

Iran's Top Human Rights Official Says Paris Must Swiftly Release Iranian Musician and Filmmaker Bashir Biazar, Illegally Arrested and Imprisoned in France for Speaking Out Against Israel's War on Gaza

IRAN NEWS

Iranian MPs Have Roundly Denounced the Canadian Government's Decision to Blacklist the Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC), Demanding a Countermeasure Against the North American Country's Armed Forces

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Iran, Bahrain Move to Open New Chapter in Bilateral Ties



TEHRAN - In a significant development signaling growing regional convergence, Iran and Bahrain are set to reconcile and restore diplomatic ties after a hiatus of eight years. In a joint statement on Sunday, the foreign ministries of both countries highlighted the deep-rooted historical, fraternal, religious, and geographical ties between Iran and Bahrain. The statement followed a meeting between Bahraini Foreign Minister Abdullatif bin Rashid Al Zayani and Iran's acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani on the sidelines of the 19th Ministerial Meeting of the Asia Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) in Tehran. The two diplomats engaged in detailed discussions to lay the groundwork for future dialogues aimed at fully restoring political relations between the two Persian Gulf countries. The 19th ACD Ministerial Meeting, held on Monday, saw participation from 30 international delegations, with an emphasis on the importance of enhanced cooperation and convergence. Bahrain severed its diplomatic ties with Iran following the escalation of tensions between Tehran and Riyadh in 2016 over the execution of a prominent Shiite cleric Sheikh Baqir Nimr in Saudi Arabia. Bahrain was among several Persian Gulf states that sided with Riyadh and cut ties with Iran. However, after the restoration of ties between Iran and Saudi Arabia following marathon negotiations mediated by Iraq, Oman and China in March last year, many Persian Gulf countries followed suit and extended an olive branch to the Islamic Republic of Iran.

According to regional observers, late Iranian president Ebrahim Raisi's neighborhood-friendly foreign policy and East-centric focus were instrumental in this convergence between Persian Gulf states.

Before Bahrain, countries such as Kuwait, Sudan, Egypt as well as the UAE and Jordan had restored ties with Iran.

In a televised interview two weeks ago, Mohammad Jamshidi, the deputy chief of staff for political affairs of the Iranian president, confirmed reports about Bahrain's move to restore ties with Iran.

He revealed that Bahrain had conveyed a message through Russia to Iran, expressing a desire to normalize relations after a hiatus of over eight years.

U.S. Interests Will Be Targeted If Israel Attacks Lebanon



BAGHDAD (Dispatches) - The secretary general of Iraq's Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq resistance group has warned Israel against waging a new war on Lebanon, emphasizing that the strategic interests of its main ally, the United States, in West Asia will be targeted in case of such military aggression. "If America continues to support the usurping Israeli regime, and the Zionist enemy expands its assaults on Lebanon and Hezbollah, Washington's interests in the region and Iraq will be in jeopardy," Qais al-Khazali said. The Asa'ib Ahl al-Haq chief stated that the occupying Israeli regime and its extremist right-wing administration led by prime minister Benjamin Netanyahu will not be of any benefit to the United States, apparently questioning Washington's full-fledged support for the Tel Aviv regime. Meanwhile, the speaker of Lebanon's parliament and chairman of the Amal Movement says his political party will stand by Hezbollah resistance movement if Israel wages a new war on Lebanon. "We are fighting on the Lebanese soil. We are fully prepared and will join forces with Hezbollah if an Israeli ground invasion breaks out," Nabih Berri noted. He voiced his deep concern over developments in southern Lebanon and the escalation of tensions between Beirut and the Tel Aviv regime, saying, "The next month will be decisive for us." "I am very worried that the situation would spiral out of control. We are in a sensitive and complicated stage, and the status quo is not reassuring." I met with US President Joe Biden's Mideast envoy, Amos Hochstein, and was expecting his response following his trip to Tel Aviv. This, however, did not happen and cast doubts on the sincerity of the American initiative [to defuse tensions between Israel and Hezbollah]," the senior Lebanese lawmaker said. According to Berri, Hochstein had suggested that Hezbollah should withdraw eight kilometers from the border in order to calm the situation. "In return, I said it is the Israeli army that should take the measure," he underlined.

IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK



TEHRAN - Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei says a high voter turnout in the upcoming presidential election makes Iran proud and helps the Islamic Republic overcome its enemies.

The Leader made the remarks on Tuesday in an address to thousands of Iranians from the provinces of Tehran, Gilan, Kohgiluyeh and Boyer-Ahmad, Markazi and North Khorasan on the occasion of Eid al-Ghadir and ahead of the Friday presidential election. The Iranian nation is to face a test, Ayatollah Khamenei said, referring to the June 28 presidential election. Iranians will go to the polls on Friday to elect the next president from among the six candidates vying to replace the late President Ebrahim Raisi. "Elections are always a test, but now [they are] more [important] than ever," the Leader added. Ayatollah Khamenei also expressed hope that the election will be a source of pride for the Iranian nation through their "maximum participation" and choosing "the most qualified" candidate. "One of the factors that enable the Islamic Republic to overcome its enemy is the election," Ayatollah Khamenei asserted. He further advised people to show a high voter turnout in the election to silence the country's ill-wishers, noting whenever participation was low it served as a tool for the enemies to reproach the Islamic establishment.

The Leader criticized the politicians who believe in reliance on world powers, saying they "think all the ways of progress pass through the US; No, it is not like that."

"The one who thinks that it is not possible to take steps without favors of the US, he

will not manage [the country] well," he emphasized.

Ayatollah Khamenei said that the most qualified candidate is the person who is capable of tapping into domestic opportunities and capacities, among them the country's young, educated generation.

"The Islamic Republic has shown that it can advance without relying on foreigners and it has done so."

The Leader said that he has always believed in interaction with the entire world, with one or two exceptions.

He further expounded that his call for not pinning hope on foreigners "does not translate into severing relations [with them], but it means national courage ... [and] national independence."

Ayatollah Khamenei stated: "One candidate who can use the country's opportunities and capacities is the best choice. The Islamic Republic has shown that it can advance without relying on foreigners and has advanced so far."

The leader added: "From the beginning, I have believed in interacting with the whole world, except for one or two exceptions. Anyone interested in a strong Iran should participate in the elections. Candidates should promise to their God that if they succeed, they do not get assistance from people who are far from the revolution's ideas. Whoever imagines that without the grace of the US it is not possible to make progress, he will not manage the administration well."

Gaza Is Most Important Topic of ACD FMs Meeting

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Acting Foreign Minister Ali Bagheri Kani has said that in the statement of the meeting of foreign ministers of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue (ACD) the most important topic is the association and empathy of the ACD members with the people of Gaza who are in a very difficult situation.

In a joint press conference with the Secretary General of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum, Boranchai Danvivatana, which was held after the meeting of foreign ministers of this forum with the presence of 41 foreign delegations in Tehran, Bagheri Kani stated that in the circumstances that the Islamic Republic Iran is on the eve of the biggest event of this year, which is the presidential election, the meeting of foreign ministers of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum from 41 countries is being held in Tehran.

He said that ministers and general secretaries of international organizations used the opportunity of the Tehran meeting and finalized frameworks for cooperation. "Today the ministers had documents to cooperate with each other and today's output is the final statement that sets the vision of this assembly for another year."

Bagheri Kani further stated that two documents, one of the regulations governing the activities of the Assembly Secretariat and the other of the regulations of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum, were also approved today.

He further said that regarding the regional and global developments and



existing challenges, the views of the member countries have been seen in the statement. "The most important topic of this statement is the association and empathy of the members of the assembly with the people of Gaza, who are in many difficult situations. The members expressed their disgust towards the crime of the Zionist regime and demanded a quick stop to the war in Gaza."

He stated that the member countries of the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum requested to send humanitarian aid to the people of Gaza, adding, "As the chairman of the summit, I feel it necessary to thank the maximum attendance of the member countries and the efforts of Mr. Secretary General and his colleagues. I hope that in the coming period, the efforts and actions of the

Secretary General of the Assembly and his colleagues will be able to improve the position of this Assembly in Asia and bring this mechanism forward in the field of international relations."

Bagheri Kani, meantime said the Asian Cooperation Dialogue Forum is one with the largest number of members among other mechanisms in Asia, and this provides a good opportunity for members to express different views.

He stated that "we had good relations with various countries" in the southern region, and stressed, "I thank Saudi Arabia for its efforts to promote bilateral relations and emphasize that there are many fields of cooperation between the two countries, and today in the meeting with the Deputy Foreign Minister of Saudi Arabia we have emphasized this issue on both sides."

Dialogue Is Only Practical Option to Revive JCPOA



TEHRAN - Amir Saeed Iravani, the ambassador and permanent representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations, in the meeting of the United Nations Security Council on the topic "Non-proliferation: Implementation of Security Council Resolution 2231 (2015)", emphasized: "The fundamental policy of the Islamic Republic of Iran in rejecting nuclear weapons, as well as its strong determination to use nuclear energy for peaceful purposes, remains unchanged. I also affirm Iran's firm commitment to dialogue and diplomacy." Iran's senior diplomat at the United Nations stated: "The JCPOA was a multilateral diplomatic achievement that was achieved with difficulty and effectively prevented an unnecessary crisis." He emphasized: "JCPOA remains the best option, it has no alternative, and its revival is really in the interest of all its members." Iran, for its part, has never turned its back on negotiations and has shown its sincere desire to resume talks to revive the JCPOA while announcing readiness to fully implement its obligations under the JCPOA when it is restored and accepted by the United States and all other parties to resume all their obligations in a timely, effective, complete and honest manner under the JCPOA and Resolution 2231. Such a matter requires their real political will, Iravani noted. He said: We also note the Secretary-General's recent report (S/2024/471), which accurately states that the United States has neither returned to the JCPOA nor lifted the unilateral sanctions reimposed after its illegal withdrawal on 8 May 2018 and urged participants, especially the United States to pursue dialogue and cooperation. However, the report continues to overlook the root causes of the current situation: the unilateral and unlawful US withdrawal from the JCPOA and the subsequent failure of the E3/EU to honor their commitments under the deal." He added: "We sincerely appreciate most Council members for reaffirming their resolute support for the restoration of the JCPOA and calling for its full implementation by all sides as the only viable course of action. However, the US, the UK, France, and Germany, again unsuccessfully attempted to shift onto Iran the blame for the JCPOA's current status."

Plans to Prevent the Smuggling of 5m Liters of Fuel



TEHRAN - Jalil Salari stated in a press conference: "The gasoline production and consumption plan for the year 1399 (2020-2021) was set to produce and consume 105 million liters, but due to COVID-19, production was 94 million liters and consumption dropped to about 75 million liters, creating an opportunity for gasoline exports for Iran." He added: "Gasoline consumption increased from 75 million liters per day in 1399 to 91 million liters in 1400, 104 million liters in 1401, and reached 111 million liters in 1402." The CEO of the National Iranian Oil Refining and Distribution Company (NIORDC) said: "Currently, daily gasoline consumption in the country is 118 million liters, and over the past three years, approximately 3 million fuel cards were issued annually, with an average annual increase of 5 million liters in gasoline production capacity." He continued: "We consume 205 million liters of petroleum products daily in the country, with an annual growth rate of 8%." Salari stated: "The daily consumption in the transportation sector is 118 million liters of gasoline and 65 million liters of diesel, with 31 million vehicles on the roads. These figures are inconsistent with any standard or criterion." He said: "Iranian vehicles are high consumers of both gasoline and diesel. Our gasoline vehicles consume an average of 12 liters per 100 kilometers, and our diesel vehicles consume 55 to 60 liters per 100 kilometers. Standardizing vehicles and removing old cars from the transportation cycle could halve these numbers."

IRAN NEWS



Iran's \$95m Investment in Azerbaijan Over 3 Months

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - Azamews reported on Saturday that Iran's foreign direct investment (FDI) in Azerbaijan reached \$94.8 million during the first quarter of 2024.

This figure, calculated based on data from the Central Bank of Azerbaijan, shows a 5.69% (or \$5.7

The report states that Iran's share of total foreign direct investment in Azerbaijan is 6.3%.

It's worth noting that Iran's direct investment in Azerbaijan amounted to \$395.9 million in 2023.

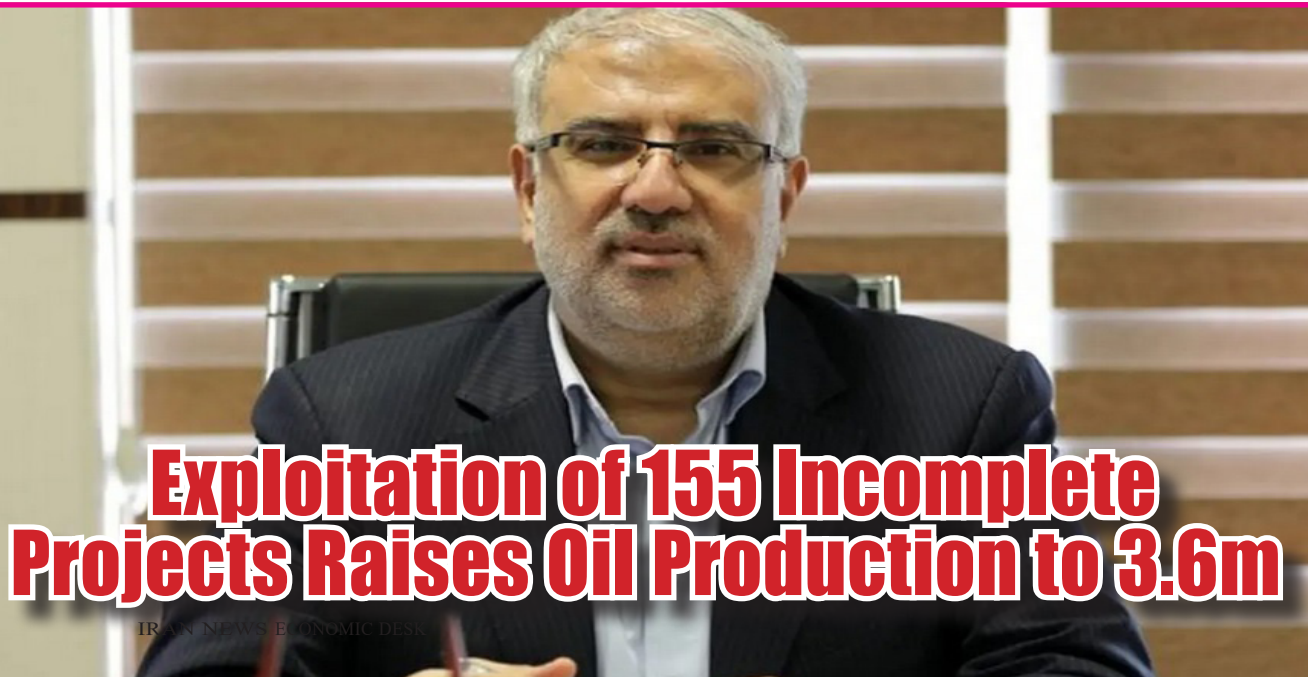
Foreign direct investment in Azerbaijan's economy last year totaled \$6.6 billion, marking a 6.1% growth.

Inflation Rate Reaches 36.1% in Month of Khordad



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Seyed Ehsan Khandouzi, in the open session of Majlis, during the reading of the performance report on the financial resources of Note "18" of the Budget Bill, concerning support for sustainable production and employment and national production growth, stated: "In September of last year, the Supreme Leader of the Islamic Revolution mentioned that significant work had been done in the economic sector under the thirteenth government, and several economic indicators show this growth." He added, "Not only domestic economic analysts but also international institutions have officially acknowledged the emergence of the macroeconomic effects of the policies of the past three years. For instance, in its May report, the Central Bank explicitly stated that 'Iran's economy has become resilient and sustainable in terms of growth,' despite all the geopolitical developments in the region." The Minister of Economic Affairs and Finance emphasized: "When the enemies of the Iranian government and nation admit that the paths to reforming growth and investment in Iran's economy have diverged from their previous course, it indicates that we have succeeded in revitalizing the economy that had been held hostage." Khandouzi, referring to the Central Bank's statistics over the past 30 years, said: "These statistics show that economic growth only surpassed the average growth of the Martyr Raisi administration during the eighth government; the average growth in the ninth government was 3.7%, in the tenth government 1%, in the eleventh government 2.6%, in the twelfth government 0.3%, and in the thirteenth government, over three years, economic growth has been 4.5%." Referring to the growth of foreign investment under the thirteenth government, he stated: "According to statistics from 2005 to 2008 until today, over the past 17 years, the highest amount of realized investment belonged to 2017, with less than \$2.8 billion in foreign investment. However, this record was broken in 2022, reaching \$4.1 billion, and in 2023, it transformed into \$5.5 billion in foreign investment."



Exploitation of 155 Incomplete Projects Raises Oil Production to 3.6m

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Oil Minister Javad Owji, during the inauguration of 17 major oil industry projects on Monday in the presence of acting President Mohammad Mokhber via videoconference, highlighted that at the beginning of the 13th administration, there were significant challenges such as reducing oil production to 2.1 million barrels, storing 87 million barrels of gas condensates, and 25 million barrels of heavy and ultra-heavy oil in tankers, a budget deficit of 4 trillion tomans, and high levels of demotivation among human resources in the oil industry. He stated that these issues were resolved through the efforts of oil industry employees, comprehensive support from the late President, and the backing of the First Vice President.

He mentioned that with the exploitation of 155 large and incomplete projects worth \$34 billion over three years of the 13th administration's activity, the country's oil production increased from 2.1 million barrels to 3.6 million barrels. Additionally, daily gas refining capacity increased by 53 million cubic meters, daily oil refining capacity by 270,000 barrels, and daily petrochemical production by 13 million tons.

The Minister reported the collection of 16 million cubic meters of associated gas over the past three years, stating that this amount will reach over 30 million cubic meters by the end of the year.

Owji noted the daily increase of 18 million liters in gasoline production and 9 million liters in diesel production over the past three years. He stated that in the past two years, due to increased production capacity, the oil industry achieved the highest economic growth (20%) among the country's executive bodies.

He announced that at the beginning of the 13th administration, the country's revenue from the sale of hydrocarbon products was \$30 billion, and by the end of 2023, this figure reached \$65 billion due to the efforts of oil industry employees. One reason for this success was reliance on domestic capabilities, increasing the number of Iranian knowledge-based companies collaborating with the oil industry from 150 to 700 companies.

The Minister described the development of phase 11 of the South Pars joint gas field as a milestone in the oil industry's performance over the past three years. This phase, after being transferred

among Western and Eastern companies for over 20 years, was finally completed by Iranian oil industry employees. Over the past three years, the Ministry of Oil signed more than \$23 billion in contracts for the development of joint and independent oil and gas fields and received approval from the government to sign \$36 billion worth of new energy optimization projects.

Owji also referred to three cyber and terrorist attacks on the oil and gas product distribution network over the past three years, noting that despite existing imbalances, the efforts of oil industry employees ensured that these issues never jeopardized the country's energy security.

The Minister of Oil, referring to the inauguration of 17 major upstream and downstream oil industry projects worth 1.8 quadrillion tomans in seven provinces with the presence of the acting President, said that these projects will create employment for 15,000 people and generate an annual profit of 1.2 quadrillion tomans for the country.

Owji noted that the exploitation of 17 major upstream and downstream oil industry projects will add more than 10,000 barrels of oil, 7.5 million liters of Euro 4 and 5 diesel, 3 million tons of petrochemical products, and 18 million barrels to the country's production and storage capacity.

He mentioned the daily movement of 17,000 oil tankers on the country's roads for transporting oil products, stating that today a 222-kilometer oil product pipeline project in the northeast of the country will be inaugurated, and this figure will reach 622 kilometers by the end of the year.

The Minister said that according to the promise made at the beginning of this year to the late President, by the end of this year, oil production capacity will increase from 3.6 million barrels to 4 million barrels. Additionally, gas production will increase by 34 million cubic meters, and the collection of flaring gas, which today reached 16 million cubic meters, will increase to 30 million cubic meters. Also, 15 petrochemical projects will be inaugurated by the end of this year, and with these plans, by 2024, the oil and gas sector's economic growth will be 15 to 20 percent and sustainable.

Talks Underway for Release of Iran's Blocked Assets in Bahrain



IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Negotiations between the Deputy for International Affairs of the Central Bank of Iran and the Deputy of the Central Bank of Bahrain have commenced with the aim of releasing the blocked assets of the Central Bank of the Islamic Republic of Iran and other Iranian banks in Bahrain. These discussions will continue until a resolution is reached.

According to IRNA, and based on a report from the Central Bank, these negotiations are a continuation of discussions held on the sidelines of the 50th Annual Meeting of the Islamic Development Bank in Riyadh with officials from the Central Bank of Bahrain. Fortunately, effective talks were held yesterday (Sunday, June 23) between the Deputy for International Affairs of the Central Bank of Iran and the Deputy of the Central Bank of Bahrain, ahead of the Bahraini Foreign Minister's visit to Tehran.

During these negotiations, both parties emphasized and agreed on the release of Iran's financial assets in Bahrain, which is to be conducted within a technical framework and based on mutual respect.

In this meeting, the Deputy for International Affairs of the Central Bank and the Deputy of the Central Bank of Bahrain also reviewed the causes and factors related to the issue, identified existing obstacles, and provided solutions to overcome these barriers. It is hoped that these efforts will soon yield positive results and good news will be announced.

The Deputy for International Affairs of the Central Bank and the Deputy of the Central Bank of Bahrain agreed that following the Bahraini Foreign Minister's political negotiations in Tehran, specialized discussions between the central banks of the two countries will continue. It was decided that these negotiations will be held in the coming days in either Tehran or Manama and will persist until a result is achieved.

According to this report, the legal actions route by the Central Bank of Iran in international courts remains available as per a resolution passed by the parliament a few months ago. However, both parties are hopeful that through negotiations and the provision of technical solutions, a desirable outcome will be reached more swiftly.

Launching Iran's First Offshore Rial With Russia



TEHRAN - The Central Bank Governor Mohammad Reza Farzin, speaking at the unveiling ceremony of the pilot implementation of the digital rial on Kish Island, stated that all evidence indicates Iran is among the top countries in electronic banking and has made significant progress in financial inclusion. He mentioned that today, the general public has access to electronic tools for banking services, thanks to the development of knowledge and IT in the country. He continued by noting that the share of cash in the liquidity pool has reached 1.3%, and people can easily access banking services through available cards. He recounted an instance where the head of a central bank from an Arab country expressed amazement when a rural vendor in Iran used a POS device to complete a transaction. The Central Bank Governor emphasized that the digital rial is essentially equivalent to cash and its issuance constitutes the monetary base. He mentioned that the Central Bank is also working on cryptocurrency initiatives and is pursuing the offshore rial project. Despite some delays due to interactions with foreign countries, the first offshore rial will soon be launched with Russia. Farzin noted that currently, 105 countries are engaged in digital currency research, with 16 countries in the proof-of-concept stage, moving towards pilot implementation. Iran is currently in the pilot phase and will soon enter the operational phase. Preparations for the implementation of the digital rial in Kish have been completed, with the necessary infrastructure already in place. He highlighted the benefits of the digital rial, stating that the primary advantage is that it facilitates the development of digital and electronic banking in the country. Since it operates on a blockchain platform, it allows for more accurate and easier collection of payment information. Furthermore, it enables direct money transfers to individual wallets, enhancing the precision of monetary policy operations. Importantly, the digital rial acts as a non-military defense mechanism. Another significant benefit is the reduction of the impact of sanctions, helping to mitigate their effects.

Increasing Strategic Storage Capacity by 8m Barrels



TEHRAN - Abouzar Sharifi announced on Monday during the inauguration ceremony of the Jask storage terminal and strategic Goreh tanks. The ceremony, attended via videoconference by Mohammad Mokhber, the acting president, Javad Owji, the Minister of Oil, and several other officials, highlighted that the construction of concrete storage tanks in Goreh began in 2002. This project, after many ups and downs, was left 70% incomplete in 2016.

Sharifi added that with the commencement of the Thirteenth Government and the emphasis of the President on value creation and the completion of unfinished projects, supported by the CEO of the National Iranian Oil Company, the project resumed in January 2023. With the relentless and devoted efforts of the Oil Engineering and Development Company employees, it was successfully completed and is now ready for operation.

The CEO of the Oil Engineering and Development Company stated that given Goreh's strategic location, these tanks, including four 500,000-barrel tanks and two 1-million-barrel tanks, were designed and constructed underground for the first time in the country, considering all passive defense measures. Sharifi also noted that alongside the operation of the Goreh storage tanks, the first oil storage tanks on the Makran coast were inaugurated today. The construction of oil storage tanks in Jask is a strategic project for developing the Makran coast, providing access to open waters and being adjacent to the Kuh Mobarak area. He continued by explaining that in the first phase of this project, which was carried out with the investment of the Omid Group, the construction of 20 floating metal tanks with a capacity of 500,000 barrels of light and heavy crude oil is underway. Today, 8 tanks with a capacity of 4 million barrels of oil were put into operation, and the remaining tanks will be operational by the end of the year.

FAO Predicts 20m Tons of Grain Production in Iran



FAO Predicts 20m Tons of Grain Production in Iran

TEHRAN - The United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) has predicted in its latest biannual report on the World Food Outlook that Iran's grain production in the current agricultural year will increase compared to the previous year, reaching 20.1 million tons.

Based on estimates from this international body, Iran produced 19.8 million tons of grain last year, making it the tenth-largest grain producer in Asia. China, as the largest grain producer in both Asia and the world, produced 577 million tons of grain that year. India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Turkey, Vietnam, Thailand, and the Philippines ranked second to ninth, respectively.

Saudi Arabia produced only 1.4 million tons of grain in 2023 but imported eight times that amount, equivalent to 11.8 million tons. Iran's grain imports for the same year were estimated at 14.9 million tons, which is less than its domestic production.

FAO statistics show that Iran has a very favorable position among Asian countries regarding grain reserves. Only China and India have more grain reserves than Iran. China's grain reserves this year were reported at 414 million tons, and India's at 65 million tons. Grain reserves for Iraq, Indonesia, Pakistan, and Saudi Arabia were calculated at 2 million tons, 8.6 million tons, 4.9 million tons, and 7.8 million tons, respectively.

Wheat is the most important grain produced in Iran, with FAO predicting that 13.5 million tons of wheat will be produced in the current agricultural year. Iran produced the same amount of wheat in the 2023 agricultural year and was recognized as the fifth-largest producer of this crop in Asia, following China, India, Pakistan, and Turkey. Approximately 4% of the total wheat produced in Asia that year was produced in Iran.

North Korea Resumes Sending Trash-Filled Balloons South

SEOUL (Dispatches) - North Korea has again taken to launching what appear to be trash-laden balloons south, according to South Korea's military. South Korea's Joint Chiefs of Staff yesterday said in a statement that North Korean balloons were moving in a southerly direction. The military said that North Korea's movements were being monitored due to the prevailing wind conditions, making it favourable for the launch of the balloons. South Korean residents were also urged not to touch the balloons and report any to the military or the police. Earlier this month, hundreds of trash and excrement filled balloons were floated over the border in what Pyongyang said was retaliation for balloons carrying anti-regime propaganda. Days later North Korean state media reported that the launching of balloons was being suspended, saying that they had been a "thorough countermeasure."



Macron Warns Far-Right, Hard-Left Policies Could Lead to Civil War



PARIS (Dispatches) - President Emmanuel Macron warned that the policies of his far-right and hard-left opponents could lead to "civil war", as France prepared for its most divisive election in decades.

French politics were plunged into turmoil by Macron calling snap legislative elections after his centrist party was trounced by the far-right National Rally (RN) in a European vote earlier this month.

Weekend polls suggested the RN would win 35-36 per cent in the first round on Sunday, ahead of a left-wing alliance on 27-29.5 per cent and Macron's centrists in third on 19.5-22 per cent.

A second round of voting will follow on July 7 in constituencies where no candidate takes more than 50 per cent in the first round.

Speaking on the podcast "Generation Do It Yourself", Macron, 46, denounced both the RN as well as the hard-left France Unbowed party.

He said the far-right "divides and pushes towards civil war", while the hard-left France Unbowed party, which is part of the New Popular Front alliance, proposes "a form of communitarianism", adding that "civil war follows on from that, too".

Reacting to Macron's comments, far-right leader Jordan Bardella told French news outlet M6: "A President of the Republic should not say that. I want to re-establish security for all French people."

Bardella, the RN's 28-year-old president, earlier yesterday said his party was ready to govern as he pledged to curb immigration and tackle cost-of-living issues.

"In three words: we are ready," Bardella told a news conference as he unveiled the RN's programme.

Bardella, credited with helping the RN clean up its extremist image, has urged voters to give the eurosceptic party an outright majority to allow it to implement its anti-immigration, law-and-order programme.

WikiLeaks Says Julian Assange Is Free, Has Left UK



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Julian Assange was released from prison and has left Britain, WikiLeaks said, as he reached a landmark plea deal with US authorities that brought an end to his years-long legal drama.

"Julian Assange is free," WikiLeaks wrote on X of its founder, who had been detained in Britain for five years as he fought extradition to the United States which sought to prosecute him for revealing military secrets.

He has agreed to plead guilty to a single count of conspiracy to obtain and disseminate national defence information, according to a document filed in court in the Northern Mariana Islands in the Pacific.

Assange is scheduled to appear in the US territory on Wednesday morning local time.

He is expected to be sentenced to 62 months in prison, with credit for the five years and two months he has served in prison in Britain. This means he could return to his native Australia.

The Australian government responded that Assange's case had "dragged on for too long" and there was "nothing to be gained by his continued incarceration."

The publisher, now aged 52, was wanted by Washington for publishing hundreds of thousands of secret US documents from 2010 as head of the whistleblowing website WikiLeaks.

During his ordeal Assange became a hero to free speech campaigners around the world and a villain to those who thought he endangered US national security and intelligence sources by revealing secrets.

US authorities wanted to put Assange on trial for divulging military secrets about the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan.

The plea bargain agreement will presumably end Assange's nearly 14-year legal drama.

Assange was indicted by a US federal grand jury in 2019 on 18 counts stemming from WikiLeaks' publication of a trove of national security documents.

WikiLeaks released a short video of Assange speaking with people in what appeared to be an office and then boarding a plane.

According to Thai officials, the plane carrying Assange was expected to refuel and resupply in Bangkok before carrying on to Saipan, capital of the Northern Mariana Islands.

Assange's family expressed deep gratitude for his freedom, including his mother Christine Assange who said in a statement carried by Australian media that she was "grateful that my son's ordeal is finally coming to an end."

His wife Stella meanwhile thanked campaigners, writing on social media platform X that "words cannot express our immense gratitude."

Israel Strikes Kill at Least 11 in Gaza

CAIRO (Dispatches) - Two Israeli air strikes targeting aid supplies killed at least 11 Palestinians in Gaza on Monday, medics said, as Israeli tanks pushed deeper into Rafah in the south and fought their way back into areas in the north they had already subdued months ago.

One strike at a food distribution centre in Gaza City, near the Shati historic refugee camp, killed three people. Another, near Bani Suhaila town in the southern Gaza Strip, killed at least eight, including guards who accompany aid trucks, the medics said.

There was no immediate comment from Israel, which denies attacking aid efforts and accuses militants of causing harm to civilians by operating among them.

Overnight, an Israeli air strike at a medical clinic in Gaza City killed the director of Gaza's Ambulance and Emergency Department, the enclave's health ministry said. Israel's military said that strike had killed a senior Hamas armed commander.

The health ministry said the killing of Hani al-Jaafarawi brought the number of medical staff killed by Israeli fire since Oct. 7 to 500. At least 300 others have so far been detained.

In a statement, the Israeli military said the strike targeted Mohammad Salah, who it said was responsible for developing Hamas weaponry.

More than eight months into the fighting, international mediation backed by the United States has so far failed to bring a ceasefire agreement. Hamas says any agreement must end the war, while Israel says it will agree only temporary pauses in fighting until Hamas is eradicated.



On Monday, Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu said he remained committed to a proposed ceasefire and hostage deal, announced by U.S. President Joe Biden in May.

"We are committed to the Israeli proposal that President Biden welcomed. Our position has not changed. The second thing, which does not contradict the first, we will not end the war until we eliminate Hamas," Netanyahu said in a speech to parliament.

In Rafah, near the border with Egypt, Israeli forces which had taken control of the eastern, southern and central parts of the city pursued their raid into the western and northern areas, said residents, describing heavy fighting.

On Sunday, residents had said Israeli tanks had advanced to the edge of the Mawasi displaced persons' camp in the northwest of Rafah, forcing many families to leave northward to Khan Younis and to Deir Al-Balah in central Gaza, the only city in the enclave where tanks have not yet invaded.

"The situation in Tel Al-Sultan, in western Rafah, remains very dangerous. Drones and Israeli snipers are hunting people who try to check on their houses, and tanks continue to take over areas overseeing Al-Mawasi further west," Bassam, a resident of Rafah, told Reuters via a chat app. The Israeli military said forces continued "intelligence-based targeted operations" in Rafah, locating weapons and rocket launchers and killing militants "who posed threats to them."

In the north of the enclave, where Israel had said its forces completed operations months ago, residents said tanks had pushed back into Gaza City's Zeitoun suburb and were pounding several areas there.

Trump Reviews Plan to Halt U.S. Military aid to Ukraine



WASHINGTON (Dispatches) - Two key advisers to Donald Trump have presented him with a plan to end Russia's war in Ukraine - if he wins the presidential election - that involves telling Ukraine it will only get more U.S. weapons if it enters into peace talks. The United States would at the same time warn Moscow that any refusal to negotiate would result in increased U.S. support for Ukraine, retired Lieutenant General Keith Kellogg, one of Trump's national security advisers, said in an interview. Under the plan drawn up by Kellogg and Fred Fleitz, who both served as chiefs of staff in Trump's National Security Council during his 2017-2021 presidency, there would be a ceasefire based on prevailing battle lines during peace talks. They have presented their strategy to Trump, and the former president responded favorably, Fleitz said. "I'm not claiming he agreed with it or agreed with every word of it, but we were pleased to get the feedback we did," he said. However, Trump spokesperson Steven Cheung said only statements made by Trump or authorized members of his campaign should be deemed official. The strategy outlined by Kellogg and Fleitz is the most detailed plan yet by associates of Trump, who has said he could quickly settle the war in Ukraine if he beats President Joe Biden in the Nov. 5 election, though he has not discussed specifics.

Russia Promises Retaliation Against U.S. for Ukraine Strike on Crimea



MOSCOW (Dispatches) - The Kremlin squarely blamed the United States for an attack on Crimea with U.S.-supplied ATACMS missiles that killed at least four people and injured 151, and Moscow formally warned the U.S. ambassador that retaliation would follow.

The war in Ukraine has deepened a crisis in relations between Russia and the West, and Russian officials have said the conflict is entering the most dangerous escalation to date.

But directly blaming the United States for an attack on Crimea - which Russia unilaterally annexed in 2014 although most of the world considers it part of

Ukraine - is a step further.

"You should ask my colleagues in Europe, and above all in Washington, the press secretaries, why their governments are killing Russian children," Kremlin spokesperson Dmitry Peskov told reporters.

At least two children were killed in the attack on Sevastopol on Sunday, according to Russian officials. People were shown running from a beach near Sevastopol and some of the injured being carried off on sun loungers. Kyiv did not comment on the attack but denies targeting civilians.

Russia said the United States had supplied the weapons, while the U.S. military had aimed them and provided data.

Russia's Foreign Ministry summoned U.S. Ambassador Lynne Tracy and told her Washington was "waging a hybrid war against Russia and has actually become a party to the conflict".

"Retaliatory measures will definitely follow," it said.

Tracy said Washington regretted any loss to civilian life, State Department spokesperson Matthew Miller told reporters, adding that Washington provided

weapons to Ukraine so it could defend its sovereign territory, including Crimea.

Pentagon spokesperson Major Charlie Dietz said that "Ukraine makes its own targeting decisions and conducts its own military operations."

A U.S. official later said that Ukraine was not targeting civilians. It seemed that the Russians were able to intercept an ATACMS missile that was targeting a missile launcher, and the ATACMS exploded with shrapnel raining down on the beach, the American official added.

President Vladimir Putin has repeatedly warned of the risk of a much broader war involving the world's biggest nuclear powers, though he has said Russia does not want a conflict with the U.S.-led NATO alliance.

U.S. President Joe Biden has ruled out sending U.S. troops to fight in Ukraine and said shortly after the 2022 full-scale Russian invasion that a direct confrontation between NATO and Russia would mean World War Three.

Putin presents the Ukraine war as part of a wider struggle with the U.S., which he says ignored Moscow's interests after the Soviet Union's 1991 break-up, then plotted to split Russia apart and seize its natural resources.



Brazil Frustrated by Costa Rica, Colombia Beat Paraguay

LOS ANGELES (Dispatches) - A lackluster Brazil launched their Copa America campaign with a dour 0-0 draw against Costa Rica on Monday as James Rodriguez inspired Colombia to a 2-1 win over Paraguay.

Brazil, chasing a 10th Copa America crown, dominated possession and territory in the Group D game at the SoFi Stadium in Los Angeles but struggled to break down a resolute Costa Rica. The Brazilians thought they had taken the lead in the 30th minute after Marquinhos tapped in at the back post after a flick on by Rodrygo following a free-kick by Raphinha.

But after an agonising VAR delay, the goal was chalked off for a fractional offside decision as Costa Rica escaped.

That was as good as it got for Brazil, who laboured to break down Costa Rica's defence for the remainder of the game, registering just three shots on target despite enjoying 73.5 percent possession. Costa Rica were content to sit back, defending in numbers and rarely venturing forward with any purpose. The Costa Ricans failed to have a single shot on goal for the entire game. Brazil coach Dorival Junior paid tribute to Costa Rica's defensive organisation. "They were very well organised from start to finish," he said. "They were dedicated in everything they did." Colombia finished the day top of Group D after collecting all three points in their deserved win over Paraguay at Houston's NRG Stadium. Rodriguez, whose club career has languished in the decade since he rose to prominence with a dazzling performance at the 2014 World Cup, created both of Colombia's goals.

The 32-year-old midfielder, who has played just a handful of minutes for Brazilian club Sao Paulo in the two months leading into the Copa America, set up the opening goal for Colombia in the 32nd minute. After finding space on the left, Rodriguez flighted a pinpoint cross to the far post to pick out Daniel Munoz, who beat Paraguay goalkeeper Rodrigo Morinigo with a firm downward header to make it 1-0. Ten minutes later Colombia doubled their lead and again it was a goal engineered by the trusty left boot of Rodriguez. This time the goal arrived from the opposite flank, with Rodriguez swinging in a wicked free-kick that was glanced in by Crystal Palace midfielder Jefferson Lerma. That made it 2-0 at half time to leave Colombia firmly on course to extend their unbeaten streak to 24 games. Colombia continued to carve out the better chances in the second half, but Paraguay set up a nervy finish after Brighton's Julio Enciso pulled one back in the 69th minute. Ramon Sosa crossed from the left and Enciso punished slack marking in the Colombia area to hook an angled first-time volley into the bottom corner past Camilo Vargas. Colombia however controlled play after the Paraguay goal and looked the more threatening team.

The Colombians thought they had earned a penalty in the 84th minute when another teasing Rodriguez cross into the box ended with defender Yerry Mina appearing to be hauled down by Gustavo Velazquez.

Argentinian referee Dario Herrera pointed to the spot but subsequently overturned the decision after a VAR review.

Paul Wins Queen's Club Championships



LONDON (Dispatches) - American fifth seed Tommy Paul won his first grasscourt title by beating Italy's Lorenzo Musetti 6-1 7-6(8) in the Queen's Club Championships.

The 27-year-old's third career crown will take him above Taylor Fritz in the ATP rankings, making him the highest-ranked American in men's singles.

Paul was dominant in the first set, landing three aces, while Musetti struggled with unforced errors. Paul also broke in the second set and served for the match with a 5-4 lead but Musetti broke back to take the set into a tiebreak.

Musetti, 22, put up a fight in the breaker, saving two match points and carved out a set point but Paul ultimately took the victory in the prolonged battle.

"I want to congratulate Lorenzo on a good week. He's been playing amazing tennis," Paul said. "I'm happy to get the win today. I'm happy to share the court with you. This is the perfect way to go to Wimbledon."

Paul, who reached the Wimbledon third round last year, will compete in the Grand Slam, which begins on July 1, for the fifth time.

Zaccagni's Last-Gasp Stunner Sends Italy Through to Last 16

BERLIN (Dispatches) - Mattia Zaccagni rescued Italy with a 98th-minute equalizer as the defending champions booked their spot in Euro 2024's last 16 on Monday with a 1-1 draw in a tense game against Croatia, whose tournament hopes are hanging by a thread. Luka Modric gave Croatia a 55th-minute lead, moments after missing a penalty, and that looked like sending them through before late substitute Zaccagni bent a stunning finish past the despairing dive of Dominik Livakovic into the far corner. The result left Italy, who next face Switzerland, second in Group B on four points, with Croatia third and waiting to see whether two points will be enough to take them through to the knockout stage as one of the best four third-placed sides. "We deserved to go through tonight in terms of what we produced out there," Italy coach Luciano Spalletti said. "It was hard to make it through this group. Spain are brilliant, Croatia are excellent." Spain, who topped the standings, beat Albania 1-0 to finish with a perfect record from



their three goals and leave the eliminated Albanians rock bottom with one point. Albania's loss also propelled sides not in action into the last 16 with England, France and the Netherlands now guaranteed to finish at least among the four best third-placed teams. Italy had been rocked with defeat by Spain, which could have been more emphatic than the 1-0 scoreline, yet if there was some solace for Spalletti's side heading into Monday's match it was that Croatia had been even less impressive at the finals. The Croats' 3-0 loss to Spain and 2-2 draw with Albania had left them on the precipice and one of the main issues that had dogged them at the tournament - how to turn possession into a goal threat - re-emerged in the first half against Italy. Croatia barely gave the Italians a kick for most of the first 20 minutes but it was not surprising that they only had Luka Sucic's long range pile-driver, which was parried over by Gianluigi Donnarumma, to show for their efforts. Italy looked far more purposeful with Mateo Retegui having a couple of half chances before Alessandro Bastoni had the best opportunity of the first half, meeting Nicolo Barella's lofted ball to the far post with a header saved by Dominik Livakovic.

Giron Beats Defending Champ at Eastbourne



LONDON (Dispatches) - Marcos Giron knocked out defending champion Francisco Cerundolo in first-round action at the Rothessay International in Eastbourne, England.

Giron edged the No. 5 seed from Argentina 7-6 (5), 7-6 (4) in one hour and 41 minutes. Giron lost only five points on his first serve and never faced a break point.

Chinese teen Shang Juncheng also scored an upset with a 7-5, 3-6, 7-6 (4) victory over No. 7 seed Tomas Martin Etcheverry of Argentina. The 19-year-old qualifier fired 38 winners, including 11 aces. Monday's other winners were Great Britain's Billy Harris and Australia's Max Purcell and Aleksandar Vukic.

Sixth-seeded Frenchman Gael Monfils earned a satisfying 6-3, 7-6 (3) win against Austria's Dominic Thiem in a first-round match in Mallorca, Spain.

Monfils, playing on grass for the first time since Wimbledon in 2021, had been 0-6 head-to-head against Thiem. He turned the tide by striking 13 aces, winning 89.7 percent of his first serves (35 of 39) and never facing a break point.

No. 5 seed Luciano Darderi of Italy defeated Spain's Pedro Martinez 7-5, 7-5. Italy's Fabio Fognini was a 7-6 (4), 7-6 (5) winner over Dutchman Gijs Brouwer. Australian Rinky Hijikata, Austrian Sebastian Ofner and Kazakhstan's Alexander Shevchenko also moved into the second round.

Meanwhile Jelena Ostapenko launched her bid for a second Eastbourne title with a gritty straight sets win over Greet Minnen in the first round of the Wimbledon warm-up event on Monday, while top seed Elena Rybakina withdrew from the tournament.

Latvian fifth seed Ostapenko, the 2021 Eastbourne champion, defeated the Belgian qualifier 7-6 (7/3), 6-1 in just under 90 minutes on court.

There was a worrying moment for Ostapenko, the 2017 French Open champion, when she fell on the grass midway through the second set but the world number 13 recovered to close out the win.

Ostapenko once won nine straight matches at Eastbourne, taking the 2021 title on England's south coast and reaching the 2022 final before her successful run was ended by Petra Kvitova.

Verstappen Beats Norris to Take Spanish Hat-Trick

BARCELONA (Dispatches) - Max Verstappen won the Spanish Formula One Grand Prix for the third year in a row while McLaren's pole-sitter Lando Norris rued a poor start that he said had cost him victory.

The hurt was evident after the Briton finished a mere 2.2 seconds behind Red Bull's triple world champion after 66 laps around Barcelona's Circuit de Catalunya on a hot and sunny afternoon.

"I should have won," said the disappointed driver, now Verstappen's closest challenger in a title 'battle' that still looks one-sided despite rivals catching up.

"Not could have. Should have won. I got a bad start. Simple as that. The car was incredible. We were the quickest and I lost it at the beginning. A lot of positives this weekend. One negative and that kind of ruined everything."

Well behind the top two, seven-times world champion Lewis Hamilton finished third for his first podium appearance of the season while Mercedes team mate George Russell was overtaken and ended up fourth.

Verstappen extended his championship lead to a hefty 69 points over Norris, who



also banked a bonus point for the fastest lap.

Ferrari's Charles Leclerc was fifth, after taking the chequered flag just 0.3 behind Russell and following a wheel-banging tussle on lap four with team mate Carlos Sainz, who finished sixth in front of his home crowd.

Leclerc said the clash damaged his front wing at a time when he was trying to manage the tyres and he would be having words with the Spaniard, who is making way for Hamilton at the end of the season.

"He is motivated to do something spectacular but I was probably not the right person to do that with," said the Monegasque.

Sainz also took issue with Hamilton after being forced wide by the Briton, but stewards saw no need for action.

McLaren's Oscar Piastri was seventh, Red Bull's Sergio Perez eighth on a three-stop strategy, with Pierre Gasly and Esteban Ocon taking the final points for Renault's underperforming Alpine team.