

## NEWS IN BRIEF

IMF deal  
on track  
for Pakistan

AFP – Pakistan announced financial support Friday from the United Arab Emirates and China totalling \$1.3 billion, giving the ailing economy a shot in the arm as it seeks to meet conditions for the resumption of an International Monetary Fund bailout.

Finance Minister Ishaq Dar said the UAE had promised a billion dollars to prop up Pakistan's forex reserves – which at their current level of \$4.04 billion can barely pay for four weeks of imports.

China on Friday released \$300 million to Pakistan – the last tranche of a \$1.3 billion rollover loan, Dar said. "UAE authorities have confirmed to IMF for their bilateral support of US\$ one billion to Pakistan," Dar tweeted.

Russian oil  
exports up

AFP – Russian oil exports jumped to their highest level in almost three years in March despite Western sanctions, the International Energy Agency said Friday. The IEA said in its monthly oil market report that total shipments from Russia rose by 600,000 barrels per day to 8.1 million bpd last month, the highest level since April 2020.

US retail sales  
post drop

REUTERS – U.S. retail sales fell more than expected in March as consumers cut back on purchases of motor vehicles, suggesting that the economy was losing steam at the end of the first quarter because of higher interest rates. Retail sales dropped 1.0% last month, the Commerce Department said on Friday. Data for February was revised up to show retail sales falling 0.2% instead of 0.4% as previously reported. Economists polled by Reuters had forecast sales slipping 0.4%.

Iran's oil minister visits Venezuela  
to boost energy ties

Iranian Oil Minister Javad Owji traveled to Venezuela to discuss ways to "strengthen energy relations" between the two friendly nations, according to the Latin American country's foreign ministry.

In a statement, the ministry said Owji will meet Venezuelan officials and visit the facilities belonging to the state-run energy firm PDVSA, reported Press TV.

Owji has already met with his Venezuelan counterpart, Pedro Rafael Tellechea, who also heads PDVSA, a source at the firm told Reuters, adding that the Iranian oil minister plans to visit the El Palito refinery.

Iran and Venezuela, both subject to illegal US sanctions, signed a 20-year cooperation deal last

June during a state visit by President Nicolas Maduro to Tehran. The document covered the energy sector, among other areas of cooperation.

Venezuela, which has the world's largest crude reserves, has struggled in recent years to produce enough gasoline and diesel due to refinery outages as a result of US bans and a political turmoil which also has its roots in Washington.

Tehran has strengthened ties with Caracas, providing crude and condensate as well as parts and feedstock for Venezuela's aging 1.3 million barrel per day oil (bpd) refining network.

It has also overseen a project to modernize the largest refining complex in Venezuela.

Relocating industries to coastal areas: Possible solution  
to Iran's water crisis

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EXCLUSIVE

Iran is facing an ongoing water crisis that has affected many central cities in the country, particularly Isfahan, where residents grapple with a decrease in water pressure. The situation is exacerbated by an influx of individuals from underprivileged regions into industrial metropolises, resulting in a persistent shortage of water resources. The establishment of water-intensive factories in cities like Isfahan and Yazd has also been a contentious issue, with some advocating for their relocation to alternative locations to alleviate the water problem.

Is relocating to  
coastal areas the  
solution?

Some environmental experts have proposed the relocation of cities and industries to coastal areas as a possible solution to the

water crisis. The Makran region, adjacent to the Oman Sea, is suggested as a viable option for relocating water-intensive industries from the central plateau. Mohsen Mousavi-Khansari, a proponent of relocating cities to coastal regions, asserts that the Iranian plateau's center has nearly depleted its subterranean water resources, making it a region with an unsustainable future. Most of the region's static underground water resources have been exhausted, and the ecological carrying capacity of this region has been exceeded.

According to Mousavi-Khansari, a crucial step is acknowledging the inevitability of relocating the population from the central plateau to the southern coastal regions within the next decade. He suggested that the 7th Development Plan of Iran should prioritize studies

on creating multiple megacities on the Oman coast, each accommodating four to five million residents. By the year 2031, industries and populations must be transferred to these new urban areas.

Challenges in  
relocation

However, the plan is fraught with many complexities and uncertainties. Some experts advocate for this approach, while others are firmly against it. Every construction project entails some degree of damage, and the relocation of industries and cities comes with its own set of challenges. The creation of multiple megacities requires the establishment of various airports, ports, and other essential infrastructure on the Makran coastline, which is a formidable undertaking. The interests of the indus-

tries are also a factor to consider. The people of Isfahan maintain that the interests of these industries are national in scope, and a significant proportion of the shareholders, and even laborers, hail from outside of Isfahan. The relocation of industries to coastal areas could negatively impact the economy and livelihoods of many people, particularly those who rely on these industries for employment.

Population  
relocation

Population relocation is another challenge that requires careful planning and execution. Mousavi-Khansari suggests that the current government should plan for the reduction of the population of central cities by half and relocate them to cities in the south. Isfahan, with a current population of four million people, may

witness a growth to six million people with water transfer projects, but it needs to reduce its population to two million. The relocation of populations comes with its own set of challenges, including the provision of housing, employment opportunities, and essential services.

Need for  
comprehensive plan

In the case of Isfahan's water scarcity, a comprehensive plan is necessary to address the multifaceted issue. The city's demand for water is estimated at three billion cubic meters, and transferring a mere one hundred million cubic meters will not suffice to meet it. The plan must involve not only water transfer but also the relocation of industries, such as Mobarakeh Steel Company and iron smelting plants, which are unsustainable with waste water.

Russia's flag carrier sends Airbus  
A330 for repair to Iran

Russia's largest airline Aeroflot has sent one of its Western-made jets to Iran for repair amid sanctions that prevent the company from obtaining spare parts or undergoing maintenance in the West.

Reuters cited a statement by Aeroflot which said that an Airbus A330-300 aircraft operated by the company had fled to Iran to receive maintenance.

"The maintenance of the Airbus A330 aircraft (in Iran) will be implemented by a provider for a wide range of work," said the statement.

"The firm has all the necessary material resources, certificates and extensive experience, (while) the provider performs main-

tenance with a high-quality level," it added without naming the Iranian company that will carry out the repair.

The statement came after Russian media outlet the RBC first reported on the maintenance of Aeroflot jet in Iran.

Flight tracking data suggested the aircraft flew to Tehran on April 5 and has remained there until now. Iranian transportation authorities had announced last year that Russian airlines were using the maintenance services provided by Iranian companies.

However, it is a first time that Russia's flag carrier is sending a large Western jet to Iran for maintenance.

That comes amid joint efforts by Iran and Russia to undermine Western sanctions that have targeted the key sectors of their economies.

Russia intensified its efforts to use the experience of Iranian companies in countering Western sanctions since the country came under pressure by the United States and allies more than a year ago because of its involvement in the Ukraine war.



IRNA

Internet available to over 91% of  
Iran's villages: Minister

Iran's Telecoms Minister Issa Zarepour said more than 91% of Iranian villages with a population of over 20 households have access to the internet via the country's domestic network.

Zarepour said in a post on his account in the local social media platform Bale on Thursday that internet had been made available to some 3,425 villages across Iran since the current administration took office in August 2020, Press TV reports.

"Considering this number of new villages, the statistics on linking villages to the National Information Network (NIN) has

increased from 80% in the start of the administration to 91%," said the minister.

Iran is working fast to expand the NIN as part of efforts to make internet safer, faster and more reliable. The government has encouraged local services and platforms to move their data and servers to the NIN.

Zarepour said many of the villages that were connected to high-speed internet in Iran over the past two years were located in hard-to-reach areas, making it more difficult and more expensive for the government to supply the infrastructure needed for the network.



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