

TEHRAN -- Iran's First Vice President Mohammad Mokher said Monday President Ebrahim Raisi has accepted an invitation from Saudi Arabia's King Salman bin Abdulaziz Al Saud to visit Riyadh. "King Salman has invited the [Iranian] president and a positive answer has been given to that invitation," Mokher told Mehr news agency. Referring to Iran's relations with Saudi Arabia and other littoral states of the Persian Gulf, he said, "Mr. Raisi's main strategies since the first day after he was elected president have been based on promoting relations with regional countries."

KYIV, Ukraine (AP) — Ukraine's Western allies have sent the country 65 billion euros (\$70 billion) in military aid to help thwart Russia's full-scale invasion, NATO Secretary-General Jens Stoltenberg said Monday, and with no peace negotiations on the horizon the alliance is gearing up to send more. "We cannot allow Russia to continue to chip away at European security," Stoltenberg told a news conference in Brussels. NATO foreign ministers meeting in Brussels on Tuesday "will discuss how we can step up our support, including by continuing to strengthen Ukraine's armed forces," Stoltenberg said. "Our support is for the long-haul."

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Tuesday, April 4, 2023, Farvardin 15, 1402, Ramadhan 13, 1444, Price 200,000 Rials

Viewpoint

Blood of Martyrs Too Sacred to be left Unavenged

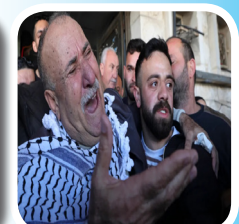
President Raisi Calls on Muslim Nations to Unite



Iran Taekwondokas Bag 4 Medals in World Grand Slam



Zionist Troops Kill Two More Palestinians



PM Sudani: Iraq Does Not Need U.S. Troops

BAGHDAD (Dispatches) -- Prime Minister Muhammed Shia al-Sudani has said Iraq does not need U.S.-led foreign combat troops on its soil.

In an interview with Al Jazeera, Sudani said Iraqi security forces have the necessary capability to ensure security throughout the country after the elimination of the Daesh terrorist group.

In early 2003, the U.S. invaded Iraq under the later debunked pretext that the regime of Saddam Hussein possessed weapons of mass destruction.

It withdrew troops from Iraq between 2007 and 2011 but redeployed them in 2014 along with other partners to allegedly counter the threat of Daesh.

Iraq managed to end the territorial rule of the takfiri outfit in the country thanks to the sacrifices of the national army as well as the anti-terror Popular Mobilization Units (PMU), which had the backing of Iran.

The U.S. military declared the end of its combat mission in Iraq in December 2021, but it still maintains a number of troops there under the guise of playing an advisory role.

In his remarks, Sudani said attacks on any country from Iraqi territory are unacceptable, noting that Iraq, as a legal and moral obligation, does not allow the use of its soil for invading neighboring states.

The Iraqi constitution does not accept the presence of armed individuals in camps, where they receive military training, as well as their infiltration into Iranian soil, he said, adding that no one is meddling in the country's national decisions and independence.

The Iraqi prime minister also described a recent agreement between Tehran and Riyadh to revive ties as "very important".

The deal will help boost regional stability, he said, adding that development and economic growth can only be realized through cooperation between the countries of the region.

Last month, Iran and Saudi Arabia agreed to resume their diplomatic relations and reopen their embassies and diplomatic missions after seven years of estrangement. China mediated the rapprochement between the two Middle Eastern powers.

The Iraqi premier further underlined the need for Syria's

return to the Cairo-based Arab League as well as interaction with the Damascus government, emphasizing that the most serious security challenge now is the security situation in Syria.

The Arab League suspended Syria's membership in November 2011 following the outbreak of foreign-backed militancy in the country.

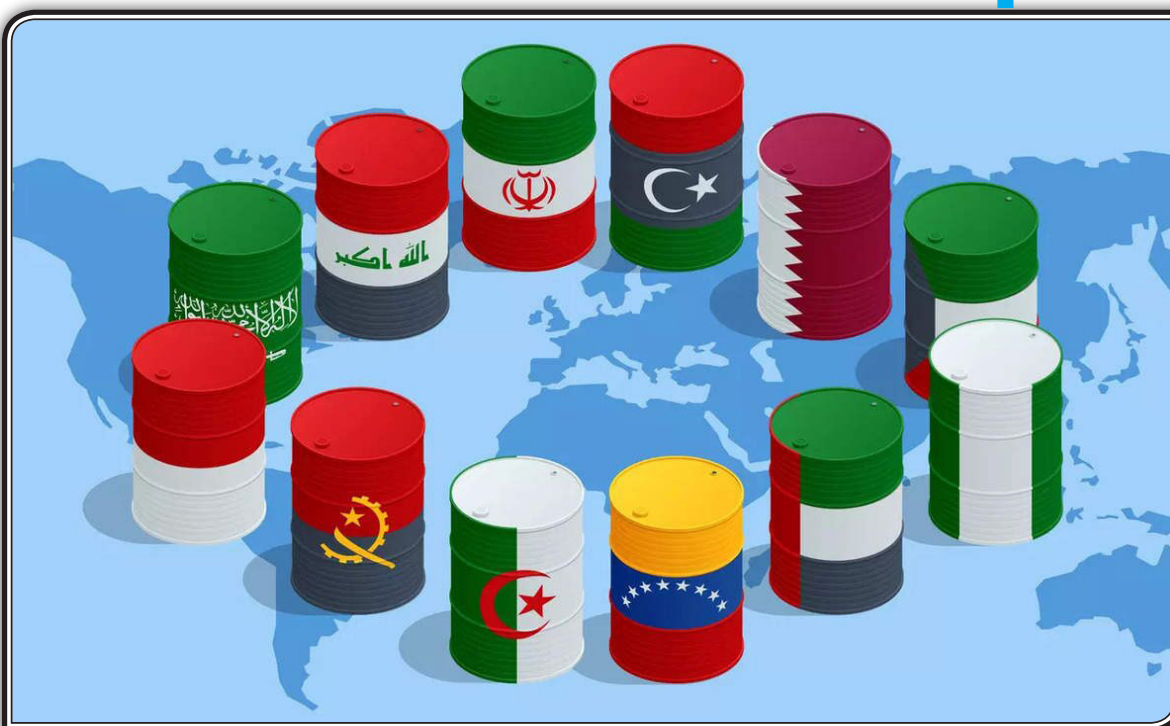
Currently, after more than a decade, reports say Saudi Arabia is planning to invite Syrian President Bashar al-Assad to an Arab League summit hosted by Riyadh next month.

Sudani also said the main challenge now facing the Iraqi government is corruption, with much of it perpetrated by political or official sides.

He assured that the Iraqi judiciary will issue arrest warrants for the officials who were involved in a corruption case dubbed the "theft of the century" regardless of their position and affiliation with different parties.

Last October, the Iraqi Finance Ministry found that almost 3.7 trillion dinars (about \$2.5 billion) had been stolen from the country's tax authority between September 2021 and August 2022.

In Further Blow to U.S., OPEC+ Announces Surprise Oil Cuts



VIENNA (AFP) -- Major oil powers led by Saudi Arabia announced a surprise production cut of more than one million barrels per day, calling it a "precautionary" move aimed at stabilizing the market.

The reductions, on top of a Russian decision to extend a cut of 500,000 barrels per day, and despite U.S. calls to increase production, risk stoking inflation and pressure to raise interest rates.

Cuts by Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the UAE, Kuwait, Algeria and Oman from May to the end of the year

will top one million barrels per day -- the biggest reduction since the OPEC+ cartel slashed two million barrels per day in October.

Russia, a leading member of the OPEC+ group, said it was also extending an existing cut of 500,000 bpd to the end of this year, describing it as "a responsible and preventive action".

Oil prices soared almost six percent in Asian trade on Monday morning with West Texas Intermediate jumping by 5.74 percent to \$80.01 a barrel and Brent

climbing 5.67 percent to \$84.42.

A Saudi energy ministry official "emphasized that this is a precautionary measure aimed at supporting the stability of the oil market", the official Saudi Press Agency said.

The cuts follow a drop in oil prices triggered by jitters over the banking sector, following the collapse of U.S. lender SVB and UBS's hurried buy-out of troubled rival Credit Suisse, UAE-based oil expert Ibrahim al-Ghitani told AFP.

Brent crude oil prices, trading

just below \$80 a barrel late last week, should bounce to above \$80 as a result of the reductions, he said, calling prices below \$80 "unacceptable" for OPEC+.

"The producing countries adhere to a balancing level that supports their large financial budget this year, and their next economic plans," al-Ghitani said.

The reductions follow a controversial decision in October by OPEC and its allies including Russia -- collectively known as OPEC+ -- to slash production by two million barrels per day.

That cut, the biggest since the height of the Covid pandemic in 2020, also came despite concerns it would fuel further inflation and push central banks to hike interest rates.

OPEC raised its 2023 world oil demand forecast in February, saying it expected demand to grow by 2.3 million barrels per day to an average of 101.87 million barrels per day this year.

But "initial expectations of higher demand in the second half are now challenged by the prospects of continued high inflation and recessionary pressures", said Persian Gulf analyst Yesar al-Maleki.

"OPEC is taking a pre-emptive measure in case demand reduction in the second half is possibly higher," he told AFP.

(Continued on Page 7)

U.S. Tenants Face Eviction Amid Surging Costs

VIRGINIA (AFP) -- For nearly eight years, driving for a ride-hailing platform and making deliveries helped Laine Carolyn pay her bills -- but a sudden deterioration in health forced her to stop work and fall behind on rent.

Carolyn, 32, is among an increased number of U.S. tenants confronting eviction risks in the face of high inflation, elevated rents and with the end of pandemic-era aid.

The country sees 3.6 million eviction cases filed in a typical year, said Peter Hepburn, associate director of Eviction Lab at Princeton University. But that number slowed to a trickle during the pandemic.

Now, with Covid-era legal protections and assistance lifted, it is surging again, Eviction Lab's figures show.

At courthouses in Virginia, tenants living paycheck-to-paycheck told AFP how an unexpected accident or medical bill was enough to land them before a judge with an eviction filing.

Carolyn said she owes over \$10,000 in rent and other fees. But she could not return to employment after being diagnosed with Graves' disease and hospitalized last November.

"It was giving me double vision and it wasn't safe for me to drive," she said. "There is brain fog, and it makes it almost impossible to think," the Alexandria resi-

dent added.

Carolyn said that she cannot afford to appeal her eviction case, which requires her to repay her rent -- so she is out of options. Now she is waiting for the axe to fall.

There has been a "steady increase" in eviction filings over the last year, and nationwide numbers are now close to where they were before the pandemic, said Hepburn of Eviction Lab.

In the 10 states and 34 cities that the group tracks, the number of such cases filed rose from around 6,600 in April 2020 during the pandemic to over 96,800 in January.

Carolyn had worked out a payment plan with her landlord but it became increasingly hard to work as her health worsened: "I just couldn't make enough money."

"I managed to make \$800 before I really got too sick to work. I had to choose between paying that towards rent or having food and some medicine," she said.

"There is anger, there is frustration, there is guilt and even some shame that I probably shouldn't be taking on because... I really am actually sick, and it's something I gotta finish accepting," she added.

Over a third of the U.S. population rent their homes.

"We haven't even seen a flattening out yet" after a dramatic rise in eviction filings, (Continued on Page 7)

UK Teachers Reject Pay Offer, Announce Strike

LONDON (Reuters) -- Teachers in England have overwhelmingly rejected a pay offer from the British government aimed at ending a series of disruptive strikes, their trade union said on Monday, announcing two further days of walkouts.

The National Education Union, Britain's largest education union, said 98% of teachers who voted in the ballot followed its advice to reject the offer of a one-off payment this year of 1,000 pounds and an average pay rise of 4.5% in the next financial year.

"This resounding rejection of the government's offer should leave (education minister) Gillian Keegan in no doubt that she will need to come back to the negotiating table with a much better proposal," NEU joint General Secretaries Mary Boustead and Kevin Courtney said in a statement.

Tens of thousands of teachers across Britain have taken strike action this year in demand of an above-inflation pay award, leaving classrooms empty and heaping pressure on Prime Minister Rishi Sunak to help resolve the dispute.

The union said teachers would take two further days of strike action, on April 27 and May 2.

"It is extremely disappointing that the NEU have called more strike action," Keegan said in a statement.

She also signaled the government did not intend to negotiate further: "Pay will now be decided by the independent pay review body which will recommend pay rises for next year."

The government has argued that higher pay rises would only worsen inflation.

Teachers in Wales have ended their strike action after voting to accept a pay offer comprising an additional 3% pay award for 2022/23 alongside a 1.5% one-off payment, and a government-funded 5% rise for the following year.

Scotland's largest teaching union has also accepted a pay deal to end long-running strikes, which it said would amount to a 14.6% increase in pay for most teachers by January 2024.

Europe is bracing for another round of strikes affecting airlines ahead of a busy Easter travel season, as the number of passengers travelling globally recovers to pre-pandemic levels.

Since last summer, strikes and staff shortages have forced European airlines to cancel thousands of flights to avoid long queues at major airports, and some disruptions persist.

British Airways reduced its flight schedule due to planned strikes by London Heathrow (Continued on Page 7)