

The Spokesperson of the 2024 Hybrid Maritime Search, Rescue and Security Exercise Said That the Exercise Was Carried Out for the First Time in the Caspian Sea by the Islamic Republic of Iran Navy and All Maritime Organizations Active in the Caspian Sea

IRAN NEWS

A Large-Scale Naval Exercise, Codenamed the "Caspian Maritime Rescue, Relief and Security 2024", Got Underway in the Caspian Sea, Involving Military Forces From Iran and Russia, Iranian Navy Commander Captain Abbas Hassani said on Monday

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115% Increase in Industrial Exports in Last Three Years

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Iran's Export of Military Products, Services Tripled

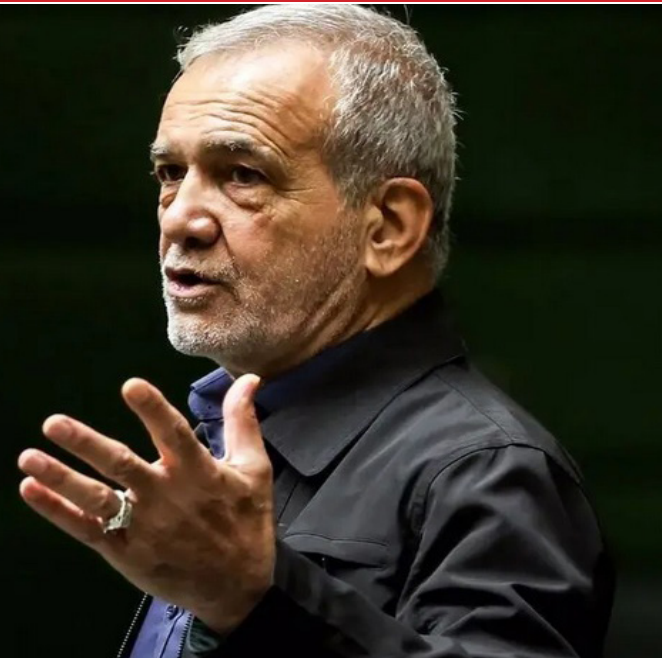


TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran's Defense Minister Brigadier General Mohammad Reza Ashtiani says the country's export of military products and services has been tripled over the past 33 months.

Ashtiani made the remarks in an address to a cabinet session as he elaborated on the defense achievements of the late President Ebrahim Raisi's administration over the past three years. In most performance indicators, he said, the country witnessed an "enormous increase" in the 33-month period. He added that Iran's production of weapons and defense equipment and systems as well as rendering services to the Armed Forces have been increased by 2.5 times. The defense chief noted that the successful launch of Simorgh (Phoenix) satellite carrier, simultaneous putting of three satellites into orbit, the launch of "Zoljanah" research satellite carrier, the launch of "Saman" orbital transmission system with a sub-orbital space probe, the design and manufacturing of Khorramshahr 4 and Abu Mahdi missiles and acquiring the capability of pinpointing missile products are among the country's defense and military achievements. He said the manufacturing of Khordad 15 surface-to-air missile (SAM) systems, the successful test of the domestically-manufactured Mersad and Arman defense systems, the design and manufacturing of Mohajer 10 strategic drone, the successful flight test of Simorgh transport aircraft for the first time, the successful flight test of Yasin training jet aircraft and completion and launch of Dana destroyer are among other Iran's defense accomplishments. Ashtiani added that the development of detection and identification systems and hitting low-altitude targets and cruise missiles were among other measures carried out by Iran's Defense Ministry. Iranian military experts and engineers have in recent years made remarkable breakthroughs in manufacturing a broad range of indigenous equipment, making the armed forces self-sufficient. Iranian officials have repeatedly underscored that the country will not hesitate to strengthen its military capabilities which are entirely meant for defense, and that Iran's defense capabilities will be never subjected to negotiations. Leader of the Islamic Revolution Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei has repeatedly called for efforts to maintain and boost Iran's defense capabilities.

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

President-Elect: We Must Understand the Language of the World



TEHRAN - The President-elect says "It's a mistake for some to think they can dictate to me. I have set criteria, and we will make decisions accordingly."

The President-elect, Masoud Pezeshkian, in a meeting with the heads of the Principlist campaign teams, said: "Your presence here is a blessing from God. During this period, all of you joined hands to bring people to the ballot boxes. I have repeatedly said that I came because I saw the system in danger."

The President-elect pointed out that in previous presidential elections, there was usually enthusiasm, and voters would bring others to the polling stations. He stated: "Unfortunately, this time, there were extensive efforts to prevent people from voting."

He added: "In the second round of parliamentary elections, only 8% participated. This low level of participation was very dangerous, and if it continued in the presidential elections, it would have put the entire system in question."

He emphasized: "In these circumstances, some told me, 'Why do you say you came to bring people to the polls?' It's as if I didn't come to be president. But I believed that if people came out, I would become president, so people had to come to the polls."

Pezeshkian noted that people did not vote for a narrow and totalitarian outlook. He said: "Given the situation, I could have not become president because some had a constant fixed vote. But, by God's grace, people came out and did not vote for them."

He added: "This group had a narrow, totalitarian view and only saw one group and one

fact. The result of this group's activities was the worsening of all the country's issues every day, and even revolutionaries who were committed to the system withdrew."

Pezeshkian stated: "When this group does not accept people like us, how do they intend to accept others? But the point is that if they are not present, the country cannot be governed because the reality is that the country cannot be governed by me alone, and this is quite clear. That's why I announced that you should write letters and gather people."

The President-elect, in the meeting with the heads of the Principlist campaign teams, said: "Do engineers, traders, industrialists, etc., belong to a single class? Do they have a specific goal for living? Unfortunately, we all just follow certain interests and do not care about the system. Our country has not reached this level of social development, and unfortunately, no party has achieved this goal. In these circumstances, they ask me why I am not partisan. I did not join any party because I saw that no party had a plan. Ideas and people must come together in a party and say if we come to power, for example, we will implement this education or health or foreign policy in this country."

Pezeshkian continued: "They say the problem is in the country's management. Were the people they brought to power managers, or did they even have the knowledge or skills? Certainly not. Which sector did they fix, and where is the utopia they talk about? I am straightforward, but are you what you claim to be?"

Gini Coefficient Falls to Lowest in a Decade



TEHRAN - The Governor of the Central Bank of Iran said that the country's economy experienced a 5% growth (based on market prices) in 2023, while the growth rate of liquidity, monetary base, and money supply returned to long-term trends with a downward trend, and consumer and producer inflation was controlled with a continued downward trend. Mohammadreza Farzin, at the 64th annual meeting of the Central Bank's General Assembly, stated: "The country's economy experienced a 5% growth (based on market prices) in 2023, while the growth rate of liquidity, monetary base, and money supply returned to long-term trends with a downward trend, and consumer and producer inflation was controlled with a continued downward trend. Additionally, based on preliminary data from the Central Bank, the Gini coefficient in 2023 reached 0.3614, the lowest in at least a decade. The management of the foreign exchange market was such that the lowest volatility in recent years was recorded in the foreign exchange market last year." Referring to the 5% economic growth in 2023, he said: "The real sector of the economy experienced a 4.5% growth based on base prices and a 5% growth at market prices in 2023; however, the economic growth at market prices provides a more comprehensive report of the growth of activities in various sectors. The economic growth based on base prices, excluding oil, reached 3.6%, which indicates the success of the government in implementing economic programs after a period of low growth. The average GDP growth from 2012 to 2020 was 0.5%."

Farzin added: "In 2023, the oil sector recorded a 14.7% growth, the industries and mining sector a 4.5% growth, the services sector a 3.8% growth, and the agriculture sector a 0.2% growth." He, referring to the World Bank report on the economic growth of regional countries in 2023, said: "The 5% economic growth of the country last year is the highest among regional countries, indicating that despite the shocks from military and security developments in the region, it achieved a suitable economic growth. This reflects the stability in the country's economic environment resulting from the implementation of stabilization policies in coordination with relevant organizations and institutions." Farzin emphasized: "Gross fixed capital formation grew by 7.2% last year. Final consumption expenditure of the private sector also recorded a 4.1% growth last year, indicating a good state of consumption of goods and services by the general population. Additionally, gross fixed capital formation in machinery and buildings grew by 7.9% and 7.1%, respectively, in 2023."

Iran Strategic Partner of BRICS States, Key SCO Member



TEHRAN - Iran's interim foreign minister says Tehran has been pursuing multilateralism in its foreign policy and managed to become a "strategic partner" in the BRICS group of emerging economies and an important member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).

Ali Bagheri Kani made the remarks in an address to a cabinet session as he elaborated on the foreign policy achievements of the late President Ebrahim Raisi's administration over the past three years.

He said the administration's "wise" policy of focusing on multilateralism led to Iran's full-fledged membership in the SCO, which is the biggest security and political mechanism.

During its 23rd virtual summit in July 2023, the SCO officially approved Iran's full-fledged membership in the world's largest regional organization in terms of geographic scope and population.

Iran officially became a member of the BRICS at the beginning of 2024, five months after it announced its acceptance as full member into the group along with Argentina, Egypt, Ethiopia, the United Arab Emirates and Saudi Arabia.

BRICS was formed by and initially consisted of Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, which collectively represent around 40% of the global population and a quarter of the world's gross domestic product (GDP).

Bagheri Kani said the Raisi administration adopted an approach in its foreign policy which was based on strategic diversity, which led to the development and growth of the country.

"We have practically witnessed that the country has never faced a deadlock during the past three years."

The top diplomat said Iran has played an active role in regional and international developments during President Raisi's three-year tenure.

Pointing to the policy of good neighborliness as one of a main pillar of the Raisi administration, he said Iran succeeded in improving relations with the neighboring and regional countries in a very short period of time.

Iran-China Dual-Load Train: An Opportunity to Strengthen Bilateral Cooperation



TEHRAN (IRNA) - The Deputy Ambassador of China in Iran stated that the inauguration of the Iran-China dual-load container train, connecting China to Central and Western Asia, creates a channel for the development of Tehran-Beijing cooperation and provides an opportunity for commercial, industrial, and cultural collaboration between the two countries.

Ms. Lihua Fu highlighted the launch of the Iran-China dual-load container train, emphasizing that the economies of Iran and China complement each other. The presidents of both countries have repeatedly stressed the importance of strengthening economic cooperation.

She mentioned that the two countries have been connected through the Silk Road for approximately 2,000 years, engaging in economic and trade exchanges. In recent years, Tehran and Beijing's cooperation under the framework of the "One Belt, One Road" initiative has yielded valuable results.

The Deputy Ambassador noted that the launch of the Iran-China dual-load train yesterday is another example of efforts to enhance bilateral cooperation.

She recalled that a few days ago, the third session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China was successfully held, with the reinforcement of open-door policies and cooperation with other countries being among its significant achievements. This presents a suitable opportunity for enhancing Iran-China cooperation, allowing both countries to exchange more goods and services under this framework.

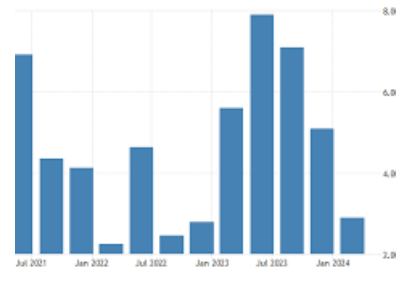
The Iran-China dual-load container train was inaugurated on Sunday in a ceremony attended by the CEO of the Islamic Republic of Iran Railways, the Ambassador of Kazakhstan, and the Chargé d'affaires of Turkmenistan. The ceremony, held at the Aprin Dry Port, also marked the opening of the first phase of the China-Iran-Europe railway corridor.

Yemen Vows Another Attack on Tel Aviv



SANAA (Dispatches) - The Yemeni Navy says it will target Tel Aviv once again in response to Israel's deadly airstrike on the Red Sea port of al-Hudaydah. "Our response to the Zionist aggression against Hudaydah port will be implemented in the near future by targeting Tel Aviv once again," Yemeni Navy spokesman Rafiq al-Jand said on Sunday, adding that the city has recently been included in Yemen's bank of targets. "The Yemeni Armed Forces have decided to gradually increase the scope of their operations against the occupiers due to the Zionist regime's continued assault on Gaza and massacre of innocent Palestinian citizens," he told the Palestinian news agency Quds News Network. On Saturday, Israeli warplanes targeted buildings, oil facilities, and a power station in Hudaydah, killing at least six people and injuring 83, many of them with severe burns. The Israeli raid came a day after the Yemeni forces fired a drone at Tel Aviv, which is at least 1,800 kilometers away from their country. Mohammed Abdulsalam, the spokesman for Yemen's Ansarullah movement, warned on Sunday that there would be "no red lines" in the Yemenis' response to Israel. "All sensitive institutions with all its levels will be a target for us," he told Qatar's Al Jazeera TV. In a post on his X account, Abdulsalam Jahaf, a member of Yemen's Shura Council, said, "The countdown has started." Additionally, Yemeni Brigadier General Abdul-Ghani al-Zubaidi said Washington had informed Sana'a through Muscat that the US is not seeking an escalation of tensions. Meanwhile, Israeli media reported that the regime's air and naval forces was on high alert for possible Yemeni reprisals.

IRAN NEWS



Average Economic Growth 14% During 13th Gov't

TEHRAN (ILNA) - Davood Manzoor stated in the cabinet meeting regarding the performance of the Planning and Budget Organization: The average number of employed individuals has increased by 1.5 million in this administration.

The head of the Planning and Budget Organization continued: The average economic growth in the 2010s was 2.1 percent, and in this administration, it is 4.4 percent. Our non-oil growth has been above 5 percent for the past three years. In the 2010s, we witnessed negative capital formation with a rate of minus 4.3 percent, but in the past three years, the average annual growth of capital formation has been 3.8 percent.

He said: From 2017 to 2021, 1,380 projects were completed, and in this administration, 2,000 projects and plans have been completed. The operational balance was negative 30 percent in 2020, and this figure has improved to negative 19 percent in 2023.

The head of the Planning and Budget Organization noted that at the beginning of the administration, the total principal and interest of debt securities amounted to 477 trillion tomans, which has now reached 870 trillion tomans.

Agro Products Witness Negative Trade Balance of \$11b



TEHRAN - A member of Iran's Chamber of Commerce said: "This negative trade balance of 11 billion dollars in imports and exports, which used to be 2 to 3 million dollars in previous years, should be considered a disaster." In a meeting of the board of representatives of Iran's Chamber of Commerce, Eshaq Bandani stated that the foundation of the global economy was agriculture before it shifted towards industry. He said: "The primary function of agriculture is food security. We currently have 4 million agricultural workers who make up 18% of the country's active workforce and produce 130 million tons of products, which means they produce 85% of the country's food. Additionally, they account for 13% of non-oil exports and generate 6 billion dollars in foreign currency." He added: "Currently, agriculture has a negative trade balance with 17 billion dollars in imports. This negative trade balance of 11 billion dollars in imports and exports is a disaster, considering it was 2 to 3 million dollars in previous years." Bandani also mentioned that self-sufficiency in the country's protein sector is at 87%, noting that efficiencies in the country are low, around 40 to 60%. He highlighted: "Dependence on imported goods has led us to a negative trade balance of 11 billion dollars, with 90% of oil, 50% of sugar, 80% of fertilizers, 90% of seeds, and 100% of feed additives, medicines, and pesticides being imported." Bandani expressed pessimism about overcoming these challenges, saying: "Water governance is currently negative, with 500,000 unauthorized wells being a major challenge, and water productivity in product production is only 1.4 to 1.5 cubic meters." He pointed out: "Another issue we face is land, where we do not have proper laws, leading to fragmented lands that prevent mechanized production and farming."

This Chamber of Commerce member identified the low share of fertile soil as another challenge, noting that the reason for this is the nutrient deficiency and the negative trend in investment.

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

115% Increase in Industrial Exports in Last Three Years

TEHRAN - The Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade announced a 115% increase in the value of industrial exports and a 56% growth in the value of the country's foreign trade during the 13th government. He added that the industrial issues system has been developed and will soon be published, providing a strategic analysis of the industry.

Abbas Aliabadi, in his report on the performance of the 13th government during the last meeting of the cabinet on Sunday, July 31, said that the actions taken by the Ministry of Industry, Mine, and Trade have been successful, and assessments show positive conditions that will reflect the impact of investments in the future.

The Minister of Industry continued: "We used to think of ourselves as a country rich in energy, while we should be utilizing the maximum advantages in energy. Therefore, we have moved towards a knowledge-based, export-oriented industry, shifting from exporting minerals and steel to focusing on added value."

He stated that to reduce energy intensity, investment in efficiency is crucial. He said: "We have pursued this strategy in the Ministry of Industry, focusing on engineering to maximize domestic production. We emphasized engineering and equipment that offers maximum added value, moving from assembly industries to knowledge-based industries."

Aliabadi emphasized that efforts have been made to direct capital

towards knowledge-based infrastructure.

Regarding currency allocation, he said: "By controlling currency expenditures, we broke the demand queues for foreign exchange and provided currency to those involved in strategic goods and increasing productivity."

The Minister of Industry highlighted the activation of inactive units, noting: "A positive development occurred in the small industries sector regarding inactive units, which was pursued by Martyr Ayatollah Raisi. At the beginning of the 13th government, 17% of industrial units were inactive, which has now reduced to less than 12%."

Aliabadi added: "4,627 inactive units have been revived. For example, the Arak Machine Tool Company, which was semi-active, increased its production from 300 to 600 units per year, transforming it into an active unit."

He also mentioned the increase in the capacity of 6,000 units in industrial parks, reflecting a 10% growth.

The Minister of Industry, Mine, and Trade further stated: "We have signed 15,765 investment contracts in industrial parks, which is a noteworthy investment, and the operationalization of 7,510 projects in these parks is a valuable action that contributes to the government's statistics and performance"

.9% Decrease in Unemployment Rate



TEHRAN - The Minister of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare announced that according to official statistics, the unemployment rate has decreased by 1.9% under the thirteenth administration, reaching 7.7%, a historic record in the country. Seyed Soulat Mortazavi, in the government cabinet meeting and during the performance report presentation of the thirteenth administration, stated: "The Ministry of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare is one of the very extensive ministries that has responsibilities and duties in all areas." He added: "In the field of entrepreneurship and employment, the president's honest promise has been fulfilled, and we achieved the creation of one million job opportunities annually. According to official statistics provided by domestic and international centers, the unemployment rate has decreased by 1.9% and has reached 7.7%, the lowest unemployment rate in the country." The Minister of Cooperatives, Labour, and Social Welfare stated: "The unemployment rate in 26 provinces is single-digit, and in many provinces, it has significantly decreased. In the field of technical and vocational training, we have had a 32% growth, and more than 2 million people have received technical and vocational training. The labor market needs were identified and training was provided accordingly. We also witnessed a 300% growth in workshop training centers in the thirteenth administration." Mortazavi said: "Three strategic plans - electronic voucher distribution, enhancing children's food security, and the subsidy for pregnant or nursing mothers (Yasna plan) - were implemented in the thirteenth administration. In the Fajraneh plan, electronic vouchers were distributed to 60 million people from the first seven deciles of society."

113 Planes Are Grounded



TEHRAN - The secretary of the Association of Airline Companies said that the deregulation of airfare rates has significantly reduced the influence of brokers and the black market in this sector.

Maqsood Asadi Samani, in a press conference, said regarding the deregulation of airfare rates: "Article 161 of the Fifth Development Plan Law required the government to deregulate airfare rates. In 2015, the deregulation was approved, and the Fifth Development Plan Law was implemented."

He added: "With the deregulation of airfare rates in 2015, about 17 million passengers were transported, which increased to 24 million by 2018. This showed the impact of deregulation on both passenger transport and ticket rates, resulting in a 20% growth in passenger transport."

The secretary of the Association of Airline Companies added: "Since 2018, due to currency fluctuations and imposed pricing, the number of transported passengers decreased, and currently, it stands at 18 million, reflecting the effects of imposed pricing."

He stated that the current market demand for domestic flights is 36 million passengers.

The secretary of the Association of Airline Companies said that many planes are grounded due to imposed pricing, with 113 planes currently not in service. He mentioned that if airlines received additional liquidity, these planes could re-enter service, facilitating an increase in passenger transport. An investment of \$500 million is needed to reintroduce these planes into the network. If imposed pricing was not in place, the number of grounded planes would be less, and the required \$500 million would not be necessary.

Samani continued: "Due to the government's insistence on imposed pricing, airline companies filed a complaint with the Administrative Justice Court, which ruled that the Market Regulation Headquarters cannot interfere in pricing."

He added: "Following the court's ruling, the Ministry of Roads and Urban Development requested the implementation of Article 91.

This matter was discussed in the court's specialized committee, and after necessary reviews, the court ruled that the request to implement Article 91 had no legal basis. The court's president then issued the ruling to deregulate airfare rates to the Ministry of Roads for execution."

He added: "Airline companies set their rates based on the equivalent of \$40 per hour per seat in local currency, and these rates are posted on the association's website for public access. Additionally, to control the rates, the Association of Airline Companies is tasked with monitoring and daily tracking these rates and reporting to the Aviation Organization. Any violations will be dealt with accordingly."

Samani continued: "Monitoring is done continuously. In the past 25 days, three different travel agencies and websites were identified for not adhering to the rates, and their sites were shut down by judicial order."

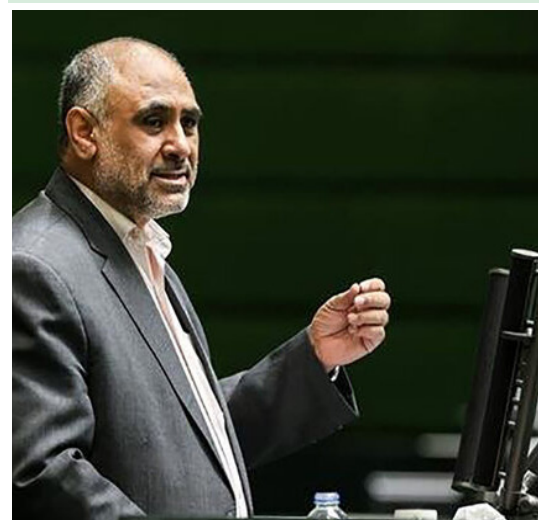
He said: "The companies are also responsible for controlling the rates. In the past 25 days, we saw an increase in ticket supply. Tickets are now abundant in the market, and prices have decreased, even by up to 50%. Deregulation has also led to an increase in quality."

He stated: "Banning charter flights, except for certain routes, was one of the measures that increased ticket supply."

He noted that airline companies are incurring losses on domestic flights due to imposed pricing. "If prices are real, airlines will stop incurring losses. We hope the new government will support the airline companies."

"This private sector representative noted that fuel costs are essentially the government's subsidy to the people. Each seat per hour consumes about 40 liters of fuel. The fuel cost included in the ticket price is 24,000 tomans. If fuel prices increase, ticket prices will also increase. The claim that companies receive cheap fuel and sell expensive tickets is a fallacy. Airlines do not receive fuel subsidies; this subsidy is for the people," he said.

Country's Essential Goods Reserves Sufficient for 5 Months



TEHRAN - Mohammad Ali Nikbakht, the Minister of Agriculture Jihad, during a session presenting the three-year performance report of his management area, said: Agricultural production in 2021 was about 110 million tons, which increased to 131 million tons in 2023.

He added: The thirteenth government has implemented five strategies to maximize production in various sectors while focusing on the preservation of water resources and the environment. The second strategy is to maintain consistency in agricultural production (reducing losses for producers and consumers). The third strategy aims at balancing production (aligning production with the share of each product or sector in the resources used). The fourth strategy focuses on export-oriented production to generate foreign exchange, develop investment and employment, and support production and producers. The fifth strategy emphasizes knowledge-based agriculture, enhancing efficiency, and utilizing knowledge-based companies, scientific institutions, and agricultural elites.

The Minister of Agriculture Jihad mentioned several indicators and statistics of the agricultural sector and said: In 2023, agricultural product exports increased by over \$1 billion compared to the previous year, due to the fourth strategy, improving the agricultural trade balance by more than \$2 billion. The growth rate of the agricultural sector's added value increased from -4.6% in the spring of 2023 to 0.6% positive in the winter of 2023, indicating an exit from recession and better conditions this year.

Nikbakht commented on the strategic product, wheat: In 2021, 4 million tons of wheat were purchased and about 7 million tons were imported. In 2023, about 10.3 million tons of wheat were purchased with imports of 1.8 million tons.



Iran Non-Oil Exports Hit \$13.5b in Q1

TEHRAN - Iran's exports of non-oil goods in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year (started March 21, 2024) reached \$13.5 billion, registering a 7.1 percent growth compared to the same period last year.

According to the statistics released by the Central Bank of Iran (CBI), the country's exports of oil and non-oil goods from March 21 to June 22, 2024, hit \$25.5 billion, showing an 18.6 percent increase compared to last year's corresponding period.

The value of non-oil exports in the first three months of the previous Iranian calendar year (March 21 to June 22, 2023) was \$12.6 billion, and it reached \$13.5 billion in the first three months of the current Iranian calendar year, indicating a 7.1 percent growth compared to the same period last year, the report added.

Iran imported \$14.3 billion of products in the first quarter of the current Iranian calendar year, showing a 1.4 percent increase compared to last year's corresponding period, Mehr news agency reported.

The balance of trade in the first three months of the previous and current Iranian calendar year reached \$7.4 billion and \$11.2 billion, respectively, indicating a 51.3 percent growth this year.

Thousands Protest in Spain's Mallorca Against Mass Tourism

PALMA DE MALLORCA (Dispatches) - Thousands of anti-tourism activists protested in Spain's Palma de Mallorca on Sunday in the latest demonstration against a key industry for the Iberian nation. Carrying makeshift models of planes and cruise ships, protesters walked through the streets of the capital of Mallorca with posters reading 'no to mass tourism' and 'stop private jets'. Anti-tourism activists have staged a series of protests this year in Barcelona, and other popular holiday destinations like Palma de Mallorca, Malaga and the Canary Islands, saying visitors drive up housing costs and lead to residents being unable to afford to live in city centres. About 10,000 protesters took part in the Mallorca demonstration on Sunday, police said. Some tourists supported the march while others appeared uncomfortable.



Fighting in Southern Gaza, Israeli Strikes Hit Central Areas



CAIRO (Dispatches) - Israeli forces battled Palestinian fighters in the southern Gaza city of Rafah on Sunday, striking areas in the centre of the coastal enclave where thousands of Palestinians displaced from their homes have been seeking shelter. Residents in Rafah, near the border with Egypt, said fierce battles, raged between Hamas-led fighters and Israeli forces, especially in the centre and in western areas where tanks had advanced in the previous two days. The armed wings of the Islamic Jihad and Hamas Islamist militant groups said fighters confronted Israeli forces with anti-tank rockets and mortar bombs. The Israeli military said its soldiers had killed a group of fighters who were moving towards them, and destroyed ammunition, tunnel shafts and infrastructure in Tel al-Sultan, in the eastern part of the city. A ceasefire effort led by Qatar and Egypt and backed by the United States has so far failed because of disagreements between the combatants, who blame each other for the impasse. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu on Sunday ordered a delegation charged with negotiating a hostage deal to be dispatched on Thursday, his office said. Netanyahu held a meeting on Sunday with the delegation and senior members of Israel's defence establishment, a statement said, without giving the delegation's destination.

Israeli strikes in the previous 24 hours killed at least 64 and wounded more than 100 others, the local health ministry said. At least 22 were killed by strikes on Sunday, according to the Hamas-run Gaza government media office.

Biden Ends Failing Re-Election Campaign, Backs Harris as Nominee



REHOBOTH BEACH (Dispatches) - U.S. President Joe Biden abandoned his reelection bid on Sunday under growing pressure from his fellow Democrats and endorsed Vice President Kamala Harris as the party's candidate to face Republican Donald Trump in the November election.

Biden, who at 81 is the oldest person ever to have occupied the Oval Office, said he would remain in the presidency until his term ended on Jan. 20, 2025, and would address the nation this week.

Biden, who has not been seen in public since testing positive for COVID-19 last week, was isolating at his home in Rehoboth Beach, Delaware.

"While it has been my intention to seek reelection, I believe it is in the best interest of my party and the country for me to stand down and to focus solely on fulfilling my duties as President for the remainder of my term," Biden wrote on X.

The move dramatically reshapes a White House contest that has been shaken repeatedly in the last month. Biden's disastrous June 27 debate performance drove his fellow Democrats to urge him to drop out. Then on July 13, a gunman attempted to assassinate former President Trump, 78. And last week Trump named hardline Republican U.S. Senator J.D. Vance, 39, to serve as his vice presidential running mate.

In opinion polls, Americans had expressed widespread dissatisfaction with a potential Biden-Trump rematch. Shortly after Biden's announcement, Trump told CNN: "Harris will be easier to beat than Joe Biden would have been."

Democratic National Committee Chair Jaime Harrison said the American people would soon hear from the party on next steps and the path forward for the nomination process. It was the first time in more than a half-century that an incumbent U.S. president gave up his party's nomination.

If Harris, 59, emerges as the nominee, she would become the first Black woman to lead a major-party ticket in U.S. history. A former attorney general of California and former U.S. senator, she ran unsuccessfully for president against Biden in 2020.

"My intention is to earn and win this nomination," Harris said in a statement. "I will do everything in my

power to unite the Democratic Party — and unite our nation — to defeat Donald Trump."

Harris campaign officials, allies and supporters have started making calls to secure the support of delegates for her nomination ahead of the Democratic National Convention in Chicago from Aug. 19-22, multiple sources said.

Democratic state party chairs held a Sunday afternoon call to discuss backing Harris as the party's nominee. Several participants said Harris has the full support of the chairs.

Opposition to Biden's campaign from within his party gained steam over the past week with 36 congressional Democrats - more than one in eight - publicly calling on him to drop out, driven by concerns over his mental acuity.

Lawmakers said they feared he could cost them not only the White House but also the chance to control either chamber of Congress next year, which would leave Democrats with no meaningful grasp on power in Washington.

That stood in sharp contrast to what played out in Milwaukee last week, when Republican convention delegates united around Trump, whose refusal to acknowledge his 2020 loss to Biden sparked a Jan. 6, 2021, assault on the U.S. Capitol.

It was unclear whether other senior Democrats would challenge Harris for the nomination - she was widely seen as the pick of many party officials - or whether the party itself would choose to open the field for nominations. Governor Gavin Newsom of California, who had been mentioned as a possible replacement for Biden at the top of the ticket, threw his support behind Harris.

Two other potential challengers, Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan and Governor Andy Beshear of Kentucky, issued statements praising Biden but did not mention the vice president.

Pennsylvania Governor Josh Shapiro and Transportation Secretary Pete Buttigieg on Sunday issued statements backing Harris' bid. Both are among a handful of Democrats seen as potential vice presidential material.

Bangladesh Court Scraps Most Job Quotas That Sparked Deadly Protests

DHAKA (Dispatches) - Bangladesh's Supreme Court scrapped most quotas on government jobs after nationwide action led by students spiralled into clashes that killed at least 139 people, but some organizers said the protests would continue. Dismissing a lower court order, the Supreme Court's Appellate Division directed that 93% of government jobs should be open to candidates on merit, Attorney General A.M. Amin Uddin told Reuters. Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina's government had scrapped the quota system in 2018, under which 56% of jobs were reserved for groups such as freedom fighters' families, women and people from underdeveloped districts. But the lower court reinstated it last month, sparking the protests and an ensuing clampdown that included an internet shutdown and a curfew with the army on the streets.

The recent clashes followed similar violent protests ahead of January's national elections by Hasina's opponents in response to what they called her authoritarian rule, and by garment workers demanding better pay amid high inflation. "Students have clearly said they are in no way part of the violence and arson that have taken place in Bangladesh since Monday," Amin Uddin said. "I am hoping normalcy will return after today's ruling and people with ulterior motives will stop instigating people," he added. Internet and text message services in Bangladesh have been suspended since Thursday, as security forces cracked down on protesters who defied a ban on public gatherings. At least four protest coordinators told BBC Bangla that they planned to continue their action until they secured the release of some detained student leaders and the restoration of internet and other cellular services. "The judgment of the Supreme Court seems unclear to us. There is no clear-cut solution for all types of quotas," said Abdul Quader, one of the coordinators. Soldiers have been patrolling the largely deserted streets of the capital Dhaka since the government ordered a curfew late on Friday. A tank was stationed outside the Supreme Court gates at the time of the hearing. Local media had reported scattered clashes earlier in the day between



protesters and security forces. At least 139 people have been killed so far, according to data from hospitals. The government on Saturday extended the curfew indefinitely, according to local media. Restrictions were eased for two hours on Sunday to allow people to shop for supplies. Tanvir Hasan, a grocer in Dhaka, said, "As curfew eased, people swarmed in like bees. We just had couple of very busy hours." The clashes have injured thousands across the country in recent days, as police used tear gas, rubber bullets and sound grenades to disperse protesters throwing bricks and setting fire to vehicles. Experts attribute the unrest to stagnant job growth in the private sector and high youth unemployment, making public sector jobs with regular wage hikes very attractive among the group who make up nearly a fifth of the population. Bangladesh also faces economic difficulties and secured a \$4.7 billion bailout from the International Monetary Fund in January last year after struggling to pay for energy imports, which cut into its dollar reserves and fanned inflation. Hasina, 76, who won power for a fourth straight term in January, has been credited with turning around Bangladesh's economy and its garment industry. But critics also accuse her of authoritarianism, human rights violations, crackdowns on free speech and suppression of dissent, charges her party denies. The Supreme Court directed the government to cut the job quotas for families of independence fighters to 5% from 30%, the attorney general said. The remaining 2% of jobs still subject to quotas are for people from so-called backward groups and the disabled, he added. There was no immediate reaction from groups affected by reduced quotas following Sunday's verdict. The court asked protesting students to return to classes and also asked the government to issue orders on the quotas. Many opposition leaders, activists and student protesters have been arrested in the current crackdown, said Tarique Rahman, the exiled acting chairman of the main opposition Bangladesh Nationalist Party. Police arrested Nahid Islam, a leading student coordinator, on Saturday, the protesters said.

Zelenskiy Calls for Long-Range Weapons After Drone Attack on Kyiv

KYIV (Dispatches) - Ukraine needs long-range weapons to protect its cities and troops on the frontline from Russian bombs and drones, Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskiy said on Sunday after a massive overnight drone and missile attack. Russia launched its fifth drone attack on Kyiv in two weeks overnight, with Ukraine's air defence systems destroying all the air weapons before they reached the capital, Ukraine's military said. Ukraine's air force said on Telegram that its air defence systems destroyed 35 of the 39 drones and two cruise missiles that Russia had launched overnight. The weapons, the air force said, targeted 10 of Ukraine's regions. It was not immediately clear how many drones were launched at Kyiv. There were no casualties and no significant damage reported, Serhiy Popko, head of the Ukrainian capital's military administration, said on the Telegram. "During last night alone, the Russian army used almost 40 'Shaheds' against Ukraine. Importantly, most of them were shot down by our defenders of the sky," Zelenskiy said on Telegram, referring to the drones. He said it was necessary to destroy Russian bombers at Russian air bases to protect Ukraine from air raids. "Our sufficient long-range capabilities should be a fair response to Russian terror. Everyone who supports us in this supports the defence against terror," Zelenskiy said. Zelenskiy renewed his call for Western allies to allow long-range strikes on Russia on Friday in London, saying Britain should try to convince its partners to remove the limits on their use. NATO members have taken different approaches to how Ukraine can use weapons they donate. Some have made clear Kyiv can use them to strike targets inside Russia while the United States has taken a narrower approach, allowing its weapons to be used only just inside Russia's border against targets supporting Russian military operations in Ukraine. Russia launched three Iskander ballistic missiles, Ukraine's air force said, without saying what happened to them.

Taiwan Starts Annual War Games

TAOYUAN (Dispatches) - Taiwan started its annual Han Kuang war games on Monday, which this year aim to be as close as possible to actual combat with no script and simulating how to repel a Chinese attack. China, which views democratically governed Taiwan as its territory, has been staging regular exercises around the island for four years to pressure Taipei to accept Beijing's claim of sovereignty, despite Taiwan's strong objections. Taiwan's drills this year has cancelled elements that were mostly for show, like scripted firepower displays, while there will be intensified nighttime exercises and practising how to operate with severed command lines. Kicking off the exercises in the northern city of Taoyuan, outside of Taipei and home to Taiwan's main international airport, reservists gathered to get their orders as they would during a war, and civilian vans were pressed into service to carry supplies. Later in the day the military will practice defending a major Taipei port. On Thursday, Taoyuan airport will close for an hour in the morning for the drills, though a typhoon is expected to be impacting the island that day meaning that the exercise could be delayed. Live fire drills will only take place on Taiwan's outlying islands, including Kinmen and Matsu which sit nestled next to the Chinese coast and were the scene of

on-off clashes during the height of the Cold War. The five-day war games will be happening in conjunction with the Wan'an civil defense drills, where the streets of major cities are evacuated for half an hour during a simulated Chinese missile attack, and test warning alarms will sound on mobile phones. The drill scenarios this week include setting up contingency command lines after existing hubs are destroyed and dispersing Chinese forces trying to land on Taiwan's western coastline facing China, a defense official involved in the planning said. China held two days of its own war games around the island shortly after President Lai Ching-te took office in May, saying it was "punishment" for his inauguration speech, which Beijing denounced as being full of separatist content. But China has also been using grey zone warfare against Taiwan, wielding irregular tactics to exhaust a foe by keeping them continually on alert without resorting to open combat. This includes almost daily air force missions into the skies near Taiwan. China has never renounced the use of force to bring Taiwan under its control. Lai, who says only the Taiwanese people can decide their future, has repeatedly offered talks but been rebuffed.





Piastri Takes First Win Amid Team Orders Row

BUDAPEST (Dispatches) - Oscar Piastri celebrated his first Formula One victory as McLaren finished one-two at the Hungarian Grand Prix with the team ordering Lando Norris to hand back the lead on a day of drama. Lewis Hamilton also took his 200th podium with third place for Mercedes despite a late collision with Max Verstappen that left Red Bull's championship leader in fifth and behind Ferrari's Charles Leclerc. "This is really the day I dreamed of as a kid, standing on the top step of an F1 podium," beamed Piastri, who finished 2.141 seconds ahead of reluctant runner-up Norris, before the ceremonies. "Obviously a bit complicated at the end, but I put myself in the right position at the start," added the fifth Australian to win a championship grand prix. The one-two was McLaren's first since the 2021 Italian Grand Prix, when Daniel Ricciardo won and Norris was again second to an Australian team mate, and made Piastri the seventh different winner in 13 races. Verstappen's championship lead over Norris is trimmed to 76 points, from a previous 84, while McLaren overtook Ferrari for second place in the constructors' standings and were 51 adrift of Red Bull. For lap after lap it looked like Norris was going to ignore all the entreaties and go for the chequered flag and a second career win, whatever the consequences, but eventually he complied. "The team asked me to do it, so that's it," Norris said in his pre-podium interview, making no attempt to hide his unhappiness.

Piastri said he was sorry it had proved more "painful" than necessary. The 23-year-old

seized the lead from pole-sitter Norris at the start as Verstappen swept into second with a short-cut after being forced wide and off the track in the battle for the first corner. Verstappen had to give the place back as stewards' investigated and Piastri was still leading when Norris came in for his second stop to cover against Hamilton.

The Australian pitted two laps later and came out behind Norris after a slower stop than his team mate. McLaren told Norris to re-establish the order "at his convenience" with more than 20 laps remaining but the gap only grew larger. "I know you'll do the right thing," Norris's race engineer Will Joseph told him with 14 laps to go after the team repeated they wanted Piastri to win. "Well you should have pitted him first," he replied. "Lando, he can't catch you up. You've proved your point," the Briton was told as he moved six seconds clear with six laps remaining. "The way to win a championship is not by yourself. You're going to need Oscar, and you're going to need the team," said Joseph, almost pleading. He also reminded Norris to remember what had been discussed before the race, and every Sunday, and added "I tried to protect you" before the driver finally complied. Behind them, Verstappen was also turning the air blue on the radio to the Red Bull pit wall as he struggled with his car's brake balance, questioned the team's strategy and cursed his opponents. The collision came on lap 63 with Verstappen trying to overtake at turn one, locking up and his car's right rear wheel catching Hamilton's front left, pitching the Red Bull onto the runoff.

Giron Wins Hall of Fame Open for First ATP Title

NEW YORK (Dispatches) - Marcos Giron captured his first ATP title on Sunday, defeating fellow American Alex Michelsen 6-7 (4/7), 6-3, 7-5 to win the Hall of Fame Open final. Paris Olympics-bound Giron, who turns 31 on Wednesday, saved a match point in the third set before becoming the ninth player to win his first ATP title this year, the first to do it on grass. "Yeah I turn 31 but I feel young, I feel good and I'm hungry for more," Giron said. "Hopefully we can go to the Olympics and bring back a title and make deep runs." Giron fired 13 aces, the 12th to save a match point in the 10th game of the final set and the last to capture the match after two hours and 37 minutes at Newport, Rhode Island. "You know where I pulled that out of. That was insane," Giron told pal Michelsen after the match. "You've got a great career in front of you. I'm sorry I had to win today." By outlasting 19-year-old Michelsen, a Newport runner-up for the second consecutive year, Giron will advance from 46th to



38th in the new world rankings on Monday. Giron broke in the opening game of their first ATP meeting, but Michelsen broke back in the sixth game to pull level at 3-3. Giron saved three break points in the eighth game to reach 4-4. Michelsen, ranked 61st, saved two break points in the 11th game for a 6-5 edge on the way to a tie-breaker, in which Michelsen seized a 5-1 edge and cruised home, taking the set after 59 minutes on a forehand winner. Giron broke in the fourth game of the second set and held from there to force a third. Giron saved a match point in the 10th game with an ace, then reversed the script by holding, then breaking in the 11th game when Michelsen netted a backhand volley and holding a final time for the title. "Super happy for you to get this one," Michelsen told Giron. "Can't believe you got it with an ace on match point." Giron lost his only prior ATP finals in 2022 in San Diego and this past February in Dallas. Michelsen lost to France's Adrian Mannarino in last year's Newport final, his only prior ATP championship match.

Borges Wins Swedish Open



BASTAD (Dispatches) - Rafa Nadal suffered a setback in his Paris 2024 Olympics preparations on Sunday as he was beaten 6-3 6-2 in the Swedish Open final by Portuguese seventh seed Nuno Borges.

The 38-year-old Spaniard was playing his first title match since his 2022 French Open triumph, but saw his serve broken five times in the one-hour and 27-minute contest as Borges won his maiden tour final. Making first appearance at the ATP Tour 250 event since winning the singles as a 19-year-old in 2005, Nadal was warming up for his bid for another Olympic medal at the Paris 2024 Games. "Many congratulations to Nuno. You've been playing great during the whole week, so you deserve it more than anyone else here... It's always special winning a title," the 22-times Grand Slam champion said. "I have been here for the week enjoying this amazing place. I really had fun on court, played some very long matches. Today wasn't my best day, but all the credit to Nuno. He played very well and it was so difficult for me, so well done." Nadal missed almost all of 2023 with a hip problem and his comeback earlier this year was stalled by a muscle tear, before small physical issues affected his preparation for the French Open, where he suffered a first-round exit. The record 14-times French Open winner then skipped Wimbledon to prepare for the Olympic tennis tournament, which will take place at Roland-Garros from July 27-Aug. 4.

Nadal won an Olympic singles gold medal in Beijing in 2008 and a doubles gold in the 2016 Rio de Janeiro Olympics. He will team up with four-times major winner Carlos Alcaraz, 21, in the doubles at Paris 2024.

Nadal Not Comfortable Ahead of Olympics Bid



BASTAD (Dispatches) - Rafael Nadal will head to the Paris Olympics chasing a third gold medal but admitted his "level was so far from what it should be" after losing in the Bastad clay-court final on Sunday.

The 38-year-old Spanish great went down to a straight-sets defeat to Portuguese journeyman Nuno Borges in his first final since capturing a 14th French Open in 2022.

"The level was so far from what it should be. Probably the energy too," said Nadal.

"It has been a long week with long matches. Even if my body, I don't have damage, that's important — but mentally and physically, I am not used to playing four days in a row and playing long matches."

Nadal was playing his first tournament since an opening round exit at the French Open in May.

He skipped Wimbledon to focus on his clay-court bag of tricks ahead of the Olympics which are being played at Roland Garros, the site of 14 of his 22 Grand Slam triumphs.

At the Games, Nadal will be looking to add to his singles gold from the 2008 Olympics in Beijing and doubles victory at Rio in 2016.

As well as singles, in Paris he will team up with French Open and Wimbledon champion Carlos Alcaraz.

"I played the final, that's positive. I was able to play long matches without having an injury, that's good," added Nadal of his week in Sweden.

The former world number one has played just six tournaments in 2024 due to injury while his ranking has slumped to 261.

"In some way I felt that I arrived here practising much better than what I played on the tournament during the whole week. That's something that I am not satisfied with," he explained.

"I arrived here with the feeling that I was playing a good level and I was not able to show that during the whole week. That is something that I am not happy with."

"Anyway it's a final, so I can't say it's a bad result because it's the first final since a long time ago. But I was not able to feel myself comfortable enough during the whole week to be satisfied with the week of tennis that I played."

Pogacar Hails Golden Age After Securing Third Tour de France Title



NICE (Dispatches) - Tadej Pogacar hailed a new "golden age" for cycling after securing a third Tour de France title on Sunday to add to his 2020 and 2021 triumphs.

The 25-year-old won the final day's time-trial with defending champion Jonas Vingegaard coming second at 1 minute 03 seconds on the day to seal second overall ahead of Remco Evenepoel, third on the day and also third overall.

Victory also gave Pogacar the first Giro d'Italia-Tour de France double since Marco Pantani in 1998. "It was an amazing journey. What a battle with Jonas and Remco. So much happened," said the champion who finished 6mins 17secs ahead of Vingegaard in the final standings. Evenepoel was 9mins 18secs off the pace. "We are living in the golden age of cycling. The rivalry with Remco (Evenepoel), Jonas (Vingegaard), Primoz (Roglic) is just incredible. We have to take advantage of this moment." Astonishingly Pogacar won six stages on this edition of the Tour, just as he did when winning the Giro earlier in the season. "To achieve the double is incredible," added Pogacar who had been runner-up to Vingegaard for the last two years. "When I won the Giro, some people said that it would serve as a safety net for me if I didn't win the Tour. Winning the Tour still represents the level above and winning the two is the next level." The

world's greatest bike race, broadcast across the globe, featured a novelty finale on the French Riviera because of the Olympic Games in Paris. Instead of the last day race around the Champs-Elysees the Tour avoided the Olympic Games sites altogether. With five stage wins already under his belt, Pogacar stormed out of his adopted hometown of Monaco and up the coast to Nice where he leapt into the arms of his teammates on the celebrated Promenade des Anglais. Pogacar took the overall lead on a downhill on day four as the race arrived in France from Italy via the Alps. By the time the race returned to the Alps, Pogacar was three minutes clear and Vingegaard was starting to flag with the Dane still not fully recovered from a major crash in March. After winning stage 19 on Friday, Pogacar knew he had won and Vingegaard switched his attention to finishing second. Vingegaard crashed heavily earlier this year and was praised for even making it to the start line, but ahead of Sunday's time-trial he expressed a desire to win another stage. "Under normal circumstances I would have been disappointed. This is such a wonderful race, the yellow jersey is the most beautiful of all. I'll be back to try for a third one next year," said the 27-year-old.

Although he started well, as has often been the case in this Tour, he was a distant second best. He did however beat pre-race favourite Evenepoel, who cried at the finish line.