

NEWS IN BRIEF

Iran's electricity use hits record-high

FARS – Iran on Monday experienced a new peak in electricity consumption, reaching a staggering 72,419 megawatts. The figure is equivalent to the combined output of 72 power plants of the same magnitude as the Bushehr nuclear power plant. In comparison to last year's zenith of 69,951 megawatts, this year's high represents a 3.5% increase in peak load. Energy Minister Ali-Akbar Mehrabian said that although the country's electricity grid remained stable, it was subjected to substantial pressure when the record-breaking surge in electricity consumption occurred.

Lawyer: Rapper death sentence revoked

The lawyer of Iranian rapper, Toomaj Salehi, who had received a primary death sentence for "provoking violence" during protests in Iran last year, said her client has been sentenced to six years and three months in prison for "corruption on earth."

In an interview with Sharq, Roza Etemad Ansari said her client, "who was in solitary confinement, has been transferred to the general ward of the prison."

Tasnim reported last week that Toomaj's court ruling had been commuted to imprisonment. Tasnim said, based on the news received, Salehi's sentence had been commuted because of his "active cooperation" with the authorities.

Iran urges ...

He also emphasized that any new sanctions based on baseless claims are completely rejected and Iran reserves the right to respond to any irresponsible action in a timely manner.

The Foreign Ministry's spokesman also slammed the irresponsibility of the three European signatories to the agreement with Iran, saying they must be held accountable for failing to meet their own obligations under the deal, from which the US unilaterally withdrew in 2018 and left the future of the deal in limbo. After the withdrawal from the agreement – also known as the Joint Comprehensive plan of Action (JCPOA) – Washington re-imposed sanctions against Tehran.

Multilateral diplomatic efforts to revive the JCPOA have been stalled since last August, with Iran blaming the United States for failing to guarantee that it will not leave the deal again.

On the eve of Raeisi's African tour

Iran envoy brands Kenya as gateway to East Africa



"Iran is pursuing the waiver of visas to facilitate travel between the two countries."

National Desk

The Iranian Ambassador to Kenya emphasized the significance of engaging with the East African country as a prime opportunity for accessing the countries in the region.

On the eve of President Ebrahim Raeisi's visit to Kenya, Jafar Barmaki, in an interview with ISNA, underscored Kenya's strategic position as a gateway to East Africa, alongside Tanzania, presenting favorable prospects for political and economic cooperation.

The Iranian envoy highlighted Kenya's robust economic standing in Central Africa, ranking second after South Africa. The country's well-developed infrastructure makes it an ideal conduit for landlocked nations in the region, offering Iran a valuable avenue to reach other East African markets. The ambassador said that in East African society, countries have established preferential trade among themselves, and Kenya, along with other countries, is a member of the Common Market for Eastern and Southern Africa (COMESA), which consists of 22 members.

Moreover, the African country benefits from preferential trade agreements with countries like the United States and the United King-



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dom in certain areas, Barmaki said, adding, "Kenya's position provides us with the opportunity to access other markets in the region."

The ambassador stressed Kenya's diplomatic significance in East Africa, serving as a reference point for some neighboring countries. By expanding bilateral relations in various sectors, Iran aims to bolster its presence in the East Africa region.

Trade volume

Ambassador Barmaki also highlighted that official

statistics indicate the trade volume between Iran and Kenya to be approximately \$100 million. However, unofficial figures suggest a higher amount, such as Iranian "bitumen" exports to this country exceeding \$50 million.

The Iranian ambassador to Kenya discussed his country's policies to encourage Kenyans to expand their trade interactions with Iran, including areas such as importing tea, coffee, lamb, and exporting agricultural machinery, among others.

Visa waiver

In another part of the interview, the Iranian envoy said that his country is pursuing the waiver of visas to facilitate travel between the two countries. This matter will probably be discussed in the upcoming joint commission meeting of the two countries, and if it reaches a conclusion, it will provide good facilities for the travel of citizens of both countries, he said.

Highlighting the considerable interest of Kenya's Muslim population, including Shia Muslims, in

visiting Iran, Barmaki emphasized there are considerable capacities in Iran in relation to health and pilgrimage tourism, and the launch of direct flights connecting the two countries would play a pivotal role in strengthening these ties by reducing travel distance and costs.

According to Barmaki, approximately 120 Iranians reside in Kenya, including individuals engaged in economic activities in technical and engineering fields, as well as those contributing to specialized UN agencies operating in the country.



TIMES OF OMAN

International desk

In a recent strategic meeting between Russia and the [Persian] Gulf Coop-

Oman sees positive impact of Tehran-Riyadh agreement on region

eration Council countries held in Moscow on Monday, Oman's Foreign Minister Sayyid Badr Albusaidi expressed optimism about the positive outcomes of the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia for the region.

Addressing the strategic dialogue session be-

tween Russia and the Persian Gulf Arab countries, Albusaidi said that the Iran-Saudi Arabia agreement would bring about positive changes in the region, IRNA reported.

He highlighted the significant development of the resumption of diplomatic relations between the two

states, adding that "We have shared a long history of coexistence with the Iranian people."

"While short-term political differences may impede collaboration, the recent agreement between Iran and Saudi Arabia demonstrates that we can overcome obstacles and restore a path that

contributes to enhancing security, stability, and enduring coexistence," he affirmed.

The official expressed hope that such positive developments would bolster the capacity to establish comprehensive regional cooperation based on mutual trust and common interests.



Mohammad Ali Rajabi
Cartoonist



Africa, a new opportunity ...

However, we are witnessing a new approach adopted by the current Iranian government towards relations with African countries, which we hope would open up new opportunities to expand relations and economic cooperation between Iran and African countries.

During the last Iranian year, 20 ministers from African countries visited Tehran, which indicates their attention to Iran. Last year, the volume of Iran's trade with Nigeria saw a significant increase, reaching about \$200 million, and is expected to reach more than \$300 mil-

lion this year.

At the same time, Iran's Foreign Ministry is also taking special heed to the political and economic potential in the African Continent, and has encouraged Iran's businessmen and private sector to promote their cooperation with African countries as a new market. However, due to the long distance and short-term view of the private sector, economic cooperation has not reached its potential so far.

President Raeisi's visit to Kenya, Uganda and Zimbabwe will definitely pave the way for improving relations. In addition to

commodities, the African countries can also import technology from Iran.

In fact, the change in relations between Iran and the African Continent has occurred in the shadow of the policies and programs introduced by the current administration; however, measures should be taken to expand relations and reach bilateral and multilateral agreements with the African countries.

Raeisi's trip to the African countries will be a good opportunity to speed up this development. Iran's private sector should also take advantage of this great opportunity and prepare itself to enter new markets.