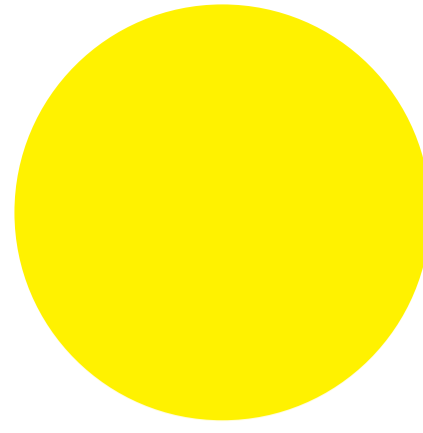




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Relief workers and rescue dogs go on a parade in southern Tehran, on March 12, 2023, as part of a drill by Iran's Red Crescent Society ahead of the Iranian New Year. 10 >

Iran-Saudi deal, a turning point for Mideast



The recently announced agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia has garnered widespread praise and been hailed as a significant turning point in the history of Middle Eastern diplomacy. The European Union and countries throughout the region have welcomed the development, recognizing the importance of the agreement in bringing about greater stability to the Persian Gulf region.

The agreement will go a long way in mitigating the long-standing differences between Tehran and Riyadh. After years of instability and conflict, especially in the wake of the U.S. invasion of Iraq in 2003, many countries in the region are looking for a way to de-escalate tensions and promote greater security.

The implementation of the agreement appears to be an uphill task, but I am hopeful that both Tehran and Riyadh will hammer out a resolution with rationality and pragmatism, keeping the larger goal of regional stability in mind. The most significant outcome of the agreement is the emergence of a more mature approach among Arab countries towards Iran, based on common interests. This approach is likely to improve relations between Iran and the Arab world, which has been fraught with tension for many years. While some Arab governments continue to follow in the footsteps of Saudi Arabia in their foreign policy, the idea that all Arab countries are followers of Saudi Arabia has begun to fade. Page 2 >

More than 100 arrested over school poisonings

Iran has arrested more than 100 individuals nationwide in connection with the mysterious poisonings of girls on school premises, the Interior Ministry said.

In a statement late Saturday, the ministry revealed that those arrested included individuals with "hostile motives" who sought to "instill terror" in students and shut down schools.

The ministry also suggested a possible link to the terrorist Mujahedeen Khalq Organization (MKO). "Fortunately, from the middle of last week until today, the number of incidents in schools has decreased significantly and there have been no reports of sick students," it added.

Since late November, schoolgirls have suffered fainting, nausea, shortness of breath and other symptoms after reporting "unpleasant" odors in schools, with some being treated in hospitals.

The suspected poison attacks sparked fear and anger among pupils and their parents.

The arrests were made in provinces including Tehran, Qom, Gilan, Khorasan Razavi, West Azarbaijan, East Azarbaijan, Zanjan, Kurdistan, Hamedan, Khuzestan, and Fars. Last Monday, Iran's Leader Ayatollah Seyyed Ali Khamenei called for the perpetrators of the "unforgivable crime" to be tracked down "without mercy."

Iran's oil exports hit highest level since US 2018 sanctions

Economy Desk

Iran's crude oil exports have reached a new milestone, reaching their highest level since the United States withdrew from the 2015 Iran nuclear deal and reimposed sanctions on Tehran in 2018.

According to Oil Minister Javad Owji, the volume of crude oil exports in the current Iranian calendar year,

which began on March 21, 2022, increased by 83 million barrels compared to the previous year. The figure represents an outstanding increase of 190 million more barrels than two years ago. Moreover, gas exports surged by 15% in 2022-23, compared to the previous Iranian year, indicating significant growth in Iran's energy sector.

Owji attributed the spike in

exports to Iran's resourceful approach, effective marketing, and modified contracts. Despite the growing pressure of US sanctions on Iran's energy sector, crude oil exports from the country are expected to increase in the coming months, as Owji had previously stated earlier this month. Iran has managed to supply increased volumes of oil to private buyers in China and other

markets in recent months, despite US sanctions that prohibit the purchase of the country's oil shipments.

In January, figures by international tanker tracking services showed that oil exports from Iran in late 2022 reached record levels not seen since the country came under US sanctions five years ago. The data suggests that Iran pumped over 1.2 million barrels per

day of oil for export markets in late 2022, with higher exports to China and Venezuela in early 2023.

The Iranian government's commitment to increasing crude oil exports comes amid rising geopolitical tensions and growing demand for fossil fuels, signaling the country's determination to maximize its hydrocarbon reserves' commercial potential.



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Birth of more than 17K twins in Iran 10 >



Nowruz diplomacy meeting convened in Tehran 12 >

French Senate adopts Macron's unpopular pension reform

International Desk

The French Senate has passed President Emmanuel Macron's controversial pension reform plan, which includes raising the retirement age by two years to 64. The upper house of the French Parliament voted on the text after a seventh day of nationwide demonstrations against the plan. A total of 195 senators voted for the bill, with 112 against.

Following the vote, Prime Minister Elisabeth Borne said that an important stage has been passed and that she believed the government had a parliamenta-



REUTERS

ry majority to pass the reforms into law. A committee will now draft a final version of the bill, which will then be submitted to both houses of parliament for a final vote. Page 9 >

History will hold Trump 'accountable' for Capitol attack: Pence

Former US vice president Mike Pence said Saturday that history would hold former president Donald Trump "accountable" for his role in the 2021 attack on the US Capitol. The remarks are likely to widen the rift between the former running mates, who have been at loggerheads since Pence refused to go along with Trump's efforts to overturn the 2020 election results and remain in power.

"President Trump was wrong," Pence said in a speech at the annual Gridiron Dinner in Washington, a white-tie gala put on by journalists that draws top politicians. "I had no right to overturn the elec-



REUTERS

tion. And his reckless words endangered my family and everyone at the Capitol that day. And I know that history will hold Donald Trump accountable," Pence was quoted as saying by multiple US media outlets. Page 3 >