follows:

- Supporting investors from both countries to boost Iran-

Afghanistan trade and establish mining companies is part of measures taken in the production and trade economy field.

- Iran is currently the largest trading partner of Afghanistan, according to the announcement of the Afghanistan Chamber of Commerce and Investment (ACCI).

- The Ministry of Commerce and Industry of Afghanistan announced that Iran had strong commercial, cultural, and political ties with Afghanistan last year.

The presence of Afghan immigrants in Iran for over four decades, the movement of Afghan citizens to Iran, and the good relations between the people of Iran and Afghanistan have led Afghans to view the Islamic Republic of Iran as their second home.

## Iran Urges Elimination of Apartheid in Palestine

TEHRAN (pressTV) - Honoring the International Nelson Mandela Day, Iran has urged the elimination of apartheid across the world, especially in Palestine.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani marked the day in a tweet that commemorated the South African icon as "the great hero of the fight against the apartheid" as well as "a friend of [Iran's] Revolution and the Islamic Republic."

"The world today is in need of Nelson Mandela's liberating thinking in [its efforts to] fight and eliminate apartheid across the world, especially in #Palestine," the tweet added.

South Africa was in the thrall of apartheid -- a system of extreme racial segregation of people -- for 46 years, between 1948 and 1994, under an all-white government that Mandela fiercely resisted.

On April 27, 1994, the country's apartheid era ended and South Africans were finally allowed to cast their votes in the first free and democratic elections after years of heroic struggle led by the icon.

Israel has been practicing the same regime against Palestinians, though far more brutally and several times more deadly, since 1948, when it claimed existence across Palestine after a Western-backed war, during which tens of thousands of Palestinians were forcibly expelled from their homes, villages were depopulated, and thousands were killed.

## Top Iranian General Visits Shared Border With Azerbaijan

TEHRAN (MNA) - Chief of Staff of Iran's Armed Forces Major General Mohammad Bagheri paid a visit to the country's shared border with the Azerbaijan Republic to inspect the security situation at the northern borders.

Accompanied by the Commander-in-Chief of the Islamic Republic of Iran Army and a group of deputy commanders and senior commanders of the General Staff of the Armed Forces of the Islamic Republic of Iran, Bagheri visited Iran's shared border with Azerbaijan in Poldasht and the Aras District to inspect the latest situation of the deployed military units there and met with the border guards present at part of Iran's borders.

During the inspection visit, the top Iranian general stressed, "Today, the deterrence power of the armed forces is higher than ever and all the armed forces units are fully prepared."

Bagheri also said the purpose of the visit was to inspect the latest situation of passive defense on the shared border between Iran and Azerbaijan.

"During the inspection visit to the defense and air units, the high morale and preparation level of army units made us proud of them," he further noted.

The commander-in-chief of the army Major General Abdolrahim Mousavi, for his part, also said during the visit that the forces are at the apex of readiness and constantly monitor enemies' moves and enhance their combat readiness by upgrading their equipment.

## Tehran-Riyadh Agreement to Contribute Regional Security

TEHRAN (MNA) - The Secretary General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council termed the agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia as one of the issues that influence the stability of the region.

Jasem Mohamed AlBudaiwi, Secretary General of the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council, emphasized that all Persian Gulf countries welcomed the normalization of ties between Saudi Arabia and Iran.

The normalization of relations between Tehran and Riyadh plays a role in strengthening the stability of the

region, he said, adding, "We are willing to hold deep discussions with Iran within the framework of international law."

Saying that the economy of the Persian Gulf countries poses the most important and biggest challenge to PGCC, he said, "We strive to strengthen the factors of achieving economic growth."

There is a clear determination among the leaders of these countries to achieve economic growth, Al-Badawi stated.

Regarding the issue of Sudan, he said that the Persian Gulf countries want the realization of peace and ceasefire in Sudan and to keep the people of this country away from war and conflict.

On March 10, after several days of intensive negotiations hosted by China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume their diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and diplomatic missions after seven years of estrangement.

## Iran Envoy to Be Stationed In Riyadh in Coming Days

TEHRAN (MNA) - Alireza Enayati, the ambassador of the Islamic Republic of Iran to Saudi Arabia will be stationed in Riyadh in the coming days, the Iranian Foreign Minister said.

Hossein Amirabdollahian made the remarks on Tuesday night while answering a question about the latest status of Iran's diplomatic mission in the Arab country.

Now Iran has a caretaker in the country, Amirabdollahian said, adding that during this time, if there were any minor problems or obstacles, they were quickly resolved with the coordination between top Iranian and Saudi diplomats.

Enayati is the first Iranian ambassador who will take charge of Iran's diplomatic mission in Riyadh following the severance of relations between the two countries in January 2016.

Iran and Saudi Arabia signed a deal earlier this year to normalize their diplomatic relations in the Chinese capital of Beijing to end seven years of severed ties.

## Iran Tenders for 180,000 T Corn Including Ukrainian Origin

TEHRAN (Dispatches) - Iranian state-owned animal feed importer SLAL has issued an international tender to purchase up to 180,000 metric tons of animal feed corn with Ukrainian supplies still included among grain sources which can be offered, European traders said on Tuesday.

The deadline for submission of price offers in the tenders is Wednesday, July 19.

The yellow corn can be sourced from Brazil, Europe, the Black Sea region, Russia or Ukraine and is sought for shipment in August and September.

Traders noted that offers for corn from Ukraine were still being sought despite the ending of the agreement for the safe Black Sea shipping channel for Ukrainian grain exports on Monday.

"It looks like some importers are either hoping the Ukrainian shipping channel will be renewed in some form or that large volumes of Ukrainian corn will still be available for export via EU ports, especially in Romania and Bulgaria," one trader said.

## Iran Building Five Plants to Produce 20 GW of Nuclear Power

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has started initial works to construct five nuclear power plants to generate 20 gigawatts (GW) of electricity by 2041, officials say.

Speaking on Tuesday during a meeting of a working group on the development of nuclear facilities, Iranian First Vice President Mohammad Mokhber expressed the government's firm resolve to set up the power plants, underlining the need to determine a financing model for the project.

"The path of building nuclear power plants should lead the country to transfer the technology and upgrade its technical knowledge, so that we gradually move towards self-sufficiency ... in all the stages of constructing and engineering," he added.

Mohammad Eslami, the head of the Atomic Energy Organization of Iran (AEOI), who was also present at the meeting, said that five places have been specified for the construction of power plants so far.

He said initial steps have been taken and preparations have been made for the project, while in certain cases, executive operations have begun after the signing of contracts with domestic industries.

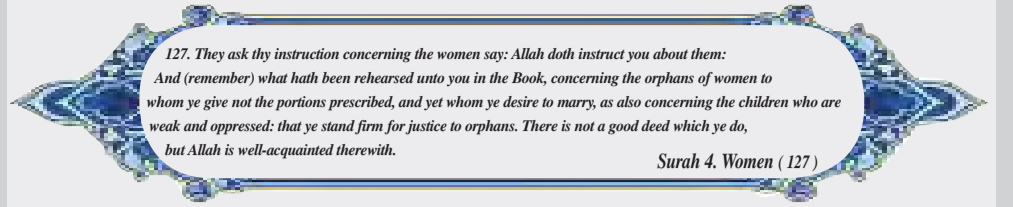
Over the past years, Iran has recorded many achievements in its peaceful nuclear energy program in defiance of US sanctions as well as hurdles created by the West.

The country has also been closely cooperating with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) as a signatory to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT).



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	12:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	19:38
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	03:23
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	05:04



# Iran-EU Trade Reaches €1.869b in 5 Months

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

**TEHRAN – The trade volume between Iran and the European Union (EU)’s member states reached €1.869 billion in the first five months of 2023, according to the data released by the European Union’s statistics office Eurostat.**



Based on the Eurostat data, the trade between the two sides fell 10 percent in the said five months in comparison to the previous year’s same period when the figure stood at €2.073 billion.

As reported, the EU’s exports to Iran from January to May 2023 stood at €1.517 billion, registering a decrease of six percent compared to the same period of the previous year when the EU exports to Iran were reported to be €1.610 billion.

The European Union’s imports from Iran also reached €352 million in the first five months of 2023 with a 24 percent decrease compared to the same period last year. EU imported €463 million of goods from Iran in January-May 2022.

As previously announced by Eurostat, the value of Iran’s export to the European Union’s member states rose 15 percent in 2022, as compared to the previous year.

The Eurostat’s data show that Iran exported commodities worth €1.055 billion to the union in 2022, while the figure was €922 million in 2021.

The EU’s export to Iran also rose seven percent to €4.183 billion from €3.931 billion.

According to the Eurostat, the total value of trade between Iran and the European Union reached €5.238 billion in January-December 2022, while the figure was €3.931 billion in 2021.

Among European countries, Germany was Iran’s top trading partner in 2022, accounting for about 35 percent of Iran’s trade with the European Union. Germany exported €1.582 billion worth of goods to Iran while importing €278 million worth of commodities from the Islamic Republic. The country’s total trade with Iran was 1.860 billion euros.

Italy was Iran’s second trading partner with the total trade between the two countries standing at €712 million. Italy exported €551 million worth of goods to Iran while the imports stood at €161 million.

## Iran Could Face Decline In Grain Production

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN – Head of Iran’s Grain Union Kaveh Zargaran said the country could face a reduction in production over the coming years due to the lack of rainfall across the country.



Pointing out the possibility of an increase in the global prices of all kinds of grains following the non-renewal of the Ukraine grain deal, a pact that allowed the country to export grain through the Black Sea, Zargaran noted that this could also impact Iran’s imports.

According to the official, Iran imported about 16.7 million tons of grains in the previous Iranian calendar year 1401 (ended on March 20).

He put the country’s grain consumption in the previous year at about 32 million tons, while five million tons were also stored in special reserves.

“In total, nearly 37 million tons of grains were provided last year, of which 20.8 million tons came from domestic production and 16.7 million tons have been provided through imports,” he explained.

The official noted that more than 8.66 million hectares of Iran’s lands are under grain cultivation, of which five million hectares are cultivated by rainfed method.

“In fact, the majority of the country’s grain production is based on the amount of rainfall in the country, and due to the decrease in the rainfall compared to the long-term period, there is a possibility of a decrease in the volume of production in this sector,” he said.

Zargaran further noted that based on recent statistics over 50 percent of the regions across the country are suffering from drought; this has negatively affected the amount of production of various agricultural products, especially grains.

## Iran to Form Int’l Aviation Consortium

TEHRAN (Tasnim) – An Iranian vice president unveiled plans for the formation of a joint consortium with other countries in the aviation and aircraft industry.

Speaking to reporters on the sidelines of a cabinet session on Wednesday, Iranian Vice-President for Science and Technology Ruhollah Dehghani Firouzabadi said a domestic working group on manufacturing homegrown commercial airplanes has held several meetings so far.

He also unveiled plans to form a joint international aviation consortium with countries that are aligned with Iran.



The vice president stated that Iran will hold a 20% share in the consortium in the industries that have a low volume but generate high economic value.

In late May, Iran’s domestically-produced transport plane named ‘Simorgh’ successfully completed its maiden flight, a year after its unveiling.

The Simorgh aircraft has been designed and manufactured by the Iran Aviation Industries Organization, a subsidiary of the Iranian Defense Ministry.

Iranian authorities say the development of this aircraft aims to enhance the country’s defensive capabilities.

## Khayyam Satellite Has Scanned 30% of Iran Surface

TEHRAN(MNA) – According to the spokesperson of the Iranian Space Agency (ISA), 30% of the country’s surface has been scanned using the Khayyam satellite.

Hossein Dalirian said that the recent agreement between the Iranian Space Agency and the Mapping Organization of Iran entails the provision of Khayyam satellite scanning data by the former to the latter.

One of the actions that the Mapping Organization is planning to undertake using these images is the production of up-to-date coverage maps of the country, Dalirian added.

According to the ISA spokesperson, with the launch of the Khayyam satellite in August 2022, a unique capacity was made available to Iran to update the country’s coverage maps after approximately two decades.

He added that Khayyam satellite made it possible to capture satellite images with a spatial resolution of 1 meter for the entire country in a short period of time.

The Khayyam satellite is an Iranian high-resolution imaging satellite that was successfully sent into low Earth orbit on 9 August 2022. It was launched from the Baikonur space base in Kazakhstan, on a Russian Soyuz rocket.



## Iran, Japan Stress Custom Cooperation

TEHRAN (IP) - Iranian and Japanese representatives stressed the expansion of customs cooperation between the two countries to boost the volume of trade exchanges.

In the joint meeting of the Director General of the International Cooperation Office of Iran’s Customs, Omid Golzari, and the Head of the Economic Department of the Japanese Embassy in Iran, they emphasized the expansion of customs cooperation between Iran and Japan to increase the volume of commercial exchanges between the two countries.

On Iran-Japan custom cooperation, Omid Golzari and the Japanese representative announced the two countries’ readiness to exchange information and hold training courses.

Between March 21 and June 21, 2023, Iran exported goods worth about \$2.6 m to Japan and imported goods worth over \$10.5 m from the country.

Iran mainly exports gas condensate, methanol, floor coverings, carpets, wool rugs, cumin seeds, pistachios, and non-velvet floor coverings to Japan.

## MOU Signed to Turn Solid Waste to Fuel

TEHRAN (MNA) - Iran’s oil and interior ministries have signed a memorandum of understanding (MOU) to cooperate on implementing refuse-derived fuel (RDF) projects, Shana reported on Tuesday.

As reported, the MOU has been signed with the aim of producing fuel from flammable municipal solid waste and using it as an alternative to fossil fuels.

The reduction of environmental pollution resulting from waste burial, including soil and groundwater pollution, waste separation, and creating added value are also among the goals of the mentioned MOU.

Under the framework of the memorandum, the ministries are going to cooperate in preparing and compiling a waste management plan required for RDF production in addition to locating waste collection sites, as well as, developing, completing, and setting up RDF production units on an industrial scale.

The ministries are also going to guarantee a long-term supply (at least 15 years) of feed, along with marketing and identification of industries ready to use RDF for those investors that are ready to partake in this program.

## Iran to Waive Visa For Some Countries

TEHRAN (IP) - The Minister of Cultural Heritage, Handicrafts, and Tourism says the government plans to waive visa requirements for selected countries.

Addressing the reporters following the cabinet meeting on Wednesday, Ezzatullah Zarghami revealed plans to waive visa requirements for selected countries.

He also announced that the average consumption of gasoline has recently reached 127 million liters, indicating a significant rise in domestic travel.

Additionally, he addressed the issue of chastity and hijab in the country, emphasizing the lack of attractive and affordable clothing options for young women and girls as a challenge.

## Iran Presents Lucrative Prospects in Water Tourism

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Ali-Shalbafian, the Iranian deputy tourism minister, launched a huge water park in the course of his stay to Yasuj, the capital of Kohgiluyeh-Boyerahmad area in the southwest of Iran.

In this huge investment plan, direct employment has been generated for around 150 people, said Shalbafian. In an expanse of 6,200 square meters, this water park is the largest of its kind in southwest Iran.

Notwithstanding its dry climate, Iran’s tourism segment has strived to lift hydro tourism or water tourism in current times.

Located amid the Caspian Sea from the north, and the Persian Gulf as well as the Sea of Oman in the south, Iran is a select place when it comes to water tourism. It is home to plentiful spas, cascades, rivers, islands, and natural springs.

Water tourism includes visiting places precisely to join in water-based doings. This division of tourism often comprises lively chases, and water tourists go to islands and shore areas to enjoy more stress-free recreations like diving or swimming.



## Iran Steel Production Up 1.5% in Q1

TEHRAN (MNA) - Production of steel in Iran increased by 10.5 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, Iranian Steel Producers Association (ISPA) reported.

The ISPA’s report put the country’s three-month steel production at 9.478 million tons.

As recently announced by the World Steel Association (WSA), Iran is ranked eighth among the world’s top steel-producing countries in April, rising one place in the list of the world’s top steel-makers.

The latest report released by the WSA shows that Iran’s crude steel output has increased 5.9 percent in the mentioned month while the global average growth rate stood at – 2.4 percent.

Based on the WSA data, Iran produced 3.1 million tons of crude steel in the mentioned month.

Meanwhile, the Islamic Republic produced 9.7 million tons of steel in the first four months of 2023, registering a 0.1 percent growth compared to the same period in the previous year.

WSA report says that the world’s 64 steel producers managed to produce 161.4 million tons of the commodity in April, 2.4 percent

less than the figure for the previous year’s same period.

The steelmakers produced 622.7 million tons of steel in the first four months of this year, which indicates a 13 percent drop compared to the same period last year.

According to the WSA report, China, India, Japan, the U.S., and Russia were the world’s top steel producers respectively.

Iran has maintained its place as the world’s 10th biggest steel producer during the mentioned four months, according to the WSA data.

The Iranian steel industry has been constantly developing over the past years against all the pressures and obstacles created by outside forces like the U.S. sanctions and the coronavirus outbreak that has severely affected the performance of the world’s top producers.

Back in February, the WSA reported that Iran’s crude steel production increased by eight percent in 2022 when the production by the world’s top 64 steelmakers declined by 4.2 percent.

Iran was ranked first among the world’s top steel producers in terms of production growth in the previous year.

# Macron Criticizes Plan to Hire U.S. Economist for Antitrust Job



PARIS (Dispatches) - French President Emmanuel Macron criticized a move by the European Union's antitrust chief Margrethe Vestager to hire a U.S. economist for a key EU antitrust job.

"It implies we have a very serious problem with all the academic systems in Europe," said Macron, as he expressed his astonishment at the fact that a European Union national could not have been found for the job. Macron added he was "attached to reciprocity" and noted that the United States and China would not have appointed an overseas national in such a role.

The appointment of Fiona Scott Morton, 56, the former chief economist at the U.S. Department of Justice during former President Barack Obama's tenure, has been criticized by France and leaders of the main political groups at the European Parliament.

# U.S. Soldier Facing Action Flees Into North Korea



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - An American soldier facing disciplinary action fled across the inter-Korean border into North Korea and was believed to be in North Korean custody, U.S. officials said, creating a fresh crisis for Washington in its dealings with the nuclear-armed state.

Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin expressed concern for the soldier, who the U.S. military in Korea said joined an orientation tour of Joint Security Area between the Koreas and "wilfully and without authorization crossed the Military Demarcation Line into the Democratic People's Republic of Korea (DPRK)."

The U.S. Army identified the soldier as Private Second Class Travis T. King.

# U.S. Deploys Nuclear-Armed Submarine to South Korea



SEOUL (Dispatches) - The United States deployed a nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea for the first time in four decades, as the allies warned North Korea that any use of the North's nuclear weapons in combat would result in the end of its regime.

Periodic visits by U.S. nuclear ballistic missile-capable submarines to South Korea were one of several agreements reached by the two countries' presidents in April in response to North Korea's expanding nuclear threat. They also agreed to establish a bilateral Nuclear Consultative Group and expand military exercises.

The USS Kentucky, an Ohio-class submarine, arrived at the South Korean port of Busan on Tuesday afternoon, South Korea's Defense Ministry said. It is the first visit by a U.S. nuclear-armed submarine to South Korea since the 1980s, it said.

A series of low-slung buildings and somber soldiers dot the border village of Panmunjom inside the DMZ, or demilitarized zone.

The U.S.-led United Nations Command is trying to secure the release of an American soldier who fled to North Korea from the South Korean side of a border village.

U.S. officials say an American soldier who fled across the heavily armed border from South Korea into North Korea had been facing military disciplinary actions.

The highest-ranking U.S. military officer is praising Japan's moves to double its defense spending over the next five years. Gen. Defense Minister Lee Jong-Sup called the submarine's visit a demonstration of U.S. resolve in implementing its "extended deterrence" commitment, a pledge by the U.S. to use its full military capabilities, including nuclear weapons, to protect its allies, the ministry said in a statement.

He said the submarine's visit "shows the allies' overwhelming capability and posture against North Korea."

During the Cold War in the late 1970s, U.S. nuclear-armed ballistic missile submarines made frequent visits to South Korea, sometimes two or three times per month, according to the Federation of American Scientists. It was a period when the U.S. had hundreds of nuclear warheads located in South Korea. But in 1991, the United States withdrew all of its nuclear weapons from the Korean Peninsula.

North Korea's nuclear ambitions have taken on a new urgency after it threatened to use nuclear weapons in conflicts with its rivals and conducted about 100 missile tests since the start of last year. Last week, North Korea conducted a second test of a more mobile and powerful intercontinental ballistic missile designed to strike the mainland United States. After observing that launch, North Korean leader Kim Jong Un vowed to further strengthen his country's nuclear combat capabilities.

Also on Tuesday, South Korean and U.S. officials held the inaugural meeting of the Nuclear Consultative Group in Seoul to discuss ways to strengthen deterrence against North Korea's nuclear threats.

"Any nuclear attack by North Korea against the United States or its allies is unacceptable and will result in the end of that regime," the two countries said in a joint statement after the meeting.

President Joe Biden issued a similar warning after his summit in Washington with South Korean President Yoon Suk Yeol in April.

"Both sides affirmed that the NCG will play an integral role in discussing and advancing bilateral approaches, including guidelines, to nuclear and strategic planning and responses to (North Korean) aggression," the statement said.

# Russia Targets Ukraine's Port of Odesa



KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine said its forces shot down Russian drones and cruise missiles targeting the Black Sea port of Odesa before dawn in what Moscow called "retribution" for an attack that damaged a crucial bridge to the Crimean Peninsula.

The Russians first sought to wear down Ukraine's air defenses by firing 25 exploding drones and then targeted Odesa with six Kalibr cruise missiles, the Ukrainian military's Southern Command said.

All six missiles and the drones were shot down by air defenses in the Odesa region and other areas in the south, officials said, though their debris and shock waves damaged some port facilities and a few residential buildings and injured an elderly man at his home.

The Russian Defense Ministry said its "strike of retribution" was carried out with sea-launched precision weapons on Ukrainian military facilities near Odesa and Mykolaiv, a coastal city about 50 kilometers (30 miles) to the northeast.

It destroyed facilities preparing "terror attacks" against Russia involving maritime drones, including a facility at a shipyard that was producing them, the ministry said. It added that it also struck Ukrainian fuel depots near the two cities.

It was not possible to verify the conflicting claims by both countries. President Vladimir Putin blamed Ukraine on Monday for striking the Kerch Bridge, which links Russia with Crimea and was attacked in October 2022 and needed months of repairs. The bridge is a key supply route for the peninsula, which was illegally annexed by Moscow in 2014.

Ukrainian officials stopped short of directly taking responsibility, as they have done in similar strikes before, but Ukraine's top security agency appeared tacitly to admit to a role.

Satellite images taken Monday by Maxar Technologies showed serious damage to both eastbound and westbound lanes of the bridge across the Kerch Strait on the part nearest to the Russian mainland, with at least one section collapsed. The railroad bridge that runs parallel to the highway appeared undamaged.

South Africa is seeking an exemption under ICC rules based on the fact that enacting the arrest could threaten the "security, peace and order of the state," Ramaphosa said.

Last month, Ramaphosa led a seven-country African peace delegation including representatives from Egypt, Senegal and Zambia, to talks in Kyiv and Saint Petersburg.

The ICC treaty states that a member country should consult the court when it identifies problems that may impede the execution of a request, and that the court may not proceed with requesting an arrest if this would require a state to break international rules on diplomatic immunity.

South Africa's diplomatic dilemma is playing out in court, where the leading opposition party, the Democratic Alliance (DA), is trying to force the government's hand and ensure the Kremlin leader is held and handed over to the ICC if he steps foot in the country.

But in a responding affidavit, Ramaphosa described the DA's application as "irresponsible" and said national security was at stake.

"Russia has made it clear that arresting its sitting President would be a declaration of war," he said.

"It would be inconsistent with our Constitution to risk engaging in war with Russia," he said, adding that this would go against his duty to protect the country.

The arrest would also undermine a South African-led mission to end the war in Ukraine and "foreclose any peaceful solution", Ramaphosa wrote.

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# Sun-Baked Iraqis Protest Water and Electricity Shortages

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - Despite punishingly high temperatures, dozens of Iraqis took to the streets of Baghdad to protest water and electricity shortages, and to blame Turkey for reduced flow of rivers.

Designated by the United Nations as one of the five countries in the world most touched by some effects of climate change, Iraq is experiencing its fourth consecutive summer of drought.

"We have come to peacefully protest and demand water from the government and the source countries," Najeh Jawda Khalil told AFP around midday as temperatures neared 50 degrees Celsius (122 degrees Fahrenheit).

"The agricultural regions and marshes are gone," said Khalil, who travelled to the Iraqi capital from the central province of Babylon for the march. "There is neither electricity nor water."

In addition to declining rainfall and rising temperatures, Iraqi authorities say upstream dam construction by Turkey and Iran has affected the volume of water in the Tigris and Euphrates rivers through Iraq. "If the Turkish government continues to deprive Iraqis of water, we will move towards internationalizing the water problem and boycotting Turkish products," read a sign at the demonstration.

Summer in Iraq is a prime example of the convergence of multiple crises weighing down the lives of the 43-million strong population: rising temperatures, severe water

shortages and a dilapidated electricity sector -- exacerbated by rampant corruption and public mismanagement.

"Twenty years and the electricity crisis repeats itself every year," read another banner, referring to the time passed since the fall of dictator Saddam Hussein in a US-led invasion.

Ravaged by decades of conflict, oil-rich Iraq relies on Iranian gas imports for a third of its energy needs.

Generally, power cuts can last up to 10 hours a day. But every summer when the thermometer climbs, the supply of public electricity worsens.

Only those who can afford it are able to connect their houses to neighbourhood generators to make up for the poor supply.

Water shortages have fuelled tensions between Turkey and Iraq, which demands Ankara release more water from upstream dams along the rivers.

"Currently, Iraq only receives 35 percent of its water rights. This means that Iraq has lost 65 percent of its water, whether it's from the Tigris or the Euphrates," Khaled Chamal, the spokesman for the Ministry of Water Resources, has told AFP.

In the summer of 2022, the Turkish ambassador to Baghdad sparked outrage after accusing Iraqis of wasting water and urging "the modernisation of irrigation systems".

Experts say he may have a point. Iraqi farmers flood their fields, rather than irrigate them which is more efficient.



# Saudi Arabia Buys Turkish Drones During Erdogan's Visit



RIYADH (Dispatches) - Saudi Arabia agreed on Tuesday to buy Turkish drones in the biggest defense contract in Turkey's history as President Tayyip Erdogan reaped the benefits of his diplomatic push to repair ties with Persian Gulf powers and help Ankara's struggling economy.

Erdogan and Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman attended the signing ceremony between Turkish defense firm Baykar and the Saudi defense ministry, Saudi state news agency SPA reported.

Erdogan arrived in the Saudi Red Sea city of Jeddah on Monday for the first stop of a Gulf tour.

Saudi Arabia will acquire the drones "with the aim of enhancing the readiness of the kingdom's armed forces and bolstering its defense and manufacturing capabilities," Defense Minister Prince Khalid bin Salman said in a tweet on Tuesday.

SPA did not give details about the value of the deal but Baykar CEO Haluk Bayraktar said it was the biggest defense and aviation export contract in Turkey's history.

"We signed a contract with the Saudi Arabian defense ministry for the Bayraktar Akinci (unmanned combat aerial vehicle) export and cooperation," he said in a Twitter post.

Investments and funding from the Persian Gulf have helped relieve pressure on Turkey's economy and its currency reserves since 2021, when Ankara launched a diplomatic effort to repair ties with Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates.

Turkey had been at odds for years with the two Persian Gulf states over Ankara's support of pro-democracy movements in the Middle East and North Africa and the murder of Saudi journalist Jamal Khashoggi in the Saudi consulate in Istanbul in 2018.

Erdogan left Riyadh for Qatar on Tuesday, the second stop of his first Persian Gulf tour since being reelected in May. He is also due in the United Arab Emirates.

SPA said Erdogan and Prince Mohammed attended the signing of a defense cooperation plan by Prince Khalid and Turkish Defense Minister Yasar Guler.

Developing a local military industry has been part of an ambitious plan by Prince Mohammed to diversify the kingdom's economy away from oil.

## Experimental Alzheimer's Drug Donanemab May Slow Symptoms by a Third

NEW YORK (UPI) - Another experimental drug meant to slow the damage of Alzheimer's appears poised to join a growing arsenal of new treatments for this memory-robbing disease.

In research published online Monday in the *Journal of the American Medical Association* and presented simultaneously at the Alzheimer's Association International Conference in Amsterdam, the drug donanemab slowed memory and thinking declines in early symptomatic Alzheimer's patients by more than one-third. About 47% of those taking the medication had no decline on a key measure of thinking over a year, compared to 29% of patients on a placebo.

"If approved, we believe donanemab can provide clinically meaningful benefits for people with this disease and the possibility of completing their course of treatment as early as 6 months once their amyloid plaque is cleared," Anne White, executive vice president of Eli Lilly and president of Lilly Neuroscience, said in a company news release. "We must continue to remove any barriers in access to amyloid-targeting therapies and diagnostics in an already complex healthcare ecosystem for Alzheimer's disease."

The company added that it has already completed an application for traditional approval from the U.S. Food and Drug Administration.

"People living with early, symptomatic Alzheimer's disease are still working, enjoying trips, sharing quality time with family - they want to feel like themselves, for longer," Dr. Mark Mintun, group vice president of neuroscience research & development at Lilly, said in the company news release. "The results of this study reinforce the importance of diagnosing and treating disease sooner than we do today."

About 52% of the patients in the trial were able to stop taking the medication by one year because of its effectiveness. About 72% could do so by a year and a half, the company said.

In the trial, a group with intermediate levels of a brain protein known as tau had a 35% slowing in cognitive and functional decline. In the intermediate group combined with a group with higher tau levels, slowing in decline was 22%.

Despite the promising results, four editorials that were published alongside the trial results raised concerns about cost, access and safety risks.

"The modest benefits would likely not be questioned by patients, clinicians or payers if amyloid antibodies were low-risk, inexpensive and simple to administer," wrote experts led by Dr. Eric Widera, from the University of California, San Francisco (UCSF). "However, they are none of these."

Other editorials also offered caveats on the findings.

"Donanemab was very effective at eliminating its target, cerebral amyloid, but the clinical effect was comparatively weak," wrote Jennifer Manly and Kacie Deters, from the Taub Institute for Research on Alzheimer's Disease and the Aging Brain at Columbia University and the University of California, Los Angeles, respectively. "By the end of the trial (76 weeks), amyloid plaques were cleared in 80% of the treatment group. Overall, cognition and daily function continued to decline in all participants, but treatment with donanemab delayed progression on the primary outcome... by about 4 months," they noted.

"While the slowing of clinical decline seen in this trial represents an important start, and may be deemed clinically meaningful for some patients, development of more impactful and safer treatments is still needed," wrote Dr. Gil Rabinovici and Renaud La Joie, from UCSF's Memory and Aging Center.



## Early Detection, Treatment of Glaucoma May Save Vision

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Treatment can control the symptoms of the most common type of glaucoma and save someone's vision.

The catch is that a person can't feel the changes in eye pressure that can damage vision, so they often won't know they even have it before it's too late.

That is, unless they've been seeing an eye doctor regularly.

One vision expert encourages people to not wait for that pressure to damage the optic nerve, but rather to preserve vision with regular healthcare.

"Some people say they don't need glasses, so they don't need to see an eye doctor," said Dr. Tara O'Rourke, an optometrist at Penn State Health Eye Center. "It's important for everyone to have yearly eye exams to monitor the health of the eye, especially for patients over the age of 50."

About 3 million Americans have glaucoma, according to the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention. The condition is the second leading cause of blindness in the world.

Half of those who have the most common type, open-angle glaucoma, don't know they have it.

In open angle glaucoma, the tiny canals that naturally drain away eye fluid become clogged.

"The exact cause or mechanism of open angle glaucoma is unknown at this time. We can manage the eye pressure, but do not have a cure for the disease," O'Rourke said in a center news release. However, treatment can control glaucoma.

Both heredity and age can contribute to the condition. O'Rourke recommends that people over 50 get tested for glaucoma at least annually, even with perfect vision. A person who has a family member with glaucoma should test earlier.

Some can experience pain, cloudy vision and a sensitivity to light, but many have no symptoms early in the disease. Rather, they have a slow progressive peripheral vision loss, which is irreversible.

Eventually, people with this condition will have total vision loss without treatment. Yet, glaucoma is treatable, especially in the early stages.

To diagnose glaucoma, doctors test to determine eye pressure. Normal pressure is anywhere from 10 millimeters of mercury (mm Hg) to 21 mm Hg. Any measure over 21 is a reason for more testing.

A puff test, in which a machine blows a puff of air into a patient's eye, is common.

O'Rourke said she typically uses a device called a Goldmann applanation tonometer. With this test, an eye drop numbs the eye, then the device gently taps or rests on the front surface of the eye to get a better reading.

A common treatment is using eyedrops, which will need to continue indefinitely. A variety of drops will have different effects. Some drops decrease fluid production. Others help to improve fluid outflow.

Oral medications can also lower the pressure in the eye, and laser therapy can enhance the outflow of fluid through the drainage system of the eye. Medication will still typically be needed to keep the pressure in the eye down.

Surgical options include installing tiny tubes called stents. These tubes help to clear fluid in the eye. This may happen at the same time as cataract surgery for some patients.



## UNAIDS Says End of AIDS Could Happen by 2030



GEEVA (Dispatches) - The ultimate end of AIDS is a political and financial choice, as HIV funding has plummeted in 2022, a new report from UNAIDS indicates.

Botswana, Eswatini, Rwanda, the United Republic of Tanzania, and Zimbabwe are countries with some of the highest HIV rates globally. They have already achieved the "95-95-95" targets. This means 95% of the people with HIV know their status. Of those, 95% are on antiretroviral treatment that helps to manage the disease and live longer and healthier lives. Some 95% of people receiving the treatment are virally suppressed, meaning they cannot transmit HIV to their sex partners.

A further 16 other countries, eight of them in sub-Saharan Africa, the region which accounts for 65% of all people living with HIV, are also close to reaching the targets.

Progress has been the most significant in the countries and regions with the most financial investments, such as in eastern and southern Africa, where new HIV infections have dropped by 57% since 2010.

As 82% of HIV-positive pregnant and breastfeeding women had access to antiretroviral treatment in 2022, the number of new HIV infections among children decreased by 58% since 2010.

Meanwhile, new HIV infections are rising at alarming rates in Asia and the Pacific. Eastern Europe and Central Asia, as well as the Middle East and North Africa, have also seen steep increases since 2010.

"These trends are due primarily to a lack of HIV prevention services for marginalized and key populations and the barriers posed by punitive laws and social discrimination," the UNAIDS report states.

## Skin Lightening Products May Contain Harmful Ingredients

LONDON (Dispatches) - Using skin lightening products can be dangerous without a doctor's supervision because they may contain harmful ingredients.

Still, nearly a quarter of people in a recent survey said they used the products not for a medical issue, but for overall

skin lightening. It's an issue that relates back to colorism, the system of inequality that considers lighter skin more beautiful, researchers say.

"The most surprising finding was the lack of awareness of ingredients in products being purchased over the counter and their potential detrimental effects," said lead investigator Dr. Roopal Kundu, a professor of dermatology at Northwestern University Feinberg School of Medicine.

"These products are bought from chain grocery stores, community-based stores or even online and do not undergo the same type of regulation as large-chain store or prescription products," she said in a university news release.

While doctors prescribe lighteners for some skin conditions, including melasma, many people who use these products do not consult a medical provider before use, said Kundu, who is also founder and director of the Northwestern Medicine Center for Ethnic Skin and Hair in Chicago.

Research has shown these products are often contaminated with other things such as steroids and mercury that could be toxic to the skin.

To study what was happening with skin lighteners, researchers sent an anonymous 19-question survey to individuals of color in the United States. The survey asked about their demographics, colorism attitudes, skin tone satisfaction and skin lightening habits.

In all, 455 people completed the survey.



They included 238 Black people; 83 Asians; 84 who were multiracial; 31 who were Hispanic; 14 were American Indian or Alaskan Native, and five who identified as other.

Of those, 21.3% reported using skin lightening products, with three-quarters of them using the

products to treat acne, melasma (a condition producing dark patches or spots) or hyperpigmentation. The others used the products for general skin lightening.

The participants who used skin lighteners perceived stronger colorism in their lives, according to the study. A majority were women.

"There is this perception that having lighter skin within a group -- Southeast Asian or African populations, for example -- is looked upon more favorably and manifests by making someone more attractive to a mate or more likely to get a job," Kundu said. "The belief is that having lighter skin is tied to personal and professional success."

It can be dangerous to use skin lighteners without a doctor's supervision. Kundu recalled a patient who used the lightening product hydroquinone, also called a bleacher, on his entire face for many years. That patient now has permanent hyperpigmentation.

Another one of Kundu's patients said his goal was to completely lighten his skin.

"I had to tell him that is not something we can do," Kundu said. "We weren't going to globally lighten his skin color."

The U.S. Food and Drug Administration received reports of serious side effects from the use of skin lightening products containing hydroquinone in 2020, including skin rashes, facial swelling and discoloration of skin. The agency advised people to not use these products.

## All Aboard: Grocery Bus Caters to Isolated German Villages



LOHNE (Dispatches) - In the western German village of Lohne, where the only grocery store closed its doors earlier this year, residents now do their food shopping on board a red-and-green supermarket bus that rolls into the main square once a week.

For 90 minutes, locals get a chance to buy the essentials without having to get into a car to drive to the nearest store.

The supermarket-on-wheels is a pilot project between Germany's third-largest food retailer, REWE, and the Deutsche Bahn rail and transport company.

The bus began plying its route in March, catering to rural villages in the state of Hesse where brick-and-mortar stores have become an increasingly rare sight, turning some areas into so-called food deserts.

For the roughly 600 inhabitants of Lohne, where the balconies are dotted with colourful geraniums, the arrival of the REWE shopping bus is a welcome sight after the village's only mini-mart closed for good in the spring.

"I can get the basics here," said 90-year-old Inge Nehreng, who rode her electric trike for three kilometres (1.8 miles) to join the weekly bus rendez-vous.

"If I need something special, I go to a department store," she added.

Parked on the village square, the 18-metre (60-foot) long bendy bus carries over 950 everyday products.

Fresh fruit and vegetables are on display outside the bus, while inside the choice ranges from food items to cigarettes, newspapers, soap and condoms.

"The only things missing are nappies and wet wipes," said Yasmine Schneider, 34, who was shopping with her toddler Felix.

## India's Fight Against Inflation Far From Over

MUMBAI (Dispatches) - Food price spikes in India, typical at the onset of the monsoon, drove up headline inflation in June, corroborating the monetary policy committee's (MPC) view that the fight against inflation is far from over, the Reserve Bank of India said.

"Monetary policy has to stay the course on the arduous last leg of the journey to align inflation with the target," the RBI said in its State of the Economy article, published as a part of its monthly bulletin. Surging food prices accelerated India's annual retail inflation rate to 4.81% in June, snapping four months of easing and erasing any chance of a rate cut this year.



## German Economy May Contract Slightly in 2023

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Germany's economic output may shrink slightly this year due to the energy price shock and tightening financial conditions, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) said.

Gross domestic product is expected to regain momentum gradually in 2024 and 2025, as the lagged effects of monetary tightening gradually dissipate and the economy adjusts to the energy shock, the IMF said in its country report for Germany.

Over the medium term, average GDP growth is expected to fall back below 1% due to accelerating headwinds from population aging and a lack of significant increases in productivity.

Inflation is expected to keep falling amid softening energy prices and tightening fiscal policy, but core inflation may decline more slowly than headline inflation due to rising nominal wage pressures and the time it takes for lower global commodity prices to seep through to core inflation, the IMF said.

Uncertainty is unusually high, with substantial risks in both directions, which on balance are tilted downward for growth, the IMF warned in its report.

"Uncertainty around the persistency of core inflation is especially high, as a rapid rise in core inflation to its current levels has not been observed in Germany or most other advanced economies for decades," the IMF said.

Meanwhile the German economy may shrink by more this year than expected only a few weeks ago despite a small bounce in the second quarter, the Bundesbank said on Monday.

Industry-heavy Germany is bearing the brunt of a drop in global demand for goods - the result of higher borrowing costs dampening investment and people spending more on leisure, travel and other services in the aftermath of the pandemic.

The Bundesbank said Europe's largest economy was likely to have grown slightly in the three months to June after contracting in the previous two quarters, thanks to a stabilisation in consumer spending.

But the outlook was more bleak than the central bank's own estimate for a 0.3% contraction this year, which was published less than a month ago, due to worsening sentiment.

"The economic recovery in the remainder of the year could therefore turn out to be somewhat more timid than expected in the June forecasts," the Bundesbank said.

It cited a survey from the Ifo institute showing that German business morale worsened for the second consecutive month in June, particularly in the industrial sector.

The Bundesbank expected inflation - the No.1 concern for it and the European Central Bank at present - to fall further in the coming months as lower producer prices are passed down the supply chain.

Core inflation, which excludes energy and food costs, should remain high, however, also thanks to a boom in packaged holidays, which now have a greater weight in the inflation index.

## Russia to Hike Rates to 8% as Weak Rouble Adds to Inflation Concerns

MOSCOW (Dispatches) - Russia's central bank is expected to hike rates to 8% on Friday, increasing the cost of borrowing for the first time in over a year as the rouble's sharp slide adds to inflation pressure, a Reuters poll showed.

The bank has held rates at 7.5% since September, but has steadily become more hawkish in its rhetoric.

A series of rate cuts followed an emergency hike to 20% shortly after Russia dispatched troops to Ukraine in February 2022. Sixteen of 21 analysts and economists polled by Reuters on Monday predicted that Russia would increase its benchmark rate to 8% on Friday. Three forecast a 25-basis-point hike, while two predicted an increase to 8.5%.



The Bank of Russia is no longer discussing whether or not to raise rates, but by how much, said Mikhail Vasilyev, chief analyst at Sovcombank.

Vasilyev forecast a 50-basis-point increase, arguing that the rouble's slump since the bank's previous meeting meant a 25-basis-point hike was no longer sufficient.

The Russian currency has been gradually weakening for most of this year as exports fall and imports recover, but pressure intensified sharply after an abortive armed mutiny in late June, sending the rouble to a more than 15-month low.

A rate hike seems inevitable, said Olga Belenkaya of Finam brokerage. "The rate could be raised by 50 basis points to 8%, although a larger increase cannot be ruled out," said Belenkaya, who also pointed to the importance of the central bank's updated macro forecasts, which will be released on Friday.

Annual inflation has dipped below the bank's 4% target in recent months, due to a favourable base effect after last year's double-digit jump in prices. Inflation accelerated in June and is set to continue climbing due to other factors in addition to the rouble, including a labour shortage and strong consumer demand.

"A significant pro-inflationary factor in June-July was the rouble's weakening against major currencies by 11-15% on average," said Rosselkhozbank analysts. "We expect that the transfer of the rouble's weakening to prices for goods and services will strengthen the upward dynamic of prices in July-September."

Meanwhile inflationary expectations for the year ahead among Russian households climbed to 11.1% in July from 10.2% in June, the central bank said on Monday, just days before it is widely expected to raise its key interest rate from 7.5%.

## Debt Restructuring Talks At G20 Meet Hurt By Differences

GANDHINAGAR (Dispatches) - Debt restructuring talks made little progress during the third finance meeting of the G20 countries in India as the bloc was unable to overcome key differences and low attendance due to domestic issues adding to the roadblocks.

The finance ministers of the G20 countries gathered in the western Indian state of Gujarat, hoping to push for agreements on debt restructuring for vulnerable countries, global minimum taxation and reforms on multilateral development banks.

"We are not making much headway with the debt restructuring issue," a senior official, who is part of the meeting, told Reuters on Monday.

Last month, Zambia struck a deal to restructure \$6.3 billion in debt owed to governments abroad, in what was seen as a breakthrough for indebted nations around the world that have faced lengthy negotiations with their creditors.

But nations did not agree to using Zambia as a model for other restructuring and most remained unwilling to talk about fresh lending to vulnerable countries as many G20 member countries face economic challenges back home, the official said.

Ministers from many countries chose to skip the meeting, which added to the slow progress on the issue, a second official said, adding that 13 finance ministers attended the event. The United States has sent the biggest delegation, led by Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen, to the meeting.

The two-day meetings that kicked off on Monday were seen as key to setting the tone for the G20 leaders' summit in September in New Delhi.

Officials said several finance ministers were forced to skip the meetings due to domestic issues that were a "priority".

"This may have crimped the bloc's decision-making ability in this meet and slowed progress on building consensus on any issue," a third official, also present in the meeting, said.

Finance ministers from Japan, Australia, Canada, Indonesia, South Korea, Indonesia, South Africa, along with the United States and India were present.

Argentina, Brazil, France and Mexico only sent junior-level officials, sources added.

German and British ministers did not attend the meeting. However, Germany's central bank chief Joachim Nagel attended.

The officials did not want to be identified as they were not authorised to speak to the media. India's finance ministry and external affairs ministry did not immediately respond to emails seeking comment.

## Yellen Does Not See Recession in U.S.



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - U.S. Treasury Secretary Janet Yellen said the United States was making good progress in bringing inflation down and she did not expect the U.S. economy to enter into a recession.

Yellen, speaking to Bloomberg TV from India during a meeting of Group of 20 finance officials, said slower growth in China could spill over to other economies, but the U.S. economy was on "a good path" to reducing inflation while the labor market remained strong.

"For the United States, growth has slowed, but our labor market continues to be quite strong. I don't expect a recession," Yellen said. "The most recent inflation data were quite encouraging."

Data on Monday showed China's economy grew 6.3% in the second quarter on a year-on-year basis, accelerating from 4.5% in the first three months of the year, but well below expectations of 7.3%, as demand weakened at home and abroad.

U.S. data released last month showed gross domestic product increased at a 2% annualized rate in the first quarter, a sharp upward revision from the 1.3% pace reported earlier, but still below the 2.6% growth reported in the fourth quarter.

Yellen downplayed the prospect for U.S. tariff cuts or reductions as part of the Biden administration's push to reestablish relations with Beijing.

She said Chinese officials raised serious concerns, especially about U.S. tariffs, during her visit earlier this month, but the underlying reasons that Washington implemented them in the first place, including unfair trade practices, had not been addressed.

"We have to see what comes out of the four-year review" of tariffs, Yellen said, adding, "But I would emphasize that really the underlying concerns have not yet been addressed. And we need to work on that going forward."

## Brazil's Economic Activity Surprises Negatively With 2% Decline in May

BRASILIA (Dispatches) - Economic activity in Brazil declined in May, showed a central bank index, signaling a non-linear trajectory for the country's growth, even as analysts have been consistently revising their forecasts upward for the year.

The IBC-BR economic activity index, a key gauge of gross domestic product (GDP), declined by a seasonally adjusted 2.0% compared to April, disappointing analysts who had expected zero growth according to a Reuters poll.

This marked the largest monthly drop since March 2021. The observed data series recorded a 2.15% increase on a year-on-year basis, resulting in an accumulated growth rate of 3.43% over the past 12 months.

Gabriel Couto, economist at Santander Brazil, stated that the frustrating outcome could be attributed to the end of contribution from the record grain production witnessed during the 2022-23 summer crops.

Speaking to reporters, Finance Minister Fernando Haddad said the numbers came in "as expected" amid an environment marked by persistently high borrowing costs.

"The economic slowdown intended by the central bank has arrived strongly, and we need to be cautious about what may happen," he said, emphasizing that current real interest rate levels are imposing a heavy burden on the economy.

The central bank has held its benchmark interest rate steady at a cycle-high of 13.75% since September to tackle inflationary pressures. Still, it has recently indicated the possibility of a rate cut in August if the inflation scenario continues to improve.

## Turkey's Central Bank to Deliver Another Substantial Rate Hike to 20%

ISTANBUL (Dispatches) - Turkey's central bank is expected to raise its policy rate by 500 basis points to 20% this week, a Reuters poll showed on Monday, making good on its pledge of further tightening with another sharp hike to curb inflation which is set to rise again.

The central bank raised its policy rate by 650 basis points in June to 15%, while promising to continue tightening until a significant improvement in the inflation outlook is achieved.

The rate hike and the hawkish tone were the strongest signals of a reversal after years of loose policy under President Tayyip Erdogan, who was prioritising growth and investments.

The tightening still remained below expectations, with economists saying that Erdogan's influence over the central bank limits how far they can go in tightening policy. Real rates are also still deeply negative.

Economists see a further hike this week to 20%, according to the median estimate of 23 economists in a Reuters poll, with forecasts ranging between 17% and 21.50%.

"Anything less than a move to hike the policy rate to 20% will be seen as disappointing and a signal that Erdogan is constraining what (Finance Minister Mehmet) Simsek and (Central Bank Governor Hafize Gaye) Erkan can do," said Tim Ash of BlueBay Asset Management.

Turkey's annual inflation surged to a 24-year high of 85.51% last October, mainly due to the constant depreciation of the lira.

Inflation eased to 38.21% by June but is expected to rise again. The year-end forecast stood at 51.50% in the latest Reuters poll, but economists now say it will likely be around 60% after Ankara hiked several tax rates to support its deteriorating budget and as the lira continues to decline.

The central bank was expected to keep hiking rates in coming months, with the median estimate of 13 economists in the Reuters poll for the policy rate at year-end standing at 25%.

The forecasts ranged between 24% and 35%.

The central bank's one-week repo rate had been slashed to 8.5% from 19% since 2021 under Erdogan's economic programme. The bank had also used foreign exchange reserves to prop up the lira, which nonetheless plunged to a series of record lows.

As a result of the recent policy reversals, the central bank's net international reserves rose to \$13.17 billion in the week to July 7, continuing to rebound from a record low of \$-5.7 billion it touched in June. The central bank will announce its rate decision today.

## Iran Urges Apartheid Elimination Across world, Palestine

TEHRAN (MNA) – Honoring International Nelson Mandela Day, Iran has urged the elimination of apartheid across the world, especially in Palestine.

On Tuesday, Foreign Ministry spokesman Nasser Kanaani marked the day in a tweet that commemorated the South African icon as “the great hero of the fight against the apartheid” as well as “a friend of [Iran’s] Revolution and the Islamic Republic.”

“The world today is in need of Nelson Mandela’s liberating thinking in [its efforts to] fight and eliminate apartheid across the world, especially in Palestine,” the tweet added.



## Who Is Spain’s Far-Right Leader and What Does He Stand for?

MADRID (Dispatches) - As could be expected of the head of a far-right party that puts nationalism at its core, Vox leader Santiago Abascal drapes himself in Spanish symbols, wearing designer shirts glorifying bullfighting or issuing Vox-branded hand fans to rally attendants.

Giving speeches against backdrops of oil paintings and churches and vowing to return to Spaniards “the things that really matter”, Abascal has toured the country in recent weeks to tout his Vox party’s nationalist, anti-feminist, Eurosceptic, socially conservative and economically liberal manifesto.

Despite being the youngest of the candidates running for office in the July 23 snap election, the 47-year-old has in nine years turned the splinter party he founded into Spain’s third-largest electoral force.

Abascal appeals to “the children of traders, workers, students, doctors, judges, fishermen and farmers” to join to face “the enemies of Spain” as he describes Socialist Prime Minister Pedro Sanchez’s leftist government.

Vox may have doubled its vote in the May local elections but some analysts say it has exhausted its natural pool of voters. Polls suggest its parliamentary seats will wane from 52 in the last election to 35 in the July poll.

However, the frontrunning centre-right People’s Party (PP), led by Alberto Nunez Feijoo, is unlikely to secure an outright majority, and may turn to Vox as a kingmaker.

Abascal is the third generation of politicians in his family, his father and grandfather having also served in regional or local government.

A sociology graduate from Spain’s northern Basque Country, Abascal joined the PP at 18, was elected as a councillor at 23 and became a PP lawmaker in the Basque parliament.

He fell out with the PP in 2013 over its handling of corruption, the ETA militant group and other separatist challenges.

He founded Vox to campaign for abolishing regional autonomy and parliaments, a theme that struck a chord with many after a failed independence bid by Catalonia in 2017.

Those who work with “Santi” describe him as an extrovert and fan of motorbikes and hunting, who likes to crack a joke but is serious about his work.

“He is intense in his debates and rallies because he believes in what he says and that is perceived by everyone who listens to him,” a party source said.

He has been married twice, at present to a social media influencer, and has four children.

Vox says it would lower income tax, crack down on graft, cut public spending, and increase tax breaks for large families.

It proposes the expulsion of illegal migrants and a naval blockade to stop them arriving, and the closure of mosques promoting “radical Islam or jihad”, while supporting immigration meeting the needs of Spain’s labour market and from nationalities with a shared language or culture.

It has also vowed to repeal progressive laws on transgender rights, abortion and animal rights, along with climate protections promoted by Sanchez, whom Abascal accuses of introducing to Spain “wokism, a pathology that treats adults as minors and children as degenerate adults”.



Vox secured its first political foothold in December 2018, winning 12 seats in Andalusia’s regional parliament.

It won 24 parliamentary seats in a national election in April 2019, and 52 seats in a repeat ballot seven months later.

Political analyst Miguel Angel Murado predicted Vox had hit a ceiling and would lose votes to the PP, remaining “a smaller, really far-right party” and a fixture of Spanish politics for a years ahead.

Ana Pedroza, 56, a nutritionist from Madrid, feels Vox is not extreme but would halt a leftist bloc “that wants to break up the country, with our taxes, our freedoms, our children”.

Others, such as flower shop owner Carlos Perez, 47, fear a vote for Vox could take the country back to the days of Francisco Franco’s dictatorship: “We would go back to a rural, bad, backward Spain... when a dictator was here giving orders and doing what he pleased.”

But Abascal points to the success in office of Italy’s Prime Minister Giorgia Meloni, whom he says proved the far-right have “neither horns, nor tail nor do we bite”.

The far-right governs alone in Hungary and in coalition with the centre-right in Italy and Finland.

A rightwards shift is also expected in June 2024 elections for the European Parliament, with implications for climate policies, social rights or migration.

Abascal has attended and hosted summits with France’s Marine Le Pen, Hungarian Prime Minister Viktor Orban and Italy’s Meloni, who on July 13 appeared via video link at a rally in Valencia encouraging Vox to have a “a leading and decisive role” in the next government.

## UK Relaxes Visa Rules To Attract Foreign Construction Workers



LONDON (Dispatches) - Britain has added a number of construction roles to its “shortage occupation list”, allowing the building industry to bring in staff from abroad more easily to help employers struggling to fill positions.

Bricklayers, masons, roofers, roof tilers, slaters, carpenters, joiners and plasterers will benefit from cheaper visas and more relaxed employment criteria under the changes.

Britain is suffering from acute labour shortages in some sectors meaning employers are keen to recruit workers from abroad.

But, doing so causes a political headache for Prime Minister Rishi Sunak’s governing Conservative Party, which has been promising to cut net migration for the last decade.

The interior ministry said in a statement on Monday that adding the new roles would “aid the delivery of key national infrastructure and stimulate growth for related industries”.

The independent Migration Advisory Committee recommended in March that the construction jobs be added to the shortage occupation list. The list already includes care workers, civil engineers and laboratory technicians, plus healthcare roles.

Net migration to Britain reached a record high of 606,000 last year, data published in May showed, drawing fresh promises from Sunak to reduce arrivals.

Critics of Brexit say the UK’s exit from the European Union has exacerbated labour shortages as EU citizens can no longer travel without visas to work in Britain as they could before.

Those working in a shortage occupation can be paid 80% of the job’s usual rate and still qualify for a visa, the government statement said. Applicants need a job offer from an employer and must meet an English language requirement.

## Iran Appreciates UNODC-Japan Support For Fight Against Drugs



TEHRAN (MNA) - The Iranian anti-narcotics police appreciate the Government of Japan and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) for their support in dealing with narcotics.

The international community’s support for the anti-narcotics police is very little against the massive amount of drug threats, Nosratollah Barin, the deputy chief of the anti-narcotics police, said.

He made the remarks in a meeting with Aikawa Kazutoshi, the Japanese ambassador, and Alexander Fedulov, the UNODC representative, in Tehran on Tuesday, ISNA reported.

On the sidelines of the meeting, drug detection equipment provided by UNODC and Japan was delivered to the Iranian police.

The provision of modern drug detection equipment to the country is crucial since Iran is at the forefront of the fight against drugs, Barin stressed.

The Japanese envoy, for his part, said that the fight against narcotics and drug trafficking is a global issue that demands the widespread contribution of all countries.

He went on to say, “Japan praises Iran’s efforts in this regard and continuously supports its fight against illegal drugs.”

The UNODC official also praised Iran’s notable achievements and measures in the fight against drugs. He pointed out that being equipped with technical assistance and drug-sniffing dogs, the anti-narcotics police will be able to play a key role in the global community’s health.

Iran is known as the first station and the front line of dealing with all kinds of drugs due to its location on the European transit route of Afghan drugs.

The fight against narcotics is very expensive due to the complexity of the mafia level of this business, a cost that the Islamic Republic of Iran has been paying alone for years despite the support claims of the international community.

## Iran Full SCO...

FROM PAGE 1

At the end of the 23rd virtual summit of the SCO Council of Heads of States on July 4, Iran gained full membership of the world’s largest regional organization in terms of geographic scope and population. Iran’s national flag was raised at the bloc’s Secretariat compound in Beijing on July 5.

Iran and the organization started a formal process for Tehran’s accession to the bloc in March 2022. In September of the same year, Iran signed a memorandum of commitment to join the SCO. A month later, the Iranian parliament approved the country’s accession to the organization.

Amirabdollahian pointed to the outcomes of Iran’s accession to the SCO and said Iran will enjoy all the facilities available to the Shanghai Cooperation Organization member states in the economic and commercial domains.

The chief Iranian diplomat, however, emphasized that the SCO is not just an organization that focuses only on economic issues, but it also includes cooperation in the fields of security, culture, military, anti-terror fight, science and technology.

Pointing to Iran’s potential accession to the BRICS, Amirabdollahian said Iranian President Ebrahim Raisi has been officially invited to take part in the powerful bloc’s 15th summit in South Africa from 22–24 August 2023.

He added that Iran’s potential membership in the five-state bloc would provide the country with an opportunity to make use of great capacities from Africa to Asia, Latin America and other countries.

Iran’s membership in BRICS, regardless of laying the groundwork for the flourishing of trade, can be a field to test the ways to deal with the hegemony of the US dollar.

BRICS is comprised of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The group’s members host around half of the world’s population besides representing one-fifth of the global economy.

Iran is among more than a dozen countries that seek membership in the bloc and has submitted a formal application to join the body. The Islamic Republic has described its objectives as in alignment with those of the BRICS countries.

“The world today is not a world of unilateralism. A new international order is shaping in the world. One of the features of this new order is the countries’ focus and attempts to move from unilateralism to multilateralism,” the Iranian foreign minister said.

“Nothing can hinder development of Iran-Egypt cooperation”

Amirabdollahian also pointed to numerous commonalities between Iran and Egypt, saying the two countries are drawing up plans to improve relations.

“We set no limitation to the expansion of all-out cooperation with Egypt,” he stated.

He then pointed out that both sides have already sent their ambassadors to their respective capitals and started security talks.

Egypt severed its diplomatic relations with Iran in 1980 after it welcomed the deposed Pahlavi ruler of Iran and also recognized the apartheid Israeli regime.

Elsewhere in his wide-ranging interview, the minister said Iran would continue the path of negotiations with the United States and European countries but would never cross its red lines.

Amirabdollahian added that Iran is making efforts to tackle the impacts of unilateral US sanctions.

Despite the sanctions, he noted, Iran succeeded in increasing the value of its trade exchanges with its neighbors to more than \$90 billion.

Tehran has also raised its economic exchanges with European countries in spite of certain political challenges, he said.

Amirabdollahian added that Iran has maintained its ties with Britain, Germany and France – the three European parties to the 2015 nuclear deal – but argued that Europe is not confined only to these three countries.

“There are other large sectors in Europe that we interact with without any challenge,” the Iranian minister said.

Amirabdollahian also said any development in Afghanistan can have impacts on Iran’s security, given 900 kilometers of common border.

“Any instability in Afghanistan has a direct impact on our border areas,” he said, describing the massive influx of Afghan refugees into Iran as one of the Islamic Republic’s “serious” challenges.

He warned of the spread of terrorism in Afghanistan and said, “We have explicitly announced that no group in Afghanistan has been able so far to run a stable political system without the participation of all ethnic groups. Therefore the formation of an inclusive government is a necessity.”

Iran does not recognize the Taliban in the absence of an inclusive Afghan government, the minister asserted.

The Iranian foreign minister says Tehran will never tolerate any intervention in matters relating to its territorial integrity.

Amirabdollahian also reiterated Tehran’s firm determination to safeguard the country’s national interests and independence following a joint statement issued last week by the Persian Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) and Russia that challenged Iran’s sovereignty over the three Persian Gulf islands of Abu Musa, the Greater and Lesser Tunbs.

The minister said Iran would maintain its relations with countries while pursuing its “Look to Asia” policy, but hastened to add that the Islamic Republic “will never allow Russia or China to think that they are our only choices.”

Iran interacts with Russia and China based on its own interests and would never let them harm the Islamic Republic’s independence, national sovereignty and territorial integrity, Amirabdollahian said. In their statement, the GCC and Russian ministers said the issue of the three Persian Gulf islands should be settled through bilateral negotiations or the International Court of Justice, in accordance with the rules of international law and the United Nations Charter.

## U.S. Letting Baghdad...

FROM PAGE 1

“We have to help the Iraqis with this perennial pressure from the Iranians to access the money,” stated the U.S. official.

“The Iraqis have requested, and now we have agreed, to expand the waiver,” said the official, adding this might help ensure better compliance with the US requirement that any disbursements be for humanitarian purposes.

“It also helps the Iraqis, at least somewhat, to have an argument to make (to Iran) that they are not in control of the money that they have paid (into non-Iraqi accounts),” he continued.

Iran is under extensive US economic sanctions reimposed in 2018 after then-U.S. President Donald Trump abandoned

the nuclear deal that Tehran struck with major powers Britain, China, France, Germany, Russia and the United States in 2015.

Iraq has paid some of its debts over the years, but U.S. sanctions and economic troubles in the Arab country have made the transfer of money much slower than Iran expected.

## Vingegaard Pulverizes Pogacar in Tour de France

PARIS (Dispatches) - Jonas Vingegaard soared to a crushing triumph on stage 16 of the Tour de France, winning the 22.4km time trial by 1min 38sec from Tadej Pogacar, who was second.

Jumbo Visma rider Vingegaard attacked from start to finish with a win that extended his overall lead in the Tour de France to 1min 48sec over Team UAE rider Pogacar. Vingegaard went down the start ramp two minute after Pogacar. The Dane said his heart leapt when he saw his rival's team car ahead of him.

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## Fofana Heads for Saudi Club Al-Nassr

LILLE (Dispatches) - Lens captain Seko Fofana confirmed he has accepted an offer to join Al-Nassr, the Saudi Arabian club where Cristiano Ronaldo plays.

"I leave you with the feeling of accomplishment and pride at being a part of this history which is ours," Fofana, 28, wrote in a farewell video posted on Instagram.

The Ivorian international midfielder played 112 times for the northern French outfit scoring 21 goals in three years.

# Cavaliers Win Title, Cam Whitmore Silences Critics

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - The first three days of the NBA Summer League in Las Vegas were sold out as fans from all 30 teams packed UNLV's Thomas & Mack Center to watch the rookies and upcoming stars hit the league. There were 140,000 fans in attendance during the 11-day tournament, and the Cleveland Cavaliers took home the championship after defeating the Houston Rockets, 99-78. The No. 1 pick in the draft, 7-foot-4 Victor Wembanyama, played only two games with his second game superseding his debut. Rockets guard Cam Whitmore earned MVP honors, silencing critics after falling to the No. 20 pick in the NBA Draft on June 22.

There were strong performances from rookies and a few second-year players who showed out, as well as disappointing showings from established teams and a couple of teams looking to rebuild. Here's a look at the winners and losers of the 2023 NBA Summer League:

The Cavaliers are the top winners of Summer League, taking home their first title since a tournament format was implemented in 2013. Second-year forward Isaiah Mobley was named the MVP of the final and finished with 28 points (12-for-20 from the field), 11 rebounds and three assists. Mobley is the older brother of Cavs center Evan Mobley and was the 49th pick in the 2022 draft. The 6-8 forward had an incredible tournament and led Cleveland in the closing minutes against Brooklyn to make the championship game, netting 27 points and adding seven rebounds, five assists and two blocks. Mobley had a little something extra to prove after being snubbed for Summer League All-Tournament honors.

Mobley's two teammates, however, were selected to the All-Summer League teams, with Sam Merrill taking first-team honors and Emoni Bates named to the second team. Merrill, a former Utah State guard, was the best shooter on the court all tournament long, tallying 25 3-pointers (the highest for any player since 2017). He finished with 27 points (6-for-12 from 3-point range) and added four rebounds and two assists in the title game.

Bates was the 49th pick in the 2023 draft and looked incredible after a disappointing



college career at Memphis and Eastern Michigan. He shot the 3-ball well, defended the perimeter, chased down blocks and made some great passes. Bates averaged 18.1 points and 5.5 rebounds per game, with his best performance coming in a win over the Memphis Grizzlies where he had 21 points (including five 3s), and he scored in double digits every game he played in Vegas.

The Rockets came up short in the championship, but the organization looks to be heading in the right direction after what fans saw from second-year forward Jabari Smith Jr. and Houston's two first-round picks from this year, Amen Thompson and Whitmore.

Whitmore was considered a top-five talent all college season during his one year at Villanova and dropped to No. 20 on draft night, reportedly because teams had concerns about his medical report during the pre-draft process.

"I don't know what happened," Whitmore told reporters the day after he was drafted. "But I feel fine. It's my body. If they think it's something different, they have their own opinions. But at the end of the day, it's my body."

Whitmore set aside all question marks during Summer League, while averaging 19.3 points, 5.2 rebounds and 2.3 assists over six games.

Smith was the No. 3 pick in last year's draft and arguably the best player on the court in Houston's first two games. He hit the winner at the buzzer in the first game against the Portland Trail Blazers and led all players in the second game with 37 points, seven rebounds and six assists. He scored 71 points in two games on 49% shooting.



NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Former Spain international defender Jordi Alba will sign for Inter Miami and join up with former Barcelona team-mate Lionel Messi, with more new arrivals expected in the coming days, owner Jorge Mas said.

"Jordi Alba will sign today," Mas told a group of reporters after the team's training session.

Messi has already been joined by Spanish midfielder Sergio Busquets, another former Barcelona player, but the club are looking to add some youth to the squad which is struggling in last place in MLS.

Mas said that 20-year-old Paraguayan international defender Diego Gomez was set to join from Asuncion club Libertad.

Another young South American, 20-year-old Argentine midfielder Facundo Farias has a verbal agreement to join the club, said Mas.

The Miami owner added that talks are also underway with two young talents from the Argentine league -- Tomas Aviles, a central defender with Racing Club, and striker Brian Aguirre, of Newell's Old Boys.

## Australia Retain Warner For Fourth Ashes Test

LONDON (Dispatches) - David Warner has kept his place in Australia's XI for the fourth Ashes Test at Old Trafford despite the opener's ongoing struggles against England pacesman Stuart Broad.

But spinner Todd Murphy has been dropped for a match as Australia go into a Test without a frontline slow bowler for the first time in 11 years.

Australia captain Pat Cummins, bidding to lead the side to a first Ashes series win in England since 2001 at 2-1 up with two to play, said Tuesday that Warner would continue to open with Usman Khawaja.

Warner managed just five runs in total as he fell twice to Broad during England's three-wicket win in the third Test at Headingley.

Broad has now dismissed the left-hander 17 times in Tests and could equal the record for most dismissals by a bowler against a single batsman at this level -- held by Australia great Glenn McGrath, who claimed the wicket of former England captain Mike Atherton 19 times -- if he does another double over Warner in Manchester.

But Cummins said Warner's role in three partnerships over 50 had helped Ashes-holders Australia establish their series lead and backed the 36-year-old, averaging a meagre 23.5 after six innings, to return to form this week.

"Davey didn't have his best game last week at Headingley but prior to that, I think he's looked really good -- he's had three fifty-run partnerships which can be rare over here in England," Cummins told reporters at Old Trafford.

The fast bowler added: "We back Davey, absolutely. We know how tough it can be to open over here. He's doing all the right things, he's shown some great signs and I'm sure a big score is just around the corner."

Cummins also confirmed Josh Hazlewood would replace fellow seamer Scott Boland, who has taken just two wickets in two Tests at a hugely expensive average of 115.5.

Meanwhile, fit-again all-rounder Cameron Green will replace Murphy after the novice spinner bowled just 9.3 overs at Headingley following Nathan Lyon's tour-ending calf injury in the second Test at Lord's.



# Man Utd Set to Sign Onana From Inter Milan

The Cameroonian will reportedly sign a five-year deal at Old Trafford to become the successor to David De Gea as the club's number one goalkeeper.

United will pay an initial 51 million euros with a further four million euros due in performance-related add-ons.

De Gea left the Red Devils earlier this month after 12 years at United.

LONDON (Dispatches) - Manchester United are closing in on the signing of Inter Milan goalkeeper Andre Onana for a fee of £47 million (\$61 million, 55 million euros), multiple UK media outlets reported on Tuesday.

Onana, 27, played a major role in Inter's run to the Champions League final and previously worked with United manager Erik ten Hag at Ajax.

The Spaniard struggled with Ten Hag's preference to play out from the back and Onana appears a far more natural fit for the Dutch coach's philosophy.

Onana joined Barcelona as a 14-year-old after being spotted as Samuel Eto'o's academy in his homeland.

After failing to make the first team at the Camp Nou, Onana joined Ajax in 2015 and won three Eredivisie titles under Ten Hag in the Netherlands.

However, his career was temporarily rocked in 2021 by a doping ban for taking a banned diuretic. Onana claimed to have accidentally taken a drug prescribed to his wife and had a one-year ban reduced to nine months on appeal at the Court of Arbitration for Sport.

He joined Inter on a free transfer just over 12 months ago when his contract at Ajax expired.

Onana made only 24 Serie A appearances as he shared goalkeeping duties with Samir Handanovic in the Inter captain's final year at the club.

But he was an ever-present in the Champions League, keeping eight clean sheets in 13 games as Inter reached the final for the first time in 13 years.

## Rashford Signs New Five-Year Man Utd Deal

MANCHESTER (Dispatches) - Marcus Rashford has signed a new five-year contract at Manchester United, the English football giants announced.

The 25-year-old England forward, whose existing deal was due to expire next year, rose through the Old Trafford youth set-up and has scored 123 goals in 359 first-team appearances.

"I joined Manchester United as a seven-year-old boy with a dream," said Rashford in a club statement.

"That same passion, pride and determination to succeed still drives me every time I have the honour of wearing the shirt.

"I've already had some amazing experiences at this incredible club, but there is still a lot more to achieve and I remain relentlessly determined to win more trophies in the years ahead."

He added: "As a United fan all my life, I know the responsibility that comes with representing this badge and feel the highs and lows as much as anyone.

"I can assure you that I will give everything to help the team reach the level we are capable of and I can feel the same determination around the dressing room.

"I couldn't be more excited for the future under this manager."

Rashford broke the 30-goal barrier for the first time in his United career last season under Erik ten Hag as the club lifted the League Cup to end a six-year trophy drought.

Manchester United football director John Murtough said of Rashford's new deal, which expires on June 30, 2028: "Ever since he joined our academy 18 years ago, Marcus has epitomised what it takes to succeed as a Manchester United player.

"He is a brilliant talent but also humble, dedicated and driven.



## Bayern Sign Defender Kim Min-jae From Napoli

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Bayern Munich signed South Korean defender Kim Min-jae from Italian champions Napoli.

Bayern said the 26-year-old was joining on a five-year contract but did not give the transfer fee.

Kim joined Napoli last summer and anchored the defence as they won Serie A. "It's a new beginning for me," Kim told the Bayern website. "My first goal is to play a lot of games. In addition, I want to win as many trophies as possible."

He also posted a farewell to Napoli, and departing coach Luciano Spalletti, on Instagram. "To my passionate club Napoli, Mister Spalletti, my team mates, and above all to Napoli fans, I would like to express my gratitude."

Kim has 49 international caps and played in China and then for Fenerbahce in Turkey before joining Napoli.

"He impresses with his physical presence, as well as his mentality and speed," said Jan-Christian Dreesen, the Bayern CEO.

Bayern also unveiled Austrian Christoph Freund as sporting director.

Freund, 46, will join at the end of the summer transfer window from Austrian champions Red Bull Salzburg where he spent eight years.

He replaces Hasan Salihamidzic, the club's former player who was sacked in May along with former chairman Oliver Kahn after a relatively disappointing season for Bayern.

Salihamidzic and Kahn took the gamble of parting company with coach Julian Nagelsmann at the end of March, a gamble that did not entirely work.

The club won the Bundesliga as Borussia Dortmund slipped up on the last day of the season but went out in the quarter-finals of both the Champions League and German Cup.

