

Some 183 People in Iran Have died as A Result of the Coronavirus Disease Over the Past 24 Hours Bringing the Total Death Toll to 13,791, Health Ministry Spokeswoman Sima Sadat Lari Said Yesterday

IRAN NEWS

Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Reported the Arrest Of a Group of Brawl Instigators in Mashhad of Razavi Khorasan, Northeast Iran, Who Were to Engineer Street Protests

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Tehran Warns Seoul Over Unacceptable Freezing of Iranian Oil Money

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has issued an official warning to the "rude" government of South Korea over its "unacceptable" and "unjustifiable" move to block the Islamic Republic's oil money.

In comments on Friday, Vice-Speaker of the Iranian Parliament Amir-Hossein Qazizadeh Hashemi said it is a source of regret and surprise that the South Korean government is blocking the Iranian nation's money under the US pressure.

Iranian authorities have been pressing South Korea to release between \$6.5 billion and \$9 billion in frozen funds so that Tehran could use them for purchase of basic goods.

Qazizadeh Hashemi slammed Seoul's "rude" behavior and said it shows South Korea is not committed to any ethical or legal principle.

South Korea is violating another nation's rights under the pressure of the US bullies, he said, urging the Iranian Foreign Ministry to actively pursue the return of the Iranian money.

Earlier on Thursday, Iranian Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi said Tehran has already given an official warning to Seoul over the frozen assets. **See Page 7**

General Warns Israel of Iran's Upper Hand

TEHRAN (Tasnim) - A senior spokesman for the General Staff of the Iranian Armed Forces warned the Zionist regime that if it keeps lying about bombarding and killing Iran's military advisors in Syria, it will see the upper hand of the Islamic Republic and the resistance front in action.

In comments on Thursday, Brigadier General Abolfazl Shekarchi responded to fake reports by the Zionist regime about targeting the positions of Iran's military advisors in Syria, saying, "We warn the Zionist liars and their puppeteers that if they continue their mischief, they will see the upper hand of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the resistance front in action."

He rejected Israel's claims alleging killing of hundreds or thousands of Iranians by its military as a "desperate media war, psychological operation, and (an attempt at) manufacturing lies," Press TV reported.

The Iranian commander noted that "the Zionist-Western media empire and its regional affiliates" have been leading this anti-Iran propaganda campaign for some time as part of "hollow muscle-flexing" by the inhumane, occupying, and infanticidal Israeli regime in order to project a "false image" of its military capability. **See Page 7**

Rouhani, Putin Vow Confronting U.S. Unilateralism



IRAN NEWS POLITICAL DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian President Hassan Rouhani and his Russian counterpart Vladimir Putin in a telephone conversation on Thursday underlined the need to confront the unilateral approaches practiced by the U.S. and called for the expansion of relations between Tehran and Moscow in all fields.

The presidents of the Islamic Republic of Iran and the Russian Federation have discussed a broad range of issues in a phone conversation.

During the Thursday phone call, President Rouhani emphasized the development of balanced cooperation with Moscow at all political, economic, scientific and cultural levels.

President Rouhani called for further consultations and talks between the two countries' officials, and expressed satisfaction with the implementation of the agreements.

Referring to the holding of a virtual summit of the leaders of Iran, Russia and Turkey with the aim of establishing peace and stability in Syria, President Rouhani stressed the need for continued cooperation between the three countries within the framework of the Astana process to achieve this goal, especially in humanitarian issues.

He also stressed the importance of maintaining and fully implementing the JCPOA as an international commitment, and underlined the need for countering unilateralism and the recent U.S. actions and efforts to prevent the expiration of arms embargo against Iran.

President Rouhani also referred to the outbreak of the COVID-19 in Iran and other countries, and stressed the need for cooperation between the two countries and the exchange of experiences in the fight against coronavirus.

Russian President Putin, in turn, said, "As in the past five years, we continue to support this international document (the JCPOA) and insist on its implementation and preservation."

He also stressed the significance of development of relations with Iran in all fields and added, "We welcome cooperation with Iran in the field of coronavirus and exchange of experiences."

The Russian president also stressed the continuation of his country's support for Iran's position in international communities.

Iran May Deny Farzad-B Gas Field Rights to OVL

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - In a big setback for India's ambitions to build its energy security by acquiring oil and gas blocks abroad, Iran is set to deny ONGC Videsh Ltd (OVL) exploration and production rights for the prestigious Farzad B gas field. Highly placed sources in the oil ministry said that Iran may not offer the Indian company to develop the gas field but so far it has not officially communicated its decision.

Farzad-B, which was discovered by OVL in the Farsi block about 10 years ago, had in-place gas reserves of 21.7 trillion cubic feet, of which 12.5 trillion cubic feet is believed to be recoverable. If India gets a share of this gas, it could reduce its dependence on expensive LNG. Iran has been dilly-dallying over the grant of the development right of Farzad B for a few years now. Things have come to a standstill since the US sanctions in 2018 on Iran with India also moving slowly in the matter.

Sources said that changes in the geopolitical scenario in the COVID-19 world, which suggests that Iran is coming closer to China while the proximity of India is growing towards the U.S., may further spoil the deal. In fact, information coming out from Iran now suggests that the country may offer it to a local entity rather than OVL. Media reports earlier suggested that Tehran would award it to Russia's Gazprom. This would be a double blow for Indian investment in Iran as reports suggest that an Indian company may not be allowed to develop a rail line that was part of the Chabahar port second phase project. India has done the first phase of work at the port.

"There are two issues to Farzad B project. Iran may not be giving development rights to OVL but an Indian consortium continues to have part ownership of the block and would get its share of profit whosoever develops the project," the source quoted earlier said. The OVL led consortium, which also includes Oil India Ltd and Indian Oil Corp (IOC), has invested close to \$100 million in the project.

Farzad-B was discovered by OVL in the Farsi block about 10 years ago. India and Iran were initially targeting concluding a deal on Farzad-B field development by November 2016 but later mutually agreed to push the timeline to February 2017. The deadline to wrap up negotiations was later targeted for September 2017. But the deal was stuck over the pricing of the gas. Sanctions delayed the process thereafter and despite visits of ministers from both sides no agreement could be reached. OVL pushed for the deal with a sweetened offer that included the investment of close to \$11 billion. But that also did not break the ice and the project remains in limbo.

ViewPoint

By: Hamid Reza Naghashian



China One Step Ahead In Economy

These days fever of news on Iran-China 25-Year Strategic Agreement has gripped the local and world media outlets and its supporters and opponents have written articles and expressed their opinions on it.

Earlier in my articles, I had mentioned that the U.S.-China trade relation is getting colder any moment and some have interpreted this chill in ties as trade war and even some others have gone further and have interpreted it as a military war and this has led to several analyses on China's debts from the U.S.

Some believe that Donald Trump's propaganda is a ground for freezing China's accounts in American banks and Washington has plans for China's assets which are estimated at over \$3 trillion, and some, by considering this approach, believe China has no way but to withdraw its assets from the U.S. gradually.

In the past, director of the State Administration of Foreign Exchange (SAFE) had announced that China does not need these reserves and there is no serious need to new investment due to sustainable development but nowadays some news has been circulated in the media that China has taken a bold action in its economy and it is going to minimize its dependence on the U.S. dollar. This unexpected and sudden decision that China will not use the U.S. dollar in its mercantile exchange and instead it will use its national currency yuan as the base for trade was something more than a simple shock which shook the markets.

The result of this historic decision means that the U.S. dollar is unusable in China trade and most probably the U.S. dollar in the short time will strongly fall against China's yuan because demand for yuan for purchasing Chinese goods will rise. Undoubtedly, this decision is going to have its impact on the global markets.

The range of effect of this decision made BBC World in its program discuss the issue and analyze its probable effects on the world economy. According to what political and economic analysts have said this is an economic war which can lead the world to a destructive war of the World War II type, and if the U.S. acts stupidly against China's decision, one cannot forsake it. Amid the media analyses it was predicted that China with huge amount of gross domestic product (GDP), which is even more than the U.S., will take the lead of the world economy but it has not been predicted when this leadership is to happen. It seems the Chinese have laid the ground for revealing its measures for challenge with the U.S. **See Page 7**

IAEA Chief Sets Deadline For Iran to Grant Access To Suspected Sites

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The Chief of the U.N. International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Wednesday warned Iran of "bad" consequences if access is not granted by the end of July to two sites where undeclared nuclear activities may have taken place in the past.

"I keep insisting on the absolute necessity for us to resolve this issue very soon," Rafael Mariano Grossi was quoted by the Wall Street Journal as saying. He also pointed out that the issue was not going to just go away and urged Iran again to provide IAEA investigators access to the disputed sites.

In a June report IAEA said Iran had not provided access to the two sites for four months. Subsequently, on June 19 the IAEA passed a resolution proposed by the European sides of the 2015 nuclear agreement known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action (JCPOA) against Iran.

IAEA says undeclared nuclear activities may have taken place at the two sites in early 2000s but on June 19 Behrouz Kamalvandi, the spokesman of Iran's Atomic Energy Agency said the allegations were based on evidence "fabricated" by Israeli agents. **See Page 7**



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Iran Will Never Give In to U.S. Pressure

TEHRAN (MNA) – Iranian Ambassador to Portugal Morteza Damanpak Jami said Iran will never give in to the U.S. bullying as it has adopted a policy of maximum resistance against Washington's maximum pressure campaign.

"Iran has adopted policy of maximum resistance in the face the US' policy of maximum pressure and it

will never kneel before the U.S.," Damanpak said in an interview with Portugal's Lusa News Agency.

The ambassador referred to Iran's nuclear deal, also known as the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, saying that the pact is still enforceable even in the absence of the US, as the other parties have not withdrawn from it.

Tehran, Kabul Discuss Closer Economic Ties

TEHRAN (IFP) - High-ranking officials from Iran and Afghanistan have discussed mutual cooperation on different fronts as well as a range of other issues.

The negotiations came in a meeting between Acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Hanif Atmar and Iranian Deputy Foreign Minister for Political Affairs Abbas Araqchi, who has travelled to Afghanistan heading a high-ranking delegation to follow up on the agreements already reached between the two countries during a recent meeting to Tehran by Atmar, especially to finalize the text of a comprehensive cooperation document between the two countries.

In the meeting, the two sides exchanged views on bilateral relations and the peace trend in Afghanistan as well as regional and international issues and problems, including the difficulties causes by the coronavirus pandemic.

The two sides also discussed bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation, including cooperation on trade via the Iranian port city of Chabahar as well as transit routes in Central Asia.

In the meeting, the two sides also agreed on a roadmap and the establishment of a timetable to finalize the comprehensive cooperation document.

The Iranian diplomat reiterated Tehran's backing for a peace process owned and led by the Afghan government. He expressed hope intra-Afghan talks attended by all political parties in the country will get underway as soon as possible.

What is significant, said Araqchi, is to preserve the accomplishments of Afghan people after four decades of war, especially the Constitution and democratic structures created in the country during peace talks.



He recalled common concerns and interests that Iran and Afghanistan share as well as the facilitating role that neighbouring countries have in that regard, highlighting Iran's preparedness to help the Afghan government advance the peace process.

Meanwhile Araqchi in a meeting with Head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) in Kabul on Thursday stressed the need for regional convergence.

During the meeting in Sepidar Palace in Kabul, voiced the Islamic Republic of Iran's support for efforts to restore peace to Afghanistan while reiterating the need for regional convergence and economic development.

During the meeting, Abdullah, for his part, thanked the continued supports by the Islamic Republic of Iran and briefed Araqchi on the latest efforts for achieving peace and the resumption of peace talks.

He also thanked Head of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation (HCNR) and assured him of the Islamic Republic of Iran's continued support for Afghanistan, Iran's support for peace efforts under the leadership of Afghanistan's High Council for National Reconciliation.

During the meeting, the two sides also termed the establishment of peace and security in Afghanistan as beneficial to regional and global peace and stability, as well as a step towards regional convergence, economic growth, and fighting terrorism and drug trafficking.

GC Spokesman: Mr Trump Butt out!

TEHRAN (IP) - The spokesman for the Guardian Council of the Constitution of the Islamic Republic of Iran on Thursday warned the U.S. President and other American officials not to interfere in Iran's internal affairs.

"What is expected of an independent judiciary system in Iran is the proper implementation of penal law and the persecution of convicts," Abbasali Kadkhodaei, the spokesman for Iran's Guardian Council, tweeted on Thursday.

Kadkhodaei added, "Mr. Trump, you and other American officials should be tried for countless crimes against the freedom people of Iran before and after the Revolution, Butt out!"

The spokesman for the Guardian Council warned Trump and U.S. officials highlighting: "Stop interference! Let the American people breathe!"

Terrorist Attack Leaves 2 Dead in Western Iran

TEHRAN (PressTV) - A terrorist attack on a coronavirus aid convoy in Iran's western province of Kordestan has left two people dead and one injured.

The aid convoy came under attack by the terrorists affiliated with the "global arrogance" in Bolbar village in the district of Uraman of Sarvabad County late on Wednesday, according to a statement by the Public Relations Office of Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada Base of Iran's Islamic Revolution Guards Corps (IRGC) Ground Force.

The victims were a resident, an official with the prefect's office and a member of the country's Basij volunteer force, it added,

The IRGC expressed condolences over the losses and assured the people in the area that the distribution of the coronavirus aid would continue unabatedly.

It also vowed to bring the perpetrators of this cowardly crime to justice. In July 2018, counter-revolutionary terrorists attacked a border post of the Hamzeh Seyed al-Shohada Base in the province, killing 11 security forces.

Over the past years, Iranian security forces and border guards have engaged in clashes with terror groups, many of whom cross the country's borders with Pakistan and Iraq to carry out attacks inside Iran.

Iran Stresses Supporting Syria Against U.S. Sanctions

TEHRAN (IP) - The Iranian ambassador to Syria said Iran continues to support Syria in countering the West's sanctions, providing its needs in the field of oil derivatives.

Javad Torkabadi pointed to Syria's urgent need to the oil derivatives which are sanctioned by the U.S. under the so-called 'Caesar Act' and stressed that the Islamic Republic of Iran is fully ready to meet Syria's oil and energy needs.

Condemning the sanctions through which the U.S. intends to compensate its failures in Syria, Torkabadi said, "God willing, we will all celebrate the victory of Syria".

The U.S. Congress passed Caesar Law in 2019 and enforced it since the beginning of June.

The U.S. sanctions against Syria in the form of the so-called 'Caesar Act' targeted 39 Syrian officials and figures including Syrian President Bashar al-Assad and his wife.

Under Caesar Act, the U.S. seeks to impose severe sanctions on Syria's institutions and individuals to prevent Syria and its allies from cooperating in reconstructing the country.

U.S. Interference in Iran-Georgia Relation Unacceptable

TEHRAN (MNA) – In a meeting with Georgian President Salome Zourabichvili, Iran's Ambassador to the country Javad Ghavam Shahidi said the US interference in Iran-Georgia ties are unacceptable and against with the two country's interests.

In this meeting held on Wednesday, Shahidi underlined the significance of the mutual interests, noting that U.S. unilateralism and interference in the two sides' affairs is unacceptable and will harm such issues. "The Islamic Republic of Iran has always supported and assisted the government and people of Georgia in various economic, political, and international fields and has supported its independence and territorial integrity," the Iranian envoy said.

He, elsewhere, referred to the problems that Iranian citizens are faced with in Georgia, regarding the extension of their residence, damage to their assets and the ban on imports and transportation of goods to Georgia, and called for immediate follow-up and resolution of these problems by Georgian authorities.

The Iranian official also hailed the assistance of the President of Georgia in transferring Iranian prisoners to their country.

Finalized Iran-China Cooperation Document To Go to Majlis



TEHRAN (MNA) – Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif vowed that after having the 25-year comprehensive Iran-China cooperation plan finalized with the Chinese, it will be submitted to Iran's Majlis for approval.

Reiterating that under the framework of the named document Iran will not hand over even one square centimeter of the Iranian soil or exclusive exploitation of it to China or any other country, Zarif said that the two sides are holding negotiations.

"At this point in time, the required permissions are needed to be received only from the government and the Iranian foreign ministry has already received the needed permission from the incumbent administration," Zarif said.

"When we finalize the document with China, we need to submit it to Iran's Parliament if any legal commitments are included in the finalized plan," Iranian FM explained, "In another case, the administration needs Parliament's approval when it presents the plan in form of several governmental bills to the Iranian body."

Zarif underscored that no related issue will be hidden from the Iranian Parliament in this regard.

The Iranian FM had earlier described the rumors over the sale of Kish Island to China due to the intentions of the enemies to prevent the development of Iran-China relations.

He said that the Islamic Republic of Iran's relations with China is a strategic relationship based on common interests and mutual respect.

Explaining the dimensions of the document, the Foreign Minister stressed the importance of taking into account the national interest in drafting the document and rejected rumors over the sale of Kish Island, as well as the sale of cheap oil to China, saying that these rumors have been circulated by enemies to prevent the development of Iran-China relations.

Rouhani Vows to Stay on as President

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

TEHRAN - President Hassan Rouhani implicitly rejected any talk of an early departure from his post, promising to remain as president "to the last moment" without paying attention to "controversies".

Rouhani has been under pressure by the new Iranian parliament who hold him responsible for bad management of the economy and the failures of the nuclear deal with world powers.

Earlier in July, 130 members of the parliament threatened to launch proceedings to impeach Rouhani for his failures in the area of economy, foreign policy and tackling the COVID-19 pandemic. But on July 12, Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei in a video message to parliament urged lawmakers to let the presidential administration do its job.

Rouhani who was speaking at his cabinet meeting said he "promises" the Supreme Leader that he will continue to discharge his duties "with all his power to the last hour and the last moment". He also added that the pulpit of the parliament, the judiciary and the presidency should not be used "for partisan, factional and electoral conflicts".

Tehran Ready to Mediate Between Baku and Yerevan

TEHRAN – Foreign Ministry Spokesman Seyed Abbas Mousavi stated that as always, Iran is ready to mediate and resolve the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia.

Speaking in a press conference in the city of Ardabil North-Western Iran on Thursday, Mousavi lamented the conflict between the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, adding: "The region does not have the capacity for more tension, and any conflict will not be in the interests of both sides."

He said, "As soon as we received the news of the conflict in the region, President's Chief of Staff Mahmoud Vaezi contacted the officials of the two countries, and Iran's Foreign Minister Mohammad



Javad Zarif also called his counterparts from Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, expressing regret over the conflict."

He said, "Iran believes that the regional issues, especially the problems of the Republic of Azerbaijan and Armenia, should be resolved through dialogue and within a specific framework and Iran has expressed readiness to mediate between the parties to the conflict."

Mousavi called for more restraint on both sides of the conflict, adding: "The best way to reduce tensions and disputes, and resolve the issue peacefully in the region is to try to bring the views of the parties to the conflict, closer through dialogue and mediation."

Iran, Malaysia Stress Importance of Barter Trade

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif in a video call with his Malaysian counterpart Dato' Sri Hishammuddin Hussein stressed taking advantage of barter trade and agreed on preferential tariff contract and holding joint economic commission.

Both sides discussed bilateral, regional, international, and Islamic World issues.

Thanks to Malaysia's position as an active member of the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), Zarif invited Hishammuddin to play his role in solving the Yemeni crisis through the political process.

He welcomed any initiative by Malaysia in line with establishing peace and ending the crisis in Yemen.

We will actively help maintain peace in Yemen, he noted.

Zarif appreciated Malaysia's correct and principled stance in supporting oppressed Palestinians.

Meanwhile, Hishammuddin referred to the unchangeable position of Malaysia with regard to Palestine.

IRGC Arrests Counter-Revolutionary Elements

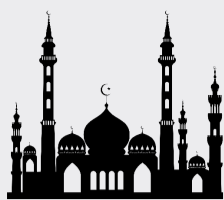
MASHHAD (IRNA) - Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps (IRGC) on Friday announced that a number of counter-revolutionary and violence-seeking stooges have been arrested in northeastern Iran.

The arrested elements were connected with anti-Iran groups and sought to induce citizens via publishing calls of supporters to protest in the streets, the IRGC reported.

Earlier, Iran's Islamic Revolution Guard Corps

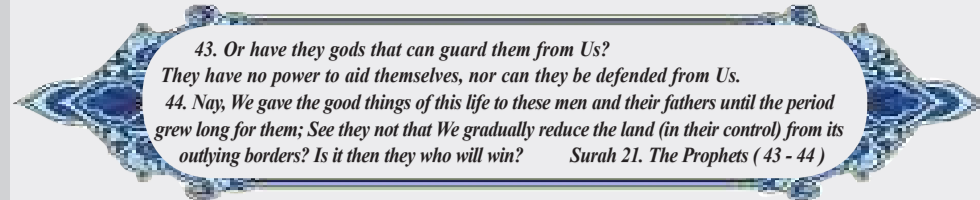
(IRGC) had dismantled a terrorist team of the terrorist Mujahedin-e-Khalq Organization (MKO) in Shiraz, Fars province. As reported, the MKO terrorists who had infiltrated into Fars province were arrested before they could carry out any terrorist act or operation.

The IRGC forces are closely monitoring the movements of terrorist groups and fight against them in order to prevent them from achieving their mischievous goals.



PRAYER TIME

■ Noon (Zohr)	13:10
■ Evening (Maghreb)	20:39
■ Tomorrow's Dawn (Fajr)	04:22
■ Tomorrow's Sunrise	06:03



President Inaugurates 18 Utility Projects in Hormozgan Province

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

HORMOZGAN – President Hassan Rouhani on Thursday ordered the official inauguration of 18 national projects in the field of water and electricity in Hormozgan province investing of 2,667 billion tomans and job creation for 5,000 people.

President Rouhani on Thursday, while ordering the inauguration of water and electricity projects in Hormozgan province, was briefed thorough explanations provided by the directors of these projects.

Unit No. 1 of Qeshm Combined Cycle Power Plant with a capacity of 175 MW, desalination system (desalination plant) of Bandar Abbas, water supply project to Bashagard city, 14 power transmission and distribution projects in Hormozgan province and 2 agricultural water supply projects and industrial town in Minab city, were among the plans and projects that were put into operation in Hormozgan province by the order of Iran's president on Thursday.

These projects include 60 km of low air pressure network, 24 km of low ground pressure network, 147 km of medium air pressure network, 11 km of medium pressure network, 345 air posts, and 55 ground posts and 4872 lights The lighting is the passages.



The aim of these projects is to reducing energy losses and increasing reliability by using modern equipment, increasing the safety and stability of the network, and as a result the satisfaction of people and subscribers with electricity services as the most important effects of these projects in Hormozgan.

During the inaugural ceremony President Rouhani said the Islamic Republic of Iran is to turn its Jask port in the south of the country into a major hub of oil exports.

"Jask will soon become a very important port for petroleum exports, and, therefore, the status of the province will become higher and more important day by day," he noted.

A major pipeline is under construction that will connect Goreh in the west of the Persian Gulf to Jask Port in its east, making Iran independent of Strait of Hormuz for oil exports.

Elsewhere in his remarks, the president underscored that the country has reached 90-percent self-sufficiency in the power industry.

"Despite all sanctions and pressure by the enemy, some 90 percent of affairs pertaining to planning and implementing key projects in the sophisticated power industry are run by capable Iranian experts, and we should move toward full self-sufficiency in this industry.

He then expressed his gratitude to all those working at the Ministry of Energy as well as investors and entrepreneurs in the private and non-governmental public sectors.

Emirates Airline to Resume Flights to Tehran

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Emirates Airline announced late on Thursday that it will resume flights to Tehran as of July 17.

A statement released on the company's official Twitter page also said that the airline will restart flights to Guangzhou, China from July 25, Ethiopia from August 1 and Oslo from August 4.

Last week, the airline also declared that passengers from 10 countries, including Iran, who intend to use the flights must have a health certificate from one of the reputable laboratories.

Emirates Airline suspended all its flights on March 25 as part of efforts to fight spread of coronavirus pandemic.

Construction of 7 Wastewater Treatment Plants in Isfahan

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – The CEO of

Isfahan Province Water and Wastewater Company says the company has constructed and inaugurated seven wastewater treatment plants in ten years in towns of Khansar, Najafabad, Harand, Ezhieh, Daran, Buin, Sadeh and Varnamkhash with budget over 105b tomans and all of them have joined the network.

Mr. Hashem Amini added that by the way, two packages of Mehr Housing project wastewater in towns of Natanz and Fereydoonshahr have come on stream with the budget over 4b tomans. He further said in recent years wastewater treatment plant construction projects in towns of Tiran and Chadehan have been operationalized, adding that last year the developmental phase of Fooladshahr wastewater treatment plant was executed while currently construction of wastewater treatment plants in towns of Chadehan and Natanz go well and the developmental phase of Fooladshahr wastewater treatment plant has progressed 40 percent physically.

Amini then pointed to construction of other wastewater installations in the province, stipulating that in the recent decade, construction of pumping stations at Haseh, Darak, southeast of Isfahan, town of Ezhieh, Safayyeh District, Korkvand, Dehno District of Mobarakeh, Souchreh District and Siahboom of Mobarakeh have started and all have joined the network and four pumping stations also in towns of Zibashahr and Dizicheh and wastewater treatment plants of Mobarakeh and Safayyeh are under construction which have progressed almost 80 percent.

He stated Isfahan Province has the most wastewater treatment plants in the exploitation network in the country, adding that the province has 26 urban and 2 rural wastewater treatment plants which is the biggest number in the country.

Amini added that the exploitation capacity of the wastewater treatment plants in the province is 778,000 cubic meters per day and currently some 482,000 cubic meters of wastewater is collected and is transferred into the treatment plants.



Iranian Heavy Crude Oil Price Rises 54% in June

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - Iranian heavy oil price increased \$12.71 in June to register a 54-percent rise compared to the previous month, according to OPEC's latest monthly report published.

Iran sold its heavy crude oil at \$36.26 per barrel in the mentioned month, compared to May's \$23.55 per barrel.

According to the report, the country's average heavy crude price was \$37.68 since the beginning of 2020 up to the report's publishing day.

The report put average Iranian crude output for the second quarter of 2020 at 1.958 million barrels per day indicating a near 103,000-bpd fall compared to the figure for the first quarter of 2020.

In addition to the devastating impacts of the coronavirus pandemic on the global oil industry which resulted in the drastic fall in oil prices, the Iranian oil industry has also been under pressure from the U.S. efforts to isolate the country by re-imposing sanctions.

The new round of sanctions targeting Iran's oil sector was put in action in early November 2018 and many of Iran's oil buyers have given in under the U.S. pressures.

Kyrgyzstan to Import Medicine From Iran to Cure Covid-19

TEHRAN (MNA) – The Prime Minister of Kyrgyzstan Kubatbek Ayilchiyevich Boronov has announced that his country is to import anti-coronavirus and Pneumonia medicine from Iran.

Regarding the dearth of anti-coronavirus medicine in Kyrgyzstan, the country plans to commence imports of them from Iran. Kyrgyz experts are to make a trip to Tehran in this regard, he said.

According to the held negotiations with Tehran, this week a special flight will transport Kyrgyzstan's required medicine to cure Covid-19 and Pneumonia from Tehran to the country, Boronov informed.

Bishkek is also holding similar talks with Russia, India, Uzbekistan, and Pakistan.

The authorities in Kyrgyzstan have decided to open day and night hospitals in the Central Asian republic to treat patients as the coronavirus pandemic worsens.

According to local authorities, this will help reduce the number of patients involved in self-medication.

Earlier, Kyrgyz doctors said that because of the panic associated with coronavirus, many people began to buy serious drugs in pharmacies and take treatment at home due to the workload of the country's medical facilities.

Such self-medication has already led to severe pneumonia.

150 Iranian Companies Exporting Medicinal Herbs

TEHRAN (IFP) - Iranian companies producing medicinal herbs are exporting their products as they tap into the existing potential to further expand the industry.

An official in charge says a considerable number of firms are now exporting their products.

"At the moment, nearly 500 companies are producing natural and traditional products. Of that number, 150 firms have managed to export their products," said Mohammad-Hassan Osareh, the secretary of the Science and Technology Development Commission for Medicinal Herbs and Traditional Medicine of the Science and Technology Department of the Presidential Office.

Given the great potential for exporting medicinal herbs, says the department, one of the priorities of the commission is to further enhance the value of basic medicinal herbs.

"The medicinal herbs and natural products industry enjoys a dynamic and growing biome where thousands of people from the private sector are working. This is while, according to a report by the Food and Drug Organization, around 500 companies are known for producing natural and traditional products," he said. The official added efforts should be made to increase the number of producers in this sector.

He touched upon restrictions on the transfer of money due to sanctions, saying exporters should be helped to tackle these challenges and to increase the "competitive privilege" of their products.

MSC to Supply State-Run Hospitals With Free Oxygen

IRAN NEWS NATIONAL DESK

ISFAHAN – Mobarakeh Steel Company has announced readiness to supply hospitals affiliated to Isfahan University of Medical Sciences with free oxygen after the hospitals faced with this strategic need for treatment of Coronavirus-infected patients.

Deputy of Human Resources and Organization of Mobarakeh Steel Company Mr. Abbas Akbari Mohammadi announced this good news, saying that Mobarakeh Steel Company in line with its social responsibilities has rushed to help the medical centers by equipping them for treating the COVID-19-infected patients since the outbreak of the virus.

He added that regarding this issue and in another move, the management of the company decided to supply all state-run hospitals of Isfahan Province with free oxygen by the yearend through its products in the oxygen and hydrogen unit in order that medical staff of those hospitals can continue treating patients without having any concern about provision of this vital need of the hospitals. On this issue, Head of medical equipment department of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences Mr. Asghar Bakrani said that after the provision of oxygen faced hurdles in the country and as the result in Isfahan Province, Isfahan University of Medical Sciences corresponded with Mobarakeh Steel Company and sought its help.

He added that like before, once again Mobarakeh Steel Company responded positively to the university's demand and rushed to help it and accepted supply of free oxygen. Meanwhile Director of Energy and Fluids of the company Mr. Seyed Amir Tabatabaiean said that the company is to produce and deliver some 860 tons of liquid oxygen to the affiliated hospitals of the university.

Iran Discloses Value of Private Sector Investment in Its Ports

IRAN NEWS ECONOMIC DESK

TEHRAN - The private sector has invested 160 trillion rials (about \$3.8 billion) in Iranian ports recent years, said Deputy Minister of Roads and Urban Development and Chairman of the Iranian Ports and Maritime Organization (PMO) Mohammad Rastad.

Rastad noted that these investments were made to develop the country's ports, especially the ports in

southern Iran and the Shahid Rajaei port.

The deputy minister added that it is necessary to encourage investors to upgrade maritime vehicles and develop infrastructure.

According to the chairman, it is planned to put into operation 3 platforms on loading of oil and oil products in the Shahid Rajaei port in the Hormozgan Province (southern Iran) in the current Iranian year (began March 20, 2020).

FIRST ANNOUNCEMENT



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TENDER NO.: 08-38-9740001

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ITEMS	MATERIAL DESCRIPTION	QUANTITY
01	COILED TUBING REEL STRING, QT-800, SINGLE TYPE H2S SERVICE, FITTING FIG. 1502 WING WITH INTERNAL / EXTERNAL CORROSION INHIBITOR, TEST CERTIFICATE/ANALYZES, ELONGATION LOCATION AND MATERIAL CERTIFICATE ATTACHED ON EACH REEL SHIPPING SPOOL. STEEL SPECIFIED AS OD SIZE, WALL THICKNESS REF. QUALITY TUBING LONG SIZE: 22000FT OD: 1.25 IN., W.T. 0.095 IN	5

Vendors who intend to participate in aforesaid tender are requested to send their "INTENTION TO PARTICIPATE" letter via fax to the following number along with their resume according to qualitative assessment Form no.1, available at www.nisoc.ir not later than 14 days after the second announcement, otherwise, their requests for Participation in the tender will be disregarded. The applicants should have relevant background in supplying the required goods and capability to provide and submit a bid bond of 13,509 EURO or 2,445,000,000 RIAL in favor of NISOC.

Tender documents including the materials thorough technical specifications and Qualitative Assessment Forms can be accessed via:

www.nisoc.ir-material-procurement-management-tab

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PAYMENT TERM IS C.O.D., SUBSEQUENT TO NISOC'S MATERIAL APPROVAL.

NO ADVANCE PAYMENT WILL BE PAID

FOREIGN PURCHASING DEPARTMENT

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Tel / NO.: +98-61-34123455 Fax No.: +98-61-34457437

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France Makes Public Mask-Wearing Compulsory Indoors

PARIS (AFP) - France will make the wearing of face masks compulsory in indoor public places from next week, the government said Thursday as it noted "signs" of an uptick in the coronavirus outbreak.

Already obligatory gear on trains, metros and buses, masks will now also become mandatory in shops, supermarkets and other enclosed spaces frequented by the public, Prime Minister Jean Castex said in the Senate.

"The wearing of a mask, along with barrier measures (such as social distancing and regular handwashing) is an effective method of prevention and protection," he said.



India Locks Down More Than 125m

PATNA (Dispatches) - More than 125 million people in India began a new lockdown Thursday as authorities worldwide scramble to get a handle on a surge in coronavirus cases that continues to wreak havoc from America to Asia.

The number of infections worldwide hit 13.4 million and more than 581,000 deaths have been reported since the virus emerged in China late last year, with the United States topping the tally.

Cases are soaring in America's south and west, and on Wednesday the country set a record with more than 67,000 new infections in 24 hours.



Trump Administration Targets Chinese Communist Party Members for U.S. Travel Ban



WASHINGTON (Reuters) - The Trump administration is considering banning travel to the United States by all members of the Chinese Communist Party and their families, a person familiar with the matter said on Thursday, a move that would worsen already-tense U.S.-China relations.

Senior officials discussing the matter have begun circulating a draft of a possible presidential order, but deliberations are at an early stage and the issue has not yet been brought to President Donald Trump, the source said, speaking on condition of anonymity. The discussions, first reported by the New York Times, centre on whether to deny U.S. visas to tens of millions of Chinese in what would be one of Washington's toughest actions yet in a widening feud with Beijing that some have likened to a new Cold War.

Such a ban, if implemented, could hit the ruling Communist Party from the highest levels down to its rank-and-file and would be certain to draw retaliation against Americans who travel to China. This could include not only U.S. diplomats but also business executives, potentially harming U.S. economic interests in China.

The White House declined comment. Relations between the world's two largest economies have sunk to the lowest point in decades as they clash on multiple fronts, including China's handling of the coronavirus outbreak, its tightening grip on Hong Kong, trade and accusations of human rights crimes in the Xinjiang region. U.S. officials across multiple federal agencies are taking part in the process, which has also included consideration of whether to block the children of Communist Party members from attending American colleges and universities, the source told Reuters.

The fact that such a sweeping ban is being seriously discussed appears to show the lengths to which some of Trump's aides may be prepared to go as they make the tough-on-China theme a major thrust of his campaign for re-election in November.

Trump and prospective Democratic presidential nominee Joe Biden have competed to outdo each other on which can take the strongest stand against China.

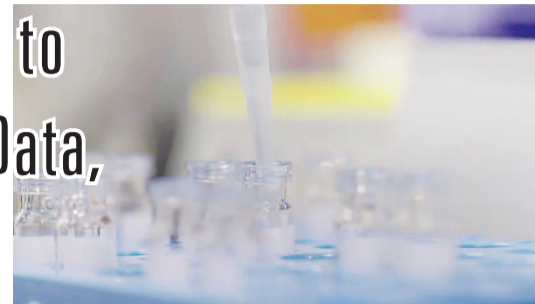
Trump's aides have made the Chinese Communist Party a main target of condemnation for what they call Beijing's "malign" activities. But Trump has held off on any direct criticism of Chinese President Xi Jinping, whom he has previously praised as a friend.

Among the options is to base such a visa moratorium on immigration laws that were used by the Trump to justify his 2017 travel ban from a group of predominantly Muslim countries, according to the person familiar with the discussions.

Trump could also have the authority to make exceptions for certain individuals or categories to temper any ban, the source said. One big difficulty would be determining which Chinese nationals are party members, since U.S. authorities do not have access to full lists, the source said.

White House spokesman John Ulliyout said on Tuesday the administration had not taken anything "off the table with respect to further sanctions of party officials for actions in Hong Kong or on other issues."

Russia Accused of Trying to Steal COVID-19 Vaccine Data, Say UK, U.S. and Canada



LONDON (Dispatches) - Hackers backed by the Russian state are trying to steal COVID-19 vaccine and treatment research from academic and pharmaceutical institutions around the world, Britain's National Cyber Security Centre (NCSC) said on Thursday.

A co-ordinated statement from Britain, the United States and Canada attributed the attacks to group APT29, also known as 'Cozy Bear', which they said was almost certainly operating as part of Russian intelligence services.

"We condemn these despicable attacks against those doing vital work to combat the coronavirus pandemic," said NCSC Director of Operations, Paul Chichester. Russian news agency RIA cited spokesman Dmitry Peskov as saying the Kremlin rejected London's allegations, which he said were not backed by proper evidence.

Polish Opposition Challenges Presidential Vote Result

WARSAW (AFP) - Poland's main opposition coalition on Thursday challenged the result of an election that returned to power President Andrzej Duda with backing from the populist right-wing Law and Justice (PiS) party.

The Civic Platform (PO) party, whose candidate Rafal Trzaskowski narrowly lost the July 12 runoff vote, said an appeal had been lodged with the Supreme Court alleging irregularities and accusing TVP public television of bias.

"We have asked for the election to be declared invalid," PO leader Borys Budka told reporters.

"This election was neither equal nor universal. It was dishonest," Budka said, adding that "the whole apparatus of the state broke the law" by supporting Duda. Duda won 51 percent of the vote against Trzaskowski's 49 percent.

The appeal includes complaints about irregularities from 2,000 people, including problems with voter registration, ballot papers not being sent out in time and issues with voting abroad.

Left-wing lawmaker Barbara Nowacka, a member of the Civic Coalition opposition grouping that lodged the appeal, said the vote was "not fair".

"One of the reasons why I'm submitting this electoral protest today is so that those in power know that citizens are keeping an eye on them. Because if we were to let this go today, then they would tighten the screws even more during the next election," she said.

Elzbieta Witek, head of the Sejm, or lower house of parliament, and a member of the governing PiS party, said: "Anyone can appeal."

"These appeals will be examined but I do not think that any kind of appeal can impact the result of the vote." Under the constitution, the Supreme Court has until August 3 to rule whether or not the election was valid.

Observers from the OSCE's Office for Democratic Institutions and Human Rights on Monday said the vote was "tarnished" by biased coverage on public television.

Taiwan Thwarts China Invasion in Live-Fire Drill

TAICHUNG (AFP) - Taiwanese soldiers on Thursday fought off simulated coastal assaults from China during their biggest annual live-fire exercises of the year, as Beijing ramps up military pressure on the island.

The five-day drill, which began on Monday, is aimed at testing how democratic Taiwan's armed forces would repel an invasion from its giant neighbour.

Beijing regards Taiwan as part of its territory and has vowed to one day seize it -- by force if necessary. Thursday's simulation saw Taiwan's fighter jets, warships and ground troops repelling an enemy attempt to land on a beach in the central city of Taichung in an operation involving some 8,000 service members.

President Tsai Ing-wen watched the drill, later tweeting that it "demonstrated to the world our robust defence capabilities and strong determination to defend Taiwan".

Taipei has lived with the threat of invasion by China since the two sides split in 1949 after a civil war.

In recent decades it has found itself increasingly outnumbered and outgunned by China's enormous People's Liberation Army.

Beijing has piled military, economic and diplomatic pressure on Taiwan since Tsai came to power in 2016,

because she refuses to acknowledge its stance that the island is part of "one China".

Tsai won a landslide reelection in January in what was seen as a strong rebuke to China's strong-arm tactics against the island.

Last year President Xi Jinping gave an especially bellicose speech about Taiwan, warning its unification was "inevitable".

In recent months Chinese warplanes have started buzzing Taiwan with unprecedented frequency, repeatedly breaching its air defence zone and prompting Taipei to scramble its own fighter jets.

The military mismatch has been compounded by Western governments' increasing wariness of selling Taiwan advanced weapon systems, fearful of incurring Beijing's wrath. That has pushed Taiwan to develop its own hardware, including advanced missiles, boats and a new trainer jet.

Some of that new hardware, including locally built surface-to-air and hypersonic missiles, was used during this week's drills. But China's increasingly muscular approach towards the island has also sparked renewed international cooperation with Taiwan.



Egypt Won't Stand Idle in Libya If Security Is Threatened



CAIRO (Reuters) - Egypt will not stand idle in the face of any direct threat to Egyptian and Libyan security, President Abdel-Fattah al-Sisi said on Thursday, after lawmakers allied to commander Khalifa Haftar urged Cairo to intervene militarily in Libya's civil war.

Tribal leaders who flew in from Haftar's Benghazi stronghold told Sisi at a meeting in Cairo that they authorized him and the Egyptian army to intervene in their country to counter what they described as the "Turkish invasion and terrorism".

The meeting, broadcast on state TV, illustrates the growing regional stakes in Libya, divided since 2014 between areas held by an internationally recognised government in Tripoli, backed by Turkey, and a rival eastern administration, backed by the UAE, Russia and Egypt. The eastern-based parliament allied to Haftar called on Egypt this week to help counter Turkish support for Libya's internationally recognised government in Tripoli.

Turkey has helped the Tripoli administration force Haftar's Libyan National Army (LNA) to abandon an offensive on Tripoli.

Any major escalation could risk igniting a direct conflict in Libya among the foreign powers that have already poured in weapons and fighters in violation of an arms embargo.

In response to Turkish actions, Sisi last month said Egypt's army might enter Libya if the Tripoli government and its Turkish allies renewed an assault on the central Sirte-Jufrah frontline seen as the gateway to Libya's main oil export terminals. Both areas are held by the LNA.

At the meeting with tribal leaders backing Haftar, Sisi said "the red lines that we announced earlier... were basically a call for peace and to put an end to the conflict in Libya."

"But we will not stand idle in the face of any moves that pose a direct threat to our national strategic security on our western borders, especially in light of the increasing military build-up operations in the vicinity of the city of Sirte."

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J, balcony
marble fl
Fully Furn

Shanon (adviser)

Niavaran Villa (\$5000)
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5bdrs, S/p
S, J, balcony
marble floor
Fully Furn

Parsian

(\$3000)
Farmanieh Apt
250sq.m, 3bdrs
S/pool, Sauna, J
balcony, & F.F

Velenjak Apts
(\$1600) 2bdrs, 140sq.m
(\$2200) 3bdrs, 200sq.m
Both with S/p, S, J, F.F

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Malaysia Vulnerable to Sovereign Rating Downgrade

KUALA LUMPUR (Dispatches) - Nomura, which is expecting Malaysia's economic growth to only recover in 2021, said the country is vulnerable to sovereign ratings downgrade due to its limited fiscal space and higher exposure to exports. The two risks for Malaysia are its higher exposure to exports and limited fiscal space, said its head of Global Macro Research Rob Subbaraman, in a media conference

call 'The World After Covid-19' held on Thursday.

He, however, lauded Malaysia's domestic handling of Covid-19, which he said was done relatively well compared with many other Southeast Asian countries.

Noting Malaysia to have a weak fiscal position, Nomura cautioned investors that Malaysia has higher risk premium.



China Avoids Recession Despite Coronavirus, Trade Disputes

BEIJING (Dispatches) - China's economy has returned to growth just three months after businesses and workers were plunged into a negative quarter, putting Beijing in a better position to confront multiple international disputes.

Surging pharmaceuticals and medical device exports, farm production, online shopping and advanced machinery manufacturing drove the economy up by 3.2 per cent in the June quarter, bouncing back from a 6.8 per cent decrease at the local peak of the coronavirus pandemic between January and March.

The figures, which often rely on provinces to self-report to meet official government targets, are closely watched as a guide to the Chinese Communist Party's confidence in their economy, foreshadowing their future level of investment with implications for worldwide exports including Australia.

They also reveal progress on key targets, including narrowing the gap between the rich and the poor and eliminating poverty. Household incomes in urban areas fell in real terms by 2 per cent in the three months to June. In rural areas they fell by 1 per cent, reducing the wealth gap by ratio by 0.06 on the same time last year.

Like other major economies, property investment has also taken a tumble during the pandemic dropping by 8.4 per cent in the June quarter. The loss was offset by double-digit increases in industrial robot production, Chinese and western medicine sales and home entertainment products.

Deutsche Bank's chief economist in China, Yi Xiong, said a "V-shaped recovery has largely [been] completed".

"Industrial production and investment growth have both turned positive in recent months," he said. "Consumer spending is still below its pre-COVID path, but the remaining gap is largely concentrated in a few sectors--travel, dining, leisure services--where rapid recovery is unlikely. As a result, the recovery curve will likely flatten soon."

Liu Aihua, the director general of the National Bureau of Statistics, said on Thursday the results showed the economy's resilience after it avoided two consecutive negative quarters, the technical definition of a recession.

"The tremendous impact of the pandemic on the world economy will continue to develop and evolve," she said. "External risk challenges have increased significantly, and domestic economic recovery is still under pressure."

Beijing now faces multiple international disputes over its initial response to the coronavirus pandemic, new national security laws in Hong Kong, incursions into the South China Sea, border tensions with India in the Himalayas and the banning of its flagship telecommunications provider Huawei from the UK, US and Australia.

Turkish State Banks Short Forex to Support Lira

LONDON (Reuters) - Turkish state banks have doubled their short foreign currency positions in six weeks to \$8.3 billion (6.61 billion pounds) to help defend the lira, their largest direct intervention for years, according to four banking sources and industry data.

The combined short positions of the state banks, shown in data from financial sector regulator BDDK, adds to more than \$90 billion of central bank intervention since last year by bankers' estimates for a total of about \$100 billion used to support the Turkish currency. The lira has faced downward pressure from falling interest rates over the last year to support economic growth - vital to President Tayyip Erdogan's long political dominance - and limit fallout from the coronavirus crisis.

State lenders have frequently sold dollars borrowed from the central bank to stabilise the currency but, barring brief interruptions, kept a net neutral foreign exchange position since Turkey's financial crisis in the early 2000s.

That changed in mid-December, when they embarked on the sharpest expansion of their short foreign currency positions in at least five years, reaching a net short position of \$4.3 billion on May 22 and nearly doubling that by July 3, according to BDDK statistics.

That pushed them beyond the regulatory limit of 20% of capital, though some leeway is allowed to exceed briefly. The large short positions could expose the banks to losses if the lira suddenly drops. It was unclear if the state banks had hedged their positions to minimize that risk.

By contrast, private banks are \$4.1 billion long on foreign currency, according to BDDK figures.

OPEC and Allies to Ease Cuts, Allow More Oil Production

VIENNA (Dispatches) - The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other nations agreed to ease up on cuts during a video conference Wednesday.

Ministers from the OPEC cartel have agreed to allow more oil to flow from the taps, saying demand for oil is growing as economies take steps to reopen.

But they also cautioned that they could revisit the decision in an emergency meeting if there are serious lockdowns that further reduce demand for oil.

The Organization of the Petroleum Exporting Countries and other nations agreed to ease up on cuts during a video conference Wednesday.

They chose to stick with a production schedule they had crafted in a previous meeting which allows participating countries to produce more oil in August than they have in the past few months.

The OPEC nations and their allies will cut production by at least 7.7 million barrels per day in August, essentially putting about 2 million more barrels per day on the market than they did in July, analysts said.

We should not be complacent, said Abdelmadjid Attar, Algeria's minister of energy, during the meeting. Oil market balance is progressively improving... But risks and uncertainties are huge, be they related to the pandemic or to the economic consequences. OPEC, which has 13 member states, is largely dominated by oil-rich Saudi Arabia. There are additional countries involved in the so-called OPEC Plus group, which has been led by Russia.

Together, the oil-producing nations had agreed to cut production by nearly 10 million barrels per day, which amounts to about 10% of global oil supply, through the end of July.

Those deep cuts were enacted in April as the world stopped flying and commuting during the pandemic, cutting back dramatically on oil consumption.

It's unclear whether there's enough demand to warrant OPEC putting more oil on the market, said Jack Rousseau, managing director at Clearview Energy Partners. That seems a little big questionable to me, because there's so much uncertainty with all the different case counts rising, Rousseau said.

Australia Unemployment Hits 22-Year High Though Jobs Surge

SYDNEY (Reuters) - Australia's jobless rate edged up even though employment surged by a record in June, as more people searched for work encouraged by the re-opening of the economy from the coronavirus lockdown.

Employment rose by a blockbuster 210,800 in June following hefty declines in April and May, Australian Bureau of Statistics (ABS) data showed on Thursday.

That handily beat forecasts for a gain of 112,000 in a Reuters poll. Yet, the jobless rate still hit a 22-year high of 7.4% because the surge in jobs growth was not enough to offset the increase in the number of people who went looking for work.

The participation rate in June rose by 1.3 percentage points to 64%, the highest since April, driving unemployment higher. The number of unemployed people increased by 69,300 to 992,300 in June - around a third more than the jobless numbers during the 2008 global financial crisis.

Economists estimate the jobless rate would have been even higher at well above 11% were it not for a government wage subsidy scheme - 'JobKeeper' - that allowed businesses to keep staff on their payrolls even though they worked zero hours.

With the government support soon expected to be withdrawn, economists expect the jobless rate to remain elevated for some time. A second wave of coronavirus infections in Victoria is also threatening the employment outlook. "Looking ahead, we continue to expect weakness in the labour market, with employment to relapse in Q4, and unemployment to increase further to 8%," UBS economist George Tharenou wrote in a note.

Tharenou said Australia would need more fiscal support to help blunt the hit from the second wave of coronavirus infections in Victoria's Melbourne.

Treasurer Josh Frydenberg is expected to publish a 'mini budget' on July 23 where he will likely announce a withdrawal of the "JobKeeper" scheme as most states and territories have reopened their economies after managing the coronavirus spread.

As a result, monthly hours worked in all sectors increased by 4% in June though they were well below March levels.

Australia is facing its first recession in nearly three decades with the country's central bank predicting the jobless rate will stay elevated through 2021.

The Reserve Bank of Australia has gone all-in by cutting rates to a record low of 0.25%, flooding the financial system with cash and even buying government bonds to lower borrowing rates for business.

Pace of Decline in UK Jobs Market Slowed in June



LONDON (Reuters) - The pace of decline in Britain's labour market slowed in June, official data showed on Thursday although the figures did not include a recent slew of job losses caused by the coronavirus's hit to the economy.

Early indicators suggested that the number of employees on companies' payrolls was down by 649,000 between March and June, with the largest falls at the start of the pandemic, the Office for National Statistics said.

Britain's unemployment rate unexpectedly held at 3.9% in the three months to May.

A Reuters poll of economists pointed to a rise in the unemployment rate to 4.2%.

An ONS official said the unemployment rate had been held down by around half a million people who were away from work because of the pandemic and receiving no pay, but who said they believed they still had a job.

Even so, the number of people in employment in the three months to May fell by the most since 2011, down 126,000, driven mostly by self-employed people, the ONS said.

There was another sign of the weakness in the labour market in the number of vacancies which fell in the three months to June to the lowest level since the data series began in 2001 at 333,000, 23% lower than the previous record low in 2009.

Finance minister Rishi Sunak last week announced a latest 30 billion-pound round of measures to stem an expected surge in unemployment, including the payment of bonuses to companies which take back furloughed workers.

But since then a string of companies have announced layoff plans ranging from private security company G4S to retailers Boots and John Lewis.

India Posts First Trade Surplus in 18 Years

NEW DELHI (Dispatches) - India posted a trade surplus of \$790 million in June, its first in over 18 years, with imports plunging as the coronavirus pandemic depressed domestic demand for crude oil, gold and other industrial products, reflecting a slowing economy.

Indian exports and imports have been falling since March and worsening India-China relations, shrinking global demand and disruptions in supply chains are likely to pressure the trade outlook over the next few quarters, analysts said.

Asia's third largest economy is projected to contract by up to 5% this financial year, beginning April, from an earlier government estimate of nearly 6% growth as an over two-month-long Covid-19 lockdown has hit economic activities and consumer demand.

Merchandise imports contracted 47.59% in June to \$21.11 billion from a year ago, while exports fell 12.41% to \$21.91 billion, leading to a marginal trade surplus, data released by the Ministry of Commerce and Industry on Wednesday showed. India last posted a trade surplus - a slim \$10 million - in January 2002, according to Refinitiv data.

Ajay Sahai, director general of the Federation of Indian Export Organisations, said a marginal trade surplus was "good news." "However, we will have to analyse to what extent lockdown, import restrictions and slowdown in the domestic economy have contributed to the fall in imports," he said, referring to a fall in raw material imports by exporters.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been pushing for import substitutions and has so far resisted industry pressure to sign a free trade agreement with the European Union. Imports of crude oil, electronic items, gold jewellery and other products fell sharply during the three months to end June.

In June, crude oil imports fell 55.29% year-on-year to \$4.93 billion due to a tumble in global commodity prices as well as local demand, while gold imports were down by more than 77% to \$608.7 million.

Total merchandise imports fell by more than 50% to \$60.44 billion during April-June quarter while exports were down 36.71% from the year-ago period to \$51.32 billion, the data showed.

India went into lockdown in late March to prevent the spread of the novel coronavirus, forcing manufacturers to close factories and fire millions of contract workers.



Iran Seeking to Speed Up Trade With Russia

TEHRAN (IRNA) - Iran's Ambassador to Moscow Kazem Jalali on Thursday called for seeking ways to facilitate the boosting of land, rail, and sea trade with Russia.

Jalali made the remarks via a videoconference with senior Russian officials. "Needed steps must be taken to boost the export of non-oil goods," he said, adding, "The obstacles and problems must be overcome."



World Population Will Reach 8.8b In 2100, 2b Below UN Projections

GENEVA (Dispatches) - Earth will be home to 8.8 billion souls in 2100, two billion fewer than current UN projections, according to a major study published Wednesday that foresees new global power alignments shaped by declining fertility rates and greying populations.

By century's end, 183 of 195 countries -- barring an influx of immigrants -- will have fallen below the replacement threshold needed to maintain population levels, an international team of researchers reported in The Lancet.

More than 20 countries -- including Japan, Spain, Italy, Thailand, Portugal, South Korea and Poland -- will see their numbers diminish by at least half.

China's will fall nearly that much, from 1.4 billion people today to 730 million in 80 years. Sub-Saharan Africa, meanwhile, will triple in size to some three billion people, with Nigeria alone expanding to almost 800 million in 2100, second only to India's 1.1 billion.

"These forecasts suggest good news for the environment, with less stress on food production systems and lower carbon emissions, as well as significant economic opportunity for parts of sub-Saharan Africa," lead author Christopher Murray, director of the Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation (IHME) at the University of Washington, told AFP.

"However, most countries outside of Africa will see shrinking workforces and inverting population pyramids, which will have profound negative consequences for the economy."

For high-income countries in this category, the best solutions for sustaining population levels and economic growth will be flexible immigration policies and social support for families who want children, the study concluded.

"However, in the face of declining population there is a very real danger that some countries might consider policies that restrict access to reproductive health services, with potentially devastating consequences," Murray cautioned.

"It is imperative that women's freedom and rights are at the top of every government's development agenda." Social services and healthcare systems will need to be overhauled to accommodate much older populations.

As fertility falls and life expectancy increases worldwide, the number of children under five is forecast to decline by more than 40 percent, from 681 million in 2017 to 401 million in 2100, the study found.

At the other end of the spectrum, 2.37 billion people -- more than a quarter of the global population -- will be over 65 years old by then.

Those over 80 will balloon from about 140 million today to 866 million.

Sharp declines in the number and proportion of the working-age population will also pose huge challenges in many countries.

"Societies will struggle to grow with fewer workers and taxpayers," noted Stein Emil Vollset, a professor at the IHME. The number of people of working age in China, for example, will plummet from about 950 million today to just over 350 million by the end of the century -- a 62 percent drop.

The decline in India is projected to be less steep, from 762 to 578 million.

In Nigeria, by contrast, the active labor force will expand from 86 million today to more than 450 million in 2100.

These tectonic shifts will also reshuffle the pecking order in terms of economic clout, the researchers forecast.



By 2050, China's gross domestic product will overtake that of the United States, but fall back into second place by 2100, they predict.

India's GDP will rise to take the number three spot, while Japan, Germany, France and the UK will stay among the world's 10 largest economies.

Brazil is projected to fall in ranking from eighth today to 13th, and Russia from the number 10 spot to 14th. Historical powers Italy and Spain, meanwhile, decline from the top 15 to 25th and 28th, respectively.

Indonesia could become the 12th largest economy globally, while Nigeria -- currently 28th -- is projected to crack the top 10.

"By the end of the century, the world will be multipolar, with India, Nigeria, China and the United States the dominant powers," said Richard Horton, describing the study as outlining "radical shifts in geopolitical power."

Until now, the United Nations -- which forecasts 8.5, 9.7 and 10.9 billion people in 2030, 2050 and 2100, respectively -- has virtually had a monopoly in projecting global population.

The difference between the UN and IHME figures hinges crucially on fertility rates. The so-called "replacement rate" for a stable population is 2.1 births per woman.

UN calculations assume that countries with low fertility today will see those rates increase, on average, to about 1.8 children per woman over time, said Murray.

"Our analysis suggests that as women become more educated and have access to reproductive health services, they choose to have less than 1.5 children on average," he explained by email.

"Continued global population growth through the century is no longer the most likely trajectory for the world's population."

Founded in 2007 and supported by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, the IHME had become a global reference for health statistics, especially its annual Global Burden of Disease reports.

Vaccination Levels Falling During Pandemic



PARIS (AFP) - The number of children worldwide getting life-saving vaccinations has declined this year largely because of the coronavirus pandemic, the World Health Organization and UNICEF warned.

The first four months of 2020 saw a "substantial drop" in the completion of the three-dose jab that protects against diphtheria, tetanus and whooping cough -- the first decline in 28 years.

"Vaccines are one of the most powerful tools in the history of public health, and more children are now being immunised than every before," said WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus.

But he said the pandemic had put those gains at risk. "The avoidable suffering and death caused by children missing out on routine immunisations could be far greater than COVID-19 itself," he said in a statement.

During the pandemic crisis at least 30 measles vaccination campaigns have been cancelled or are at risk, the two UN agencies said in a joint statement.

As of this May, the pandemic had disrupted immunisation programmes in three-quarters of more than 80 nations responding to a UN survey conducted with the US Centres for Disease Control.

Reluctance to leave home, transport problems, economic hardship, restrictions on movement or fear of being exposed to the virus were among the reasons given for the slowdown in immunisations.

"COVID-19 has made previously routine vaccination a daunting challenge," said UNICEF Executive Director Henriette Fore.

"We must prevent a further deterioration in vaccine coverage ... before children's lives are threatened by other diseases.

"We cannot trade one health crisis for another."

Progress on immunisation coverage was already stalling before the new coronavirus hit, the UN agencies said.

G20 Carbon Food-Print Highest in Meat-Loving Nations

PARIS (AFP) - If everyone alive ate steaks and dairy the way Brazilians and Americans do, we would need an extra five planets to feed the world, according to the first report to compare the carbon emissions from food consumption in G20 nations, released Thursday.

Among the world's top economies, only the per capita carbon "food-prints" in India and Indonesia are low enough to ensure the Paris climate target of capping global warming at 1.5 degrees Celsius, according to the Diet for a Better Future report.

In China, where sustained economic growth has boosted consumption of meat and imported foods, the average diet -- on a planetary scale -- would exceed the 1.5C threshold by nearly two-fold. Producing food for Earth's 7.7 billion people is responsible for a quarter of the global carbon emissions that drive climate change.

About 40 percent of that comes from livestock production and food waste, with the rest generated by

rice production, fertiliser use, land conversion and deforestation to accommodate commercial crops.

"Currently, individuals in a handful of countries are eating way too much of the wrong foods at the expense of the rest of the world," Brent Loken, global food lead at WWF and lead author of the report, told AFP.

These imbalanced diets by a relative handful of rich countries are "to the detriment of climate, health and economies," he said.

The report by EAT -- an Oslo-based non-profit that has led peer-reviewed research on the nexus of diet, health and climate change -- also rated G20 national dietary guidelines, projecting the carbon footprint they would produce if followed.

Interestingly, this ranking roughly mirrors actual consumption.

Argentina tops the list with a diet exceeding climate thresholds nearly five-fold, followed by Canada, Brazil, the United States, Russia and Australia.

Iran Calls for UN Intervention to Save Yemeni Lives

TEHRAN (PressTV) - Iran has strongly denounced the latest Saudi airstrikes against Yemen, calling on the United Nations to stop Riyadh's atrocities "by any means possible".

Iran's Foreign Ministry spokesman Abbas Mousavi made the remarks on Friday in reaction to the latest crime by Saudi fighter jets that hit wedding parties in Yemen's Hajjah and Jawf, killing and injuring more than 25 civilians, including women and children.

Mousavi expressed regret that the Saudi-led military forces are continuing their war crimes in Yemen "under the international community's silence and indifference".

He called on international human rights bodies to prevent the continuation of such crimes by the Saudi fighter jets against Yemen by any means possible.

"The countries providing arms for the forces that have invaded Yemen, which have caused the slaughter of the Yemeni women and children by supplying them (aggressors) with destructive bombs and weapons, are accomplice in these crimes and must be held accountable for such support before the international community and the people of Yemen," the spokesman noted. The Yemeni Foreign Ministry underlines the need for putting an end to weapons sales to Saudi Arabia as the regime continues with its bloody bombing campaign on the impoverished nation.

"Such crimes continue while, unfortunately, the United Nations has recently removed the name of Saudi Arabia from the list of child-murdering regimes with the political pressure of the US and the Saudi petrodollars," he added.

Mousavi called on the UN to reconsider its decision, step up efforts for an immediate end to the Saudi attacks on Yemen, and take necessary measures and arrangements to protect the health and security of civilians, women and children in particular.

The Yemeni Health Ministry initially said nine people had been killed in the Saudi air raids against al-Masafa al-Marazeeq area of the al-Hazm district of al-Jawf Province on Wednesday afternoon, but later raised the death toll to 24.

China One Step Ahead...

FROM PAGE 1

Recently some part of Iran's accord with China for a 25-year cooperation whose drafting is in the works has been covered and highlighted by the American media. The American newspaper New York Times in an article "Defying U.S., China and Iran Near Trade and Military Partnership" described Iran-China 25-Year Agreement as an act to undercut the Trump administration's anti-Iran efforts and it has tried to provoke Washington against the agreement.

The newspaper in some part of its article says, "The comprehensive Iran-China cooperation document appears to signal Beijing's growing impatience with the Trump administration after its abandonment of the nuclear agreement. China has repeatedly called on the administration to preserve the deal, which it was a party to, and has sharply denounced the American use of unilateral sanctions."

The daily continues, "The document also describes deepening military cooperation, potentially giving China a foothold in a region that has been a strategic preoccupation of the United States for decades. It calls for joint training and exercises, joint research and weapons development and intelligence sharing -- all to fight "the lopsided battle with terrorism, drug and human trafficking and cross-border crimes."

Expansion of Iran's relation with any country in any part of the world irritates the Americans who consider the world as their kingdom of their power and hegemony and due to this approach, their sensitivity towards China's relation with Iran is much more because the world public opinion considers this relation at its any level as a confrontation with the U.S.

For example, Ali Gholizadeh, an Iranian energy researcher at the University of Science and Technology of China in Beijing, says, "Iran and China both view this deal as a strategic partnership in not just expanding their own interests but confronting the U.S."

Most analysts in the world's important and influential media believe that raising the issue of the 25-year agreement has even endangered totally the foundation of the U.S. sanctions. So China's decision to ditch dollar in its stock trade will increase the U.S. anger and it will be a strategic beginning for China to lead the global economy.



Tehran Warns Seoul...

FROM PAGE 1

South Korea is citing the US sanctions as an excuse for not releasing Iran's money, Mousavi told a press briefing in the city of Ardabil in northwestern Iran.

However, he added, relations between South Korea and the US have nothing to do with Iran.

South Korea is holding the largest sum of Iran's oil money frozen under US pressure and yet it is reportedly stonewalling attempts to repatriate it.

On Tuesday, Iranian Foreign Minister Mohammad Javad Zarif told a meeting with Iranian parliamentarians that countries like South Korea have not responded positively to Iran's repeated requests for release of funds that have reportedly been blocked because of the US pressure.

General Warns Israel...

FROM PAGE 1

He also mentioned the martyrs by name in order to "further unveil the bogus Zionist regime's (attempt at) manufacturing falsehood and to lay bare its lying nature."

The "cowardly" regime also did its best, through the all-out support of the US and some regional Arab countries, to make up for its losses and weaknesses by bombarding the T-4 Airbase in Syria's western province of Homs in 2018, in which only seven of Iranian military advisors lost their lives along with a number of Syria-allied fighters, Shekarchi said.

The resistance front, however, returned the attack by launching 50 missiles and rockets at Syria's Israel-occupied Golan Heights, the spokesman noted, saying "a large number" of Israelis were killed or injured during the retaliation.

By means of the media campaign, psychological warfare and producing lies, Israel has been always trying to cover up its sheer inability and weakness as well as back-to-back defeats in the face of the resistance front in Syria during the past nine years, Shakarchi said, adding, "However, it should know this that it is (only) fooling itself."

IAEA...

FROM PAGE 1

The July 2 incident at Iran's Natanz nuclear facility has spawned speculation about whether it was possible sabotage.

IAEA reports, according to Reuters, say the two sites were demolished in 2003 and 2004, possibly for eliminating traces of enriched uranium. One of the two sites is a factory near the village of Turqezabad in the south of the capital Tehran where IAEA inspectors found uranium particles in environmental samples taken in 2019. In retaliation for the withdrawal of the United States from JCPOA in 2018 and reintroduction of U.S. sanctions Iran has taken some reverse steps including adding to its stockpile of enriched uranium. In March the stockpile had increased by more than five times the 300 kg limit set under the agreement.

Flamengo Win Rio de Janeiro State Championship

RIO DE JANEIRO (Reuters) - Flamengo clinched a second consecutive Rio de Janeiro state championship after an injury-time goal from Vitorino gave them a 1-0 win over Fluminense on Wednesday and a 3-1 aggregate triumph.

The victory, which followed a 2-1 win in the first leg on Sunday, comes less than a month after the tournament, which kicked off in late January, was restarted after a three-month hiatus caused by the novel coronavirus pandemic.

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Qatar to Host Asian Champions League Group Matches

KUALA LUMPUR (AFP) - Qatar, host of the next World Cup in 2022, will stage West region matches of this year's Asian Champions League, officials said on Thursday, following a drastic shake-up caused by the coronavirus.

The tiny, resource-rich country will host the group games through to the semi-finals in a condensed period from September 14 to October 3, the Asian Football Confederation said.

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SPORTS

SATURDAY JULY 18, 2020

Federer Almost The Perfect Tennis Player

LONDON (Dispatches) - Roger Federer is 'almost the perfect tennis player,' according to his former coach Stefan Edberg.

Edberg coached Federer for two years earlier in his career, although the partnership failed to deliver a Grand Slam title.

However, it also coincided with a transitional period in Federer's game with him using the time to evolve much of his game.

The lack of major titles didn't sour Edberg's experience, though, and he has delivered a glowing verdict on the Swiss star.

"Like I said to Roger Federer, he looks so easy when he plays, he floats around the court," Edberg Eurosport's Tennis Legends podcast.

"He's got grace, he's got power, he's got touch, he's got everything you wish for.

"He's almost the perfect tennis player as I see it—both on and off-court. So he's very special like we all know."

Edberg was an exceptionally successful player in his own right. The Swede won Wimbledon twice, the Australian Open twice, and the US Open twice, as well as reaching a French Open final.

Meanwhile Novak Djokovic is reportedly ready to commit to playing in the U.S. Open in September, but only should one special condition be met.

Djokovic previously told the Tennis Channel that he 'would love to go' but is 'waiting to see how things turn out' after initially expressing serious doubts about the strict social distancing restrictions placed on players.

The biggest concern for Djokovic was plans to limit the number of people with whom players could travel, although that



appears to have been at least relaxed a little since the initial plans were revealed.

However, according to Spanish newspaper Marca, Novak Djokovic is now inclined to play the U.S. Open, as long as quarantine laws upon his return to Europe don't impact the clay season.

A week after the U.S. Open finishes the Madrid Masters begins, with the Rome Masters quickly following seven days later.

That means that, should players be forced to self-quarantine for two weeks after returning from America, they would be unable to play in either of those tournaments, limiting their potential rankings points return more than skipping the US Open would.

It seems almost certain, though, that if the ATP can make special arrangements for players to get around the quarantine problem, the world number one will commit to Flushing Meadows.

Meanwhile the Swiss Indoors Basel, due to celebrate its 50th anniversary on the ATP tour later this year, joined Tokyo in pulling the plug early as a result of the COVID-19 crisis.

The Swiss Indoors Basel has crowned some of the ATP's greatest champions: from Bjorn Borg to Pete Sampras to, of course, former ball boy turned all-time event title leader Federer.

The historic tournament was due to celebrate its 50th anniversary later this year. Instead, its Golden Jubilee will have to wait until 2021, as organizers have already decided not to stage the indoor event with COVID-19 not showing any signs of slowing down any time soon.

"Unfortunately, coronavirus won't spare any of us," said tournament president Roger Brennwald. "And social distancing or matches played behind closed doors were out of the question for us from the start."

Kane Goes Past 200 Club Goals



NEWCASTLE (Reuters) - Harry Kane went past 200 career club goals with a second-half double as Tottenham Hotspur won 3-1 at Newcastle United in the Premier League on Wednesday to boost their European qualification hopes.

Minutes after Matt Ritchie's piledriver had drawn the hosts level, Kane's clinical header on the hour put the visitors back in front, taking him to another landmark. Kane sealed the points in the last minute with another header to take his career tally to 201.

Son Heung-min had given Tottenham the lead in the 27th minute with his 11th league goal of the campaign.

Tottenham rose to seventh on 55 points with two games remaining, one point behind sixth-placed Wolverhampton Wanderers in the race for a Europa League spot.

Kane's 201 club goals have come in 350 appearances in all competitions with 185 of them for Tottenham.

It was also a milestone of sorts for Spurs manager Jose Mourinho who claimed a first league win at Newcastle.

"201 in 350 league games — that's not bad!" Kane told BT Sport. "It's nice to get to that milestone but the points are the most important thing."

Marquez Chases

Seventh MotoGP Title

PARIS (AFP) - The MotoGP world championship finally gets underway at Jerez on Sunday, behind closed doors and more than four months late, with Marc Marquez going for a seventh top-class title to match Valentino Rossi who is "99 percent" certain this will not be his farewell season.

Marquez, the 27-year-old Spaniard who won MotoGP world titles in 2013, 2014, 2016, 2017, 2018 and 2019, is determined to continue demolishing the competition on his Honda, with his younger brother Alex, who won last year's Moto2 title, as his team-mate for just one season.

Jerez in Spain hosts the first two races a week apart. The championship will then move to the Czech Republic for one race, and then to Austria for the next two, probably still without spectators.

Eight months have passed since the last Grand Prix, five since the last practice and climbing back on a MotoGP saddle may not be easy.

After a long period of lockdown, Marc and Alex Marquez only resumed motocross training in the past few weeks.

For Rossi, at 41, the future is uncertain. The Italian dominated MotoGP in the first decade of the century, taking the world title in 2001, 2002, 2003, 2004, 2005, 2008 and 2009, but has not won a race since 2017.

The Doctor already knows this is his last season for the factory Yamaha team which has announced that he will be replaced next season by young Frenchman Fabio Quartararo.

Rossi will have to choose between dropping to a less prestigious bike, probably Yamaha's satellite team or ending his illustrious career.

"I want to continue racing and it is almost certain that I'll be with Yamaha-Petronas in 2021," he assured Sky Italia on Wednesday.

The first races will give an idea of his ability to fight for the top spots, or even one final victory, which would be his 90th at the highest level. He already holds the record, with 21 more wins than Giacomo Agostini. Marquez is third on 56.



Wawrinka Is Underestimated

LONDON (Reuters) - Stan Wawrinka is one of the best to have ever played tennis but the three-times Grand Slam champion is a "little bit underestimated", his long-time coach Magnus Norman has said.

Wawrinka, 35, was the last man to win a Grand Slam singles title outside the trio of Roger Federer, Rafa Nadal and Novak Djokovic when he won the 2016 U.S. Open. He is one only one of three players to have defeated Federer, Nadal, Djokovic and Andy Murray at Grand Slams.

"Stan is one of the best players to ever play the game, if you look at his record, if you look at winning three Grand Slams, winning three different Grand Slams in the era where he had the Big Four playing," Norman told ATP Tennis Radio.

"He's a little bit underestimated for sure ... He's had an unbelievable career."

Swede Norman, a former world number two and Roland Garros finalist in 2000, worked with Wawrinka from 2013-2017 and has again been part of his coaching team since 2018 as the Swiss makes his way back following two left knee surgeries in 2017.

Wawrinka made the quarter-finals of the French Open and U.S. Open in 2019 and also reached the last eight at this year's Australian Open. After sliding down the rankings to No. 263 in 2018, he is currently 17th in the world. "It's been a little bit up and down. He doesn't have the same stability as Andy Murray or Novak or Roger or Rafa, but in his best moments, I think he can beat all of those names on a very good day," Norman said.

"That's what makes him a little bit special.

"Stan is a gambler. He plays with small margins. He's the kind of guy that will put everything in red, do or die."

Real Madrid Clinch 34th La Liga Title With Game to Spare

MADRID (AFP) - Real Madrid were crowned La Liga champions for the 34th time on Thursday after Karim Benzema scored twice in a 2-1 victory over Villarreal which clinched the title with one game to spare.

Benzema's double included a controversial second-half penalty at the empty Alfredo di Stefano Stadium as Madrid moved seven points clear to end Barcelona's two-year hold on the trophy.

Barca had to prevail against Osasuna at home and hope Madrid slipped up but their fading challenge ended with a 2-1 defeat at Camp Nou, despite a brilliant Lionel Messi free-kick.

It means Madrid claim their third La Liga title in eight years, after a relentless run of form since Spanish football resumed on June 11 following the coronavirus pandemic.

Zinedine Zidane's side have won 10 games out of 10 since the restart. They have conceded three goals in that time and never been behind in a match.

"For me this is one of the best days in my professional career," said Zidane. "After lockdown and everything, it's astonishing."

Asked if it trumps the Champions League titles Madrid won in his first spell as manager, Zidane said: "This is better than anything. It takes a tremendous effort to win La Liga."



Juventus Seven Points Clear After Dramatic Sassuolo Draw

MILAN (AFP) - Serie A leaders Juventus continued to stutter towards a ninth straight league title as they threw away a two-goal lead before settling for a thrilling 3-3 draw at Sassuolo on Wednesday.

Juventus are seven points ahead of Atalanta, who thrashed Brescia 6-2 on Tuesday, with five games left to play after their winless run was extended to three matches.

Lazio missed the chance to retake second and cut the gap to Juve to six points with a goalless draw against Udinese and are one point behind Atalanta in third.

Juventus were two goals up within 12 minutes thanks to Brazilian Danilo and Gonzalo Higuain. But despite the return of captain Giorgio Chiellini, the Turin giants showed signs of weakness in defence again and have now conceded 11 goals in five games.

Sassuolo took advantage, with Filip Djuricic pulling one back for the hosts just before the half-hour mark, before Domenico Berardi curled in a free-kick on 50 minutes and Francesco Caputo blasted in a third four minutes later.

Alex Sandro headed Juventus level with 26 minutes to play, but the defending champions had goalkeeper Wojciech Szczesny to thank for securing a point as the Pole pulled off a string of late saves. Juventus lost 4-2 to AC Milan and needed a 90th-minute Cristiano Ronaldo penalty to snatch a 2-2 draw with Atalanta in their previous two games.

